

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH ADMIRAL MIKE MULLEN

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MODERATOR: DONNA LEINWAND, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

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DONNA LEINWAND: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Donna Leinwand. I'm a reporter with *USA Today*, and I'm the president of the National Press Club. We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists and are committed to a future of journalism by providing informative programming and journalism education and fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the National Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org.

On behalf of our 3,500 members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and our guests in the audience today. I'd also like to welcome those of you who are watching us on C-SPAN. We're looking forward to today's speech, and afterwards I will ask as many questions from the audience as time permits. Please hold your applause during the speech so that we have time for as many questions as possible.

For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear applause, it may be from the guests and members of the general public who attend our luncheons, and not necessarily from the working press.

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to stand briefly when their names are called. From your right, Andrew Gray, military affairs correspondent with Reuters; Jim Michaels, *USA Today*, military writer; Barbara Ferguson, Washington bureau chief of *Arab News* and a part time advisor to the Marine Corps on Arab culture

and Islam; Katherine Skiba, journalist and author; Kathy Scarrah, independent television producer.

Skipping over the podium, Melissa Charbonneau, independent producer for Newshook Media, and vice chair of the National Press Club Speaker's Committee. Skipping over our guest for just a moment, Lita Baldor, counterterrorism and National Security Reporter for the Associated Press; Marc Raimondi, director of communications for the Harris Corporation, and a former spokesman for the Department of Homeland Security; Josh Rogin, defense reporter for *Congressional Quarterly*; and finally, Eli Lake, national security correspondent for the *Washington Times*. (Applause)

The U.S. military has been at war for eight years, and for six of those years it has fought on two fronts; in Iraq and Afghanistan. Along the way, U.S. forces have seen success, most notably the significant reduction of violence in Iraq. But repeated deployments overseas have taken a toll on military readiness and on the mental health of many military families with suicides on the rise. Indeed, many of the U.S. armed forces must feel like runners who signed up for a five kilometer race, but who instead find themselves running a brutal marathon.

Today's speaker, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, is acutely aware of those issues and has made addressing them a top priority. Looking across the globe as Admiral Mullen does every day, one sees a host of challenges. In Iraq, most U.S. troops are scheduled to be out by August 2010. But others are expected to remain for some time after that. In Afghanistan, the U.S. is sending in thousands of additional troops with the possibility of more to follow.

A worldwide campaign against al-Qaeda proceeds apace and Admiral Mullen just returned from a trip to Russia with President Obama where they saw firsthand that Iraq and Afghanistan are not the only places the United States faces a challenge. Meanwhile back home, Defense Secretary Robert Gates is trying to reshuffle the Pentagon's priorities, often facing stiff resistance from Congress as in the effort to end certain high profile weapons programs, such as the F22 fighter jet.

By now, these challenges are nothing new to Admiral Mullen. He's been the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs since October 2007. Like Secretary Gates, he has served under both President Bush and President Obama. The Joint Chiefs Chairman is the President's principal military advisor, and Admiral Mullen is the 17th person to hold this position.

Indeed, Admiral Mullen has spent a lifetime preparing for this job and for this period in history. Born in Los Angeles, he graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy in 1968, part of a class that included Oliver North, Senator Jim Webb, and the Director of National Intelligence, Dennis Blair. Since then, he has served in a variety of command positions at sea and ashore. Prior to becoming Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman, Admiral Mullen served as the Chief of Naval Operations, the Navy's top officer.

We wanted to make sure we could hear directly from Admiral Mullen about the nation's many pressing security challenges. So, we invited him to address us here today. Unfortunately, he will have to leave us a little earlier than planned to fulfill one of his most solemn duties. He will fly to Dover, Delaware this afternoon to receive the remains of the U.S. soldiers who died this week in Afghanistan. We at the National Press Club extend our condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of these soldiers.

Under these circumstances, we are grateful that Admiral Mullen made time for us today. Please join me in extending a warm National Press Club welcome to Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. (Applause)

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Well, good afternoon. Thank you, Donna, for that warm introduction. And certainly just in your comments, the challenges that are out there are very, very evident. As you said, I literally just returned from Moscow yesterday evening. I'd actually been there the week before on a counterpart visit with head of the Russian military and our both plans for the future and engagement and our military to military relations were part of the outcome of the summit.

I'll just try to put my remarks in three different categories or three different areas, and then open it up to your questions. First of all, focusing on the Middle East, the broader Middle East and specifically the challenges that we have both in Iraq, which remain and Afghanistan and Pakistan. Clearly, we're at a point now in Iraq where the violence level is down, dramatically so. In fact, it's the lowest level of violence since 2003-2004. And we are at a point, we're on our plan to support the drawdown which will start significantly, really early in 2010, next year. And our ability to do all this is in great part attributed to the 2.2 million men and women who serve, and so many so nobly, including those that paid the ultimate sacrifice. And there isn't a day that goes by or very many issues that I'm dealing with where our young people in the best military I've ever seen are very much on my mind, and I'm privileged to be with them.

So as we move forward in Iraq and clearly that doesn't mean we still don't have our challenges, I think most of the challenges there right now are political challenges, economic challenges, and that heavy focus in those areas is absolutely critical. And elections, which come up next year, early next year, are vital. And then after that, my expectation is that we will draw down rapidly to get to about 35 to 50,000 troops in the August of 2010 and at that point certainly turn over-- We transition our combat forces totally to advisory and assistance forces.

As you know, a significant date last week was the 30 June date where we pulled out of the cities, the last two big areas were Mosul and Baghdad. That actually has gone very well. That doesn't mean it isn't a vulnerable time. Times of transition always are, but I'm confident right now that we've got the strategy right and we're in support of the Iraqi security forces.

We've shifted our main effort now to Afghanistan. We're adding additional troops. Recently, we commenced an operation in Helmand, some 4,000 Marines. I think that's

been widely reported. But really what that represents, and the Marines there are the additional forces that we needed to put in place to support the strategy that the President has laid out with respect to a fully resourced counterinsurgency plan. So, we've got additional troops there, we've got new leadership there, and General McChrystal and his team. And it comes at a time where the violence level in Afghanistan has gone up each year over the last three-plus years and the violence level, that part of it, and the Taliban has, they've gotten tougher and tougher and better and better, and meeting that challenge is what these forces are right now. They're, more than anything else, focused on security for the Afghan people.

And I believe in Afghanistan, that the center of gravity is really the protection of the people, the people of Afghanistan and everything we do needs to be focused on them. Then, being able to provide the security and create opportunities for diplomatic movement, for governance movement so that the Afghan government can supply goods and services to their people at every level. Not just the national level, but to include the local level, engaging tribal leaders so that they can do this so that they feel supported as well, is really where we are right now.

The strategy that President Obama has laid out with respect to Afghanistan is really a regional strategy to include Afghanistan and Pakistan. And I've been to Pakistan 11 or 12 times over the last year, year and a half, and I think it represents the importance of both the engagement of the Pakistan military where I spent certainly most of my time, and the importance of the country, and in fact the importance of the region, to try to create stability. Clearly, the top priority with respect to that strategy is to defeat al-Qaeda whose leadership resides in the Fatah, in the federal areas, the tribal areas, in western Pakistan. But it is a totality of both Afghanistan and Pakistan that we need to move forward on. And the assignment of Ambassador Holbrooke and the civilian military team together is absolutely critical in how we move forward as well.

There are other challenges in the Middle East, not least of all is Iran and they continue, in my view, to move forward on the nuclear weapons development plan, and that potentially is incredibly destabilizing in that part of the world. Not least of all because they would have a weapon, but what I worry about an awful lot is the beginning or the extension of a nuclear arms race to that part of the world as well.

And so I'm encouraged by the intent to both engage and have a dialogue with them on the part of President Obama and yet, I do think the window of opportunity is narrowing as time goes on here. And they still resource-- I've been asked about the elections in Iran and that's not really my purview. All of that notwithstanding, from a military standpoint they still continue to move down the road towards nuclear weapons. They are state sponsors of terrorism, and they are generally a destabilizing influence in the region and still are in both Iraq and Afghanistan. So, I spend a lot of my time on the Middle East and engaged with leaders there and addressing the issues that challenge us so significantly in that part of the world.

The second area that I'd like to just spend a couple of minutes on are our people. I am very concerned about the stress and the pressure that our people are under. As I indicated, 2.2 million men and women, roughly half of those reserves and guards. They're the best I've ever served with. Donna indicated when I was commissioned, I won't tell you how old that makes me, but my first war was Vietnam and I remember that and I remember the things that were so important as we learned our lessons there. And critical to that has been always for our military, the support of the American people, for our men and women who serve. And I have found that in this eighth year of war and sixth year of fighting two wars, the American people have been spectacular in support of our men and women in uniform. And I am very grateful for that, and so are they. They're the best I've ever seen. And yet, we've asked them to deploy multiple times for longer periods of time than they expected. And there is extraordinary pressure and stress on them. And not just on the members, but also on the families.

So, I along with my wife-- Deborah spent a lot of time engaging military members, their families, trying to understand what their needs are, where the pressures are, and we see growing indicators. Certainly, the suicide rate, particularly in the Army, although the suicide rate is up in all our services. We see a growing stress on family members, spouses and children. We have the signature wounds of these wars which are traumatic brain injury, whether it's mild or severe, post traumatic stress. And in that regard, really for our force, I think stress is the enemy, more than anything else. And we are addressing those needs. And the key, more than anything else, is leadership focus on these great young men and women.

We turned it around in Iraq because of what they did. Our retention numbers are high, our recruiting is very good. We have so many, so many, many of our people, both in the fight and who want to be engaged and make a difference. And as I indicated, they're the best I've ever seen.

And then the third piece, let me come back to that just for a second, I believe we need as a country, I would hope we keep our focus on our people, particularly those who have been wounded and their families, and the families of the fallen. These are people that have paid, in many cases, the ultimate price. And I think we as a country must repay that debt. And their dreams haven't changed, they still would like to raise a family, they'd like to go to school, send their kids to school. They'd like to own a home and they'd like to have two jobs in the family. And I think that the way that actually is able to occur is the joining of the Department of Defense, the V. A., but most importantly communities throughout the country, reach out to those who've given so much and touch them where they need support and make a difference that sustains their lives over a period of time. Again, they're the best I've ever seen and they've done exactly what we as a country have asked them to do.

The third area, I'll just say a couple of things about, is the rest of the world. And there are challenges throughout the world. I could specifically know clearly that challenges we've had lately with North Korea who continue-- North Korea leadership-- Continues to be a destabilizing force in that part of the world. Just have to look at events

of a couple of days ago to know that. I'm actually encouraged by the unity of the international community with respect to continuing to isolate the North Korean leadership and I think that's important and that we need to keep that pressure up.

I also am focused on other parts of the world where we have challenges. In the Pacific, certainly, it's not all about North Korea. We've got great relationships out there that need to be sustained with Japan and South Korea and Australia and other relationships which are emerging. We've got a rising China, and I've said for some time a rising China that is peaceful, I think, is a very positive outcome for the world. I've been concerned about their strategic intent, which oftentimes, as they continue to raise their investment in their defense, where is that going? And clarifying that strategic intent over time, I think, is very important.

We also have our forces deployed in places like Latin America, Africa, and engaging other parts of the world that very much are focused on engagement relationship, trying to see challenges from their eyes, from the people who live there, how they look at things I think is very important. To try to understand that, deepen our understanding and our relationships there. And in that regard, become preventative in nature so conflicts actually don't break out and we have a sustained relationship. That said, most of my challenges right now for my forces, just on physically what it takes, most of the numbers are in central command. So, I do that with a force, a very small percentage of my force, as well as a very active Navy and a very active Air Force which is not as committed in central command as our ground forces are and are charged with that. And they also provide a great strategic reserve for the country. So, there are lots of challenges coming from lots of directions and I'm sure you might want to ask me about a few of those. So with that, I'll take your questions. (Applause)

MS. LEINWAND: Okay, we've got a giant pile of questions, including some submitted via email from all over the world. But we will start with North Korea since you ended with that. North Korea's denial of service network attack, was that a big deal or business as usual?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: This is actually an issue of growing concern. I didn't say anything about our budget and the budget challenges that we have, and actually where Secretary Gates is going. I've been in and out of the budget world over the last decade and I don't think that strategically that this is the best budget, this amendment which is currently being debated as a part-- The budget amendment-- As a part of the fiscal year '10 budget was a very comprehensive approach to the future, including a significant investment not just in regular warfare where we're trying to move the pendulum a little bit more away from conventional, but also in the cyber world.

And I grow increasingly concerned about the cyber world and the attacks, whether they're from individual hackers or from state entities. And that's something I think we all need to be concerned about. I'm not going to go into great detail about specifics with respect to that, but it's a growing concern. There's been a significant investment in that. It's become what I believe is a mainstream issue for all of leadership,

not just for specialties. And we need to raise up more people who are capable in this area, and as I indicated, it's a growing concern and we need to have this as a big part of our focus with respect to the threat now and in the future.

MS. LEINWAND: Was the Defense Department affected by this latest cyber attack, and how secure would our critical infrastructure be at this time?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: We are constantly probed in the cyber world, and have been for some time. Without going into any specific details of that, I'm comfortable that we are alert, we recognize the probes and we are responding. But again, it's an area of growing concern for all of us in leadership positions.

MS. LEINWAND: Okay, moving on to Afghanistan, with U.S. forces fighting in Afghanistan for nearly eight years, why should Americans be persuaded that the latest ramped up military push will be the silver bullet? When will this war end, and exactly what is our country's long-term objective there?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Well, I don't think actually there are any silver bullets with all of these major challenges, including in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Afghanistan, while we have been there since 2001, it's been an under-sourced effort for a significant period of time. And now both with what we've learned, particularly with respect to counterinsurgency and what it takes, and what we've learned in Iraq and we apply those lessons to Afghanistan, and there's not a one-to-one translation there, but from a counterinsurgency standpoint, we have the best counterinsurgency force in the world. And drawing on those lessons, being able to make a difference and understand from a strategy standpoint that this is the right way to go, is where we are.

And we are now resourcing it to the needs of the commander on the ground. We just haven't done that before, and we're really just starting to do that this year, and it is those resources combined with the civilian team that's going in place, the focus that's been brought to this by Ambassador Holbrooke, who is the special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan, this joint civilian-military team that I think will allow us to move forward in a very positive way. The focus, again, is on security right now, for the Afghan people and that's, in fact, where our military forces are very much focused.

MS. LEINWAND: So how long do you expect U.S. troops to be in Afghanistan?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: My expectation is that we will have a long-term relationship with Afghanistan. When I get asked about time, I think the best number I can give you is I believe that we have to start to turn the tide with respect to the Taliban in the next 12 to 18 months. And I believe the forces that we have, and the strategy that we have and the approach that we have, will allow us to do that.

Then beyond that, I can give, or we would be able to give, a much better assessment of duration after that. Beyond that, I'm just not in a position to be knowingly specific about how long it'll take.

MS. LEINWAND: What are the major differences between the current U.S. strategy in Afghanistan and the previous strategy, besides troop levels?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: The current strategy is, again, it's a regional approach. I indicated I've been to Pakistan almost, I think, a dozen times in the last year, year and a half, and it was my belief, and it is my belief, that we needed to have a regional approach there. There's broad responsibilities, not just for those two countries, but for other countries in the region. And so I'm very encouraged by the regional approach, I'm very encouraged by the focus on civilian capacity and building civilian capacity. We've got not just a new military leader there, we've got a new ambassador there and a new embassy that's broader and deeper across a number of areas. There's focus on development, there's focus on agriculture, their economy writ large.

And there needs to be great focus on governance, again not just at the national level, and these forces that we're putting in there now, along with our coalition partners, are focused very much on security to support the elections which come in August this year as well. So there's a very comprehensive approach here that covers all of the areas that are required to move this in a positive direction. And I'm actually encouraged by the strategic approach, and now we're in a position where we just have to execute.

MS. LEINWAND: Commanders say they need more Afghan forces. Do you see any prospect for more troops to serve as trainers beyond those already announced?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: The tasking that General McChrystal had from both Secretary Gates and myself, General Petraeus, was to go in and come back in 60 days with your 60-day assessment. And zero base everything that you need, specifically from the military side. And so he's going through that now. That clock started about the second week in June and he's basically at the beginning of that assessment. So, I really look for him to come back and tell me what he needs.

And my guidance was, "Tell me what you need, bring it back to Washington, and we'll work it from there." I've had discussions with both the National Security Advisor, the President of the United States, and we're all in agreement. We're committed to properly resourcing this endeavor. So, there aren't any specifics right now with respect to that. I think all of us are concerned about having the right level of footprint, but not getting to a point where it looks like we're an occupying force. If we get to that point, it isn't going to work.

Again, it's focusing on the security for the people so that we can turn this also, and the specifics about trainers. We've got about 4,000 additional trainers which will show up later this year, the 4th Brigade of the 82nd Division. That will fill a significant gap that we've had for a long period of time. And then the main effort becomes training

the Afghan army and the Afghan police so that they can provide the security for their people.

MS. LEINWAND: What is the biggest threat our troops face in Afghanistan?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: The biggest threat is really from IEDs, the improvised explosive devices, which have become more and more sophisticated over time. And that combination with more and more sophisticated attacks from the Taliban, where they use IEDs as well as other tactics to inflict or to fight our troops. And we've come a long way with respect to that. But this is an enemy that's very adaptive and very capable. And as they adapt, we adapt, they adapt again. And so we're very focused on this in many, many ways in terms of support for both intelligence as well as capabilities to counter this threat. But that's the number one threat there.

MS. LEINWAND: Military casualties spiked during the surge in Iraq. How great of an increase in casualties are you bracing for as troop levels in Afghanistan go up?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: We put, as I indicated, some 10,000 Marines in southern Afghanistan. We know particularly in Helmand Province where 4,000 of them launched an operation just a few days ago, that that's going to be a very tough fight. I have said for some time, my expectation is as we add more troops there are, unfortunately and tragically, going to be more casualties. Certainly, we're doing everything we can to minimize that, but I think the fighting for the next 12 to 18 months is going to be very, very challenging. And with that certainly comes the casualties that go along with that.

And again, that's back to turning-- Starting to turn the tide against what has become a more sophisticated threat over the last two or three years, and that's really where we're focused right now. So, my expectation is we are going to spike. I don't know how long it's going to last. We're certainly aware of that. We're very focused on that. But, again, the expectations by adding these troops in a much tougher fight, is those numbers are going to go up.

MS. LEINWAND: What's the status of providing troops with equipment; specifically armored vehicles that better protect our forces from IEDs?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Secretary Gates has made this a top priority for the last- - Literally, since he came into office. And these armored vehicles, MRAPs we call them, we are flowing them to Afghanistan by the thousands. At the end of this year, actually we recently signed a contract to have a new lighter weight, all terrain vehicle that is MRAP capable, or provides that kind of protection. And we expect that to start arriving in theater in December.

But in the meantime, we're flowing thousands, and we have, to Afghanistan to meet the needs that are there right now. It's not the same terrain as Iraq, and we are working hard to get the right vehicle in the right place at the right time. But there isn't any, from an equipment standpoint, there's no higher priority than to get these vehicles in

theater as rapidly as we can. And we're upwards of about 2,000, two to three thousand right now that we have in Afghanistan, and we will flow the remainder of the requirement as troops flow in later this year and towards the beginning of next year, to meet the needs there that we have.

MS. LEINWAND: Would you describe your top priority to improve support for seriously wounded service members?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Probably the area that I worry most about with respect to wounded, their families and families of the fallen, is the stress issue, the whole issue of post traumatic stress. We are, on average now for a major ground units in the Army on our fourth deployment. And most of those deployments have been 8, 12, 15 months. We've now reduced those deployments to 12 months maximum. And the repetitive deployments are what are certainly most challenging.

Now, I will tell you that when I visit troops, there's also a great skip in their step because they know they've made a difference, they've turned it around in a place like Iraq. They're very confident that they can get the job done in Afghanistan. That said, those who have sustained the kinds of wounds, I called them signature wounds earlier, the traumatic brain injury, the post traumatic stress, and I think we're at the beginning of understanding how to deal with that. We're under-resourced nationally in mental health and that basically has an effect on under-resourcing the military in terms of mental health. So, again, back to I'm anxious to have communities throughout the land reach out to these young people who are the best I've ever served with and who've made such a difference in serving our country and work with them as they look to a future-- And again, their dreams haven't changed-- And address some of these very, very challenging issues. So it's probably in the mental area that I am most concerned about.

MS. LEINWAND: What impact have you seen from the policy change to allow the press to cover the return of the bodies of fallen soldiers?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Well, less impact, I think, than it's been-- It's been very well done. I've been up there and observed the process. And I think it's a very important-- I personally believe it was a very important decision. I think that's the most difficult part of fighting a war, is those that we lose, and I think we as a country owe the kind of both dignity that the ceremonies at Dover-- That the ceremonies at Dover speak to when you see them, and respect for those who sacrificed so much. And what I've seen is that dignity and that respect has been very, very much supported in the time that certainly the press has been there. And I'm very encouraged by that.

And I think it's important that all of us understand the sacrifices that these young men and women make, and certainly that decision, I think, is a very positive step to make that happen.

MS. LEINWAND: What is your assessment of the cooperation the U.S. military in Afghanistan receives from Pakistani military? The *Washington Post* had a story from the field over the weekend that suggested it's not so good at the border?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Actually, part of why I've been to Pakistan so often is to engage their military leadership and when I travel to Afghanistan and Pakistan, the question that comes up either directly or indirectly, is "are you staying this time, or are you leaving?" And we left Afghanistan in 1989 and they remember that. We actually sanctioned Pakistan from about 1990 to 2002, and so they're very wary of what is going to be our sustained position. And that's why I think it's so important to engage at every level, and that's what's going on right now. I think we need long-term partnerships here with both these countries which are just starting to be renewed, under obviously very challenging circumstances.

And part of that is support to the Pakistani military and we've given significant support there, what they've asked for in many cases, as they adapt. This is a military that's got focus on two different fronts, whether it's Kashmir area in the east and they recognize there is a significant extremist threat internal to their country that they're now attacking and dealing with. And it's very much counterinsurgency based, and I'll use the SWAT campaign in recent weeks as an example. A year ago, not many people would have said that the Pakistani military could have pulled that off, and yet they've made an awful lot of progress.

And that kind of both effort and the cooperation that we're trying to generate through our engagement in the long run, I think with the development of the Afghan security forces and the Pakistani security forces, puts growing and continued pressure on that threat that I talked about earlier. It's not perfect, we still are working our way. We have a ways to go in terms of those relationships between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and I think that's historically known and obviously we've got a ways to go with our own relationships with those two countries. But think we need to stay engaged and overall, we're working, we're moving in the right direction.

MS. LEINWAND: You have expressed some concern about high levels of civilian casualties sort of undoing your work in Afghanistan. What about the drone fired missiles in the tribal areas? Are you concerned about the hit rate there?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Let me talk specifically to civilian casualties. I don't think in the history of counterinsurgency you can win by killing civilians who live there. And I think General McChrystal in his confirmation testimony said it best when he said the future measure of success in Afghanistan won't be the number-- The measure won't be the number of enemy that we will, it'll be the number of Afghan citizens that we protect. And I don't think I could say it any better. And that civilian casualties, when they occur, set us back.

He issued a new directive last week that very specifically focused on this, and one of the thrusts is we will do everything we can and everything we have to to protect our

own troops. But, leaders need to be focused on, combat leaders need to be focused on, not just step one, but steps two, three and four, in an engagement where a tactical win can well be a strategic defeat. And so, the leadership, in particular General McChrystal, but I know him well enough to know that he is focusing this right down to the most junior level of soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, who would be in combat to understand that. And that's really where I am with respect to civilian casualties.

MS. LEINWAND: How about those drones? Tell me about--

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Do you have any other question? (Laughter)

MS. LEINWAND: You want to talk about how well those are working for you?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Well, I actually won't talk about any operational details.

MS. LEINWAND: Okay, we'll go back to strategy then. Secretary of Defense Gates has said it's time to reconsider the policy of preparing the U.S. military to fight two major conventional wars at the same time. The Army Chief of Staff said he believed the two-war strategy should be jettisoned. What is your personal view on whether that policy should be rewritten?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: I believe that focus of what Secretary Gates has put in front of us, which is to continue to shift the pendulum from a conventional capability to an irregular warfare capability is absolutely critical. And I've been in the Pentagon enough to know the Pentagon doesn't move quickly. We still expend an extraordinary amount of our budget, there are estimates of some 60 to 70 percent, on conventional capability. And where Secretary Gates and I, as well, are is to move that pendulum and focus on these capabilities that we've, one, learned so much about in the wars that we're in. But it isn't just, for me, it isn't just focusing on the wars that we're in, because I think these capabilities have great applicability for the future.

And for me, it's all about balance. It isn't about moving the pendulum from one side all the way to the other, it's about balance for the future. And I think the '10 budget, the fiscal year '10 budget which Congress is currently debating to go into effect beginning next October is very much a step in the right direction. We are in the middle of our quadrennial defense review and we are dealing with-- One of the issues that we're dealing with is how to properly size our force for the future, what kind of conflicts we should prepare for in that regard. And that covers the gamut of what kind of people skills and what kind of equipment and what kind of training that you need. And there'll be more specifically that will be an output of that review process that gets us to the sizing construct for the future. But I'm pretty comfortable it won't be two major contingency operations.

MS. LEINWAND: The Navy and the Air Force have previously told Congress they face shortfalls in fighter jets in the years ahead. Yet, the 2010 budget spends less than has been planned on F18s for the Navy, retires numerous fighters in the Air Force,

and would terminate production of additional F22s. Does the U.S. military have a fighter shortfall, or has the Pentagon downsized its required number of fighters?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: It probably depends on whose plans you're talking about to get at a question like that. Certainly, we've seen, I've seen, for the last decade a very, very focused bow wave of tactical aviation to include that of the Air Force and the Navy. And for the next several years, I'm actually comfortable with the investment, specifically in both F18s and the joint strike fighter. And I'm supportive of this, that we need to close out the F22 and we need to invest in the joint strike fighter for the future, which is a jet that will go to the Air Force and the Navy and the Marine Corps, and that investment is about right.

We're at a time in the joint strike fighter program that clearly of some risk because it's a new program, but from what I've seen, I'm comfortable with where we are with respect to that right now. There certainly are discussions about a strike fighter shortfall in the future. I'm not unaware of that and some of the numbers, I don't think it's as extreme as some of the numbers I've seen. And we need a strong tactical aviation capability. But where we are right now, and it's one of the things that Secretary Gates has directed us in this quadrennial defense review, to review in detail to make some decisions about where we go in the future. But I really believe the future is in the joint strike fighter and that's where we ought to be focused.

MS. LEINWAND: Over the next few years, what major systems and programs in the military are likely to be planned for reduction or elimination?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: (Laughter) Actually, when you look at the decisions that Secretary Gates recommended to the President and the President sent to Congress in the fiscal year '10 budget, focusing on programs that had gotten very expensive and were out of control, focusing on programs that were in some ways looking back and not looking forward. Programs that were very late in their delivery, and programs which were expected to be along those lines, let's say were at the five year point, and were at the 13 or 14 year point. And the totality of the decisions, the number of major program decisions he made in the fiscal year '10 budget with that proposed amendment to President Obama, it was extraordinary when you look back over the history of how these decisions get made.

So, I can't be predictive about the future in terms of what specific systems are there, but we did a very thorough review of what we thought was relevant at the time given those categories and challenges. That will continue, he's directed us to look at tactical aviation, he's directed us to look at amphibious ship lift capability for the future and fighting capability. And there's a dozen areas or so that we're looking at over the course of the quadrennial defense review, and I would think any changes, significant changes that would come to future systems, would come out of that review. That said, he's made the decisions for, I believe, the vast majority of the major systems in this most recent recommendation in the fiscal year '10 budget.

MS. LEINWAND: You've called for an evolution of the don't ask, don't tell policy. If you could write the new policy, what would it say?

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Well, I'm not a policy guy. I'm charged with carrying out the law, I'm charged with carrying out policy. And right now, the don't ask, don't tell policy and law from 1993 is in effect. Conversations I've had with President Obama, Secretary Gates, Secretary Gates recently announced that he's going to task his lawyers to look at a more humane way to execute the policy and what I, as I look forward to-- The strategic intent of the President is very clear. He wants to change this policy and that will also take a change in the law.

I was asked about this, actually, in my confirmation hearing. And like the law that exists now, should the law change, certainly we will carry it out. When I've talked about looking at this in the future, we have a force that's under extraordinary stress and it's a force that should this occur, I think we need to implement in a way that recognizes the challenges and the stress that we're under right now. But, if it does occur, or when it does occur, I'll certainly lead it and carry it out.

MS. LEINWAND: I hate to interrupt the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, I wish I were wearing a flak jacket, but I have to keep this-- Get you out on time. So we are just about out of time, so I just want to make one announcement. First of all, we have a future speaker on July 10th, Morris Dees, Founder and Chief Trial Counsel of the Southern Poverty Law Center, will be joining us.

Secondly, I would like to give the Admiral a token of our appreciation, thank you very much. (Applause)

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Thank you.

MS. LEINWAND: And we have one last question for you, we've got one minute. Who are among your military heroes from the U.S. or abroad, historically speaking, and what have they taught you? In one minute? (Laughter)

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Well, on the Navy side, an admiral by the name of Ray Spruance who was known as the Quiet Warrior, and he's a very patient guy that had a big impact for historians at the Battle of Midway, and lots of people recognize that that was a battle that turned the tide in the Pacific.

And someone else that I admire greatly is George Marshall, and how he did what he did, how he engaged from a leadership position both on the political side. And he was very clear about the political and military relationship, and I think he has set the standard for all of us who wear a uniform and who fought through a very, very difficult time, obviously, in the war, in certainly the Second World War, and I admire him greatly. And he's taught us all a lot, and I'm grateful for that.

MS. LEINWAND: Thank you very much.

ADMIRAL MULLEN: Thanks, Donna. (Applause)

MS. LEINWAND: I'd like to ask you all to keep your seats for just a minute. I'd like to thank you all for coming today. I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, JoAnn Booz and Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. Also, a special thanks to National Press Club Board of Governors Vice Chair, John Donnelly, who organized this luncheon but could not be here with us today.

Also, thanks to the NPC Library for its research. The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by National Press Club's Broadcast Operation Center, and our events are available for free download on iTunes, as well as on our website. Nonmembers can purchase transcripts, audio and video tapes by calling 202-662-7598, or emailing us at archives@press.org. For more information about the National Press Club, please go to our website at www.press.org.

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