

***Not a Good Day to Die:  
The Untold Story of Afghanistan's Operation Anaconda***

by Sean Naylor, Army Times  
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Discussants: Frederick W. Kagan, U.S. Military Academy at West Point  
Kalev Sepp, Naval Postgraduate School  
Moderator: Thomas Donnelly, AEI

MR. DONNELLY: I would like to welcome everybody to American Enterprise Institute. My name is Tom Donnelly. I'm the head of defense and national security studies here, such as that may be.

Actually, today's event is a great pleasure for me in that our featured speaker is Sean Naylor, a reporter for Army Times. In my previous life, I was editor of Army Times, and indeed I hired Sean at the paper way back in 1990. I had to double-check with Sean to remember the date. But he's been a really superb writer of military affairs, particularly of the United States Army, really since even before the day I hired him.

The book that he's here to tell us about – the cover of which you see displayed on the screen – gets two thumbs up from me. I just completed reading it over the weekend. And it shows, really, every one of Sean's strengths. Particularly it's a superb piece of military reporting, as Sean will divulge and should be quite obvious. A lot of the fighting done in Afghanistan and particularly in Operation Anaconda was done by America's most elite units. Again, the reporters in the audience and on the podium will understand how difficult it is to report on those communities. But it's also, really, a piece of writing that is both quite a beautifully flowing piece of writing but one that reflects Sean's long study of the United States Army.

So the format is as follows. Sean will speak for about a half an hour or so. I've asked two friends, very distinguished intellectuals in their own right – my friend Kalev "Gunner" Sepp, who has a fair amount of time in Afghanistan himself; and also Fred Kagan, a professor at West Point but not for very much longer, due to join us here at AEI in the next couple of months. And then there will be kind of a cross-examination by Gunner and Fred raising some issues and inviting Sean to give further comments. Then we'll open it to questions from the audience. So with that introduction, Sean, the microphone is yours, and let's get going.

MR. NAYLOR: Thank you very much for that generous introduction, Tom. I'm here today to talk to you about Operation Anaconda. What was Operation Anaconda? It was America's first battle of the 21st century, fought in March 2002, just three years ago last month, in the remote Shahikot Valley of eastern Afghanistan. It was the largest battle fought by U.S. troops in Afghanistan; indeed, the largest battle fought by U.S. troops since Operation Desert Storm. It was also the highest-altitude battle ever fought by American soldiers. And it was the last, best opportunity to destroy much of the al Qaeda leadership and what might be termed al Qaeda's guerilla army in that part of the world.

It was an opportunity that was, in part, squandered – squandered not so much by the colonels and generals in Afghanistan, but by a series of decisions taken by their bosses in the Pentagon and at U.S. Central Command in Tampa, Florida. Those decisions, which I shall outline here, resulted in Operation Anaconda being planned and fought by a bifurcated and hopelessly confused and confusing command structure sitting on top of a force missing much of the combat power desired and requested by its commanders.

But to figure out why the United States chose to wage its largest set-piece battle in a generation, a battle against its sworn enemies who were responsible for the deaths of 3,000 people in America just a few short months previously, I need to take you back to the winter of 2001-2002.

By December 2001, U.S. forces allied with the Northern Alliance had overthrown the Taliban government in Kabul. But the senior al Qaeda leaders and thousands of their troops remained in the field. However, by early 2002, senior U.S. commanders in the Pentagon and at Central Command were behaving as if the war was all but over. This was odd, given that it was al Qaeda, not the Taliban that had declared war against the United States and so recently killed 3,000 people on these shores. The only reason we were fighting the Taliban at all was that they had refused to give up the al Qaeda members in their country when the United States had demanded them to do so. It was as if, having been brought up in an age when seizing an enemy's capital and deposing his government equated to victory, U.S. strategists failed to grasp that such measures did not signify the end of the war, even the war in the Afghan theater, against a transnational guerilla force like al Qaeda, which had no capital to seize.

Indeed, one of the mistakes that U.S. commanders and their planners made was to fail to distinguish sufficiently between the war against the Taliban and the war against al Qaeda forces in Afghanistan. These two enemies were very different. The Taliban's army was ethnically based, drawn almost exclusively from the Pashtun tribes of southern and eastern Afghanistan, fighters who were steeped in the traditional Afghan codes of warfare. These traditions included changing sides, surrendering en masse, or simply departing the battlefield and returning to their farms when defeat seemed inevitable. There are relatively few Custer's Last Stands in intra-Afghan warfare.

By the time U.S. Special Forces and CIA operatives entered Afghanistan to link up with the Northern Alliance, the Taliban had already been significantly weakened as a military force by the withdrawal by Pakistan of its military intelligence troops who provided the Taliban with much of their tactical and operational expertise. That left the Taliban as something of a paper tiger when the combination of U.S. Special Operations forces, CIA operatives, and the Northern Alliance army, all enabled by the precise lethality of U.S. and allied air power, drove south from the Hindu Kush to sweep the Taliban from the field.

Al Qaeda was different. It had thousands of men under arms in Afghanistan. Indeed, the Taliban's 55th brigade, regarded as its best combat force, was in fact an al Qaeda seconded to the Taliban. Al Qaeda's fighters, drawn from the Gulf Arab states, Central Asia, and Chechnya, were professionals. They were well-armed and reasonably well-trained by al Qaeda in their Afghan camps. They were also very highly motivated to fight Americans. There would be no mass surrenders for these men, and they had no homes to which to return. These fighters were willing to die for their cause. They had come to Afghanistan to learn the skills of jihad, and now the Americans had come to their very doorstep. The prospects for jihad could not be better.

When Kabul fell, al Qaeda withdrew to the mountain fastnesses of eastern Afghanistan. Tora Bora is up here, the Shahikot Valley is down here. These were strongholds that the al Qaeda fighters knew well, deep in the Pashtun heartland, the residents of which had provided much of the Taliban's army, had benefited from Osama bin Laden's generosity, and whose Pashtun Wali code of conduct obliged them to shelter their guests when they sought that shelter. In short, destroying al Qaeda in this environment was always going to be a much more challenging proposition than defeating the Taliban in maneuver warfare.

But while some U.S. planners realized that rooting out al Qaeda from its mountain fortresses might require a different approach from that taken against the Taliban, U.S. commanders opted to stick with the same formula of locally recruited militia, Special Operations forces and air power that had worked so well for them up to that point. One problem with this was that the Northern Alliance, and particularly its leadership, were too busy seizing the reins of power in Kabul and picking out the choicest villas for their pied-à-terres in the capital to be bothered with the difficult, dirty job of going after al Qaeda in the mountains. The Northern Alliance men also knew that, as Tadjiks and Uzbeks, they would be viewed as an invading force in the Pashtun provinces. So the Americans were forced to recruit and train at short notice a hodge-podge of Pashtun militias for the biggest, toughest battle of the war.

The United States did have other options. The U.S. maintains at great expense the 101st Airborne Division, Air Assault, a heliborne force designed to move large numbers of infantry over difficult terrain when no good road network is available. It would have been the ideal force for this fight. But other than a downsized brigade of two infantry battalions and a few helicopters, it was left on the shelf. Why? For three reasons.

First, as we have seen, U.S. commanders had fallen in love with the Special Operations / local militia / precision-air-power formula and did not fully understand that it wouldn't work as well against the al Qaeda forces sheltering in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan.

Second, there was an obsession at Central Command and in the Pentagon with not deploying conventional forces to Afghanistan. Such an approach was viewed as one that would only repeat the mistakes made by the Soviets in their 1980s war in Afghanistan. This view seemed to see no difference between the Soviet strategy of deploying 140,000 troops into Afghanistan to wage a scorched-earth campaign whose aim was to impose an unpopular, alien, and morally bankrupt form of government on an unwilling population at the tip of a bayonet and a potential U.S. strategy of deploying perhaps another 10 to 15 thousand troops into Afghanistan to provide the combat power necessary to destroy al Qaeda, who were by no means universally loved in Afghanistan, even in the Pashtun areas.

Third, U.S. commanders had already switched their focus from the war in Afghanistan to preparing for the war they knew, or strongly suspected, was coming in Iraq. The 101st Airborne Division was needed for that war, and so it was not committed to Afghanistan. In its place, the Pentagon sent a downsized headquarters from 10th Mountain Division, at the time the most stretched, stressed division in the army. But what that headquarters deployed to Afghanistan from Uzbekistan in February of 2002, its planners were told that while their first mission was to destroy the al Qaeda forces that were gathering in the Shahikot Valley – the operation that would become Anaconda – they were only allowed to use forces already in theater to do that.

For all these reasons, U.S. leaders imposed an extremely tight cap on forces deployed to Afghanistan. They forbade the deployment of any artillery, traditionally the biggest killer on the battlefield, and only grudgingly allowed the deployment of a single company of eight Apache helicopters. This meant that the brigade combat team cobbled together from one 10th Mountain and two 101st battalions, that was the largest U.S. force sent into the Shahikot, was the first U.S. Army infantry brigade committed against prepared enemy defenses without the benefit of supporting artillery since the Pacific campaign of World War II.

All this left commanders and staffs in Afghanistan to plan Anaconda with fewer forces than they wanted. These problems were compounded by several miscalculations. U.S. planners underestimated the number of enemy fighters in the valley, believing there to be 150 to 250, when in fact there were upwards of 1,000.

They believed that there were 800 civilians in the valley. There were none. They thought enemy fighters would be in the villages on the valley floor and they turned out to be dug in along the high ground. And U.S. planners thought that their enemies would be armed with little more than a few heavy machine guns. In fact, the al Qaeda forces were equipped with an artillery battery, recoilless rifles, rockets, and numerous mortars.

Most important, U.S. commanders expected the enemy to either surrender or to cut and run. That, after all, had been the pattern in the war against the Taliban. In fact, the enemy stood and fought hard and well.

The Anaconda plan was drawn up and executed by a gaggle of different task forces that Central Command had thrown together at virtually the last moment to fight the biggest battle of the war. These included an Infantry task force and three different Special Operations task forces. A task force is, by definition, an organization brought together from disparate units for a specific mission. This setup meant that at every echelon of command, from platoon to division, officers were working and fighting beside and below leaders they had never trained with and in many cases didn't even know. Inevitably in such a confusing situation,

frictions and suspicions arose, and the plan that emerged was the result of negotiation and compromise between different task forces with competing agendas, rather than the product of a single clear vision.

Central Command's insistence on leading with an Afghan force meant that, despite the participation of three battalions of highly trained U.S. light infantry, the main effort in Anaconda was to be 300 Afghan militiamen with only a couple of weeks' training by U.S. Special Forces under their belts. They were to drive into the valley from the west and then sort the enemy from the civilians believed to be in the villages. The expectation was that the al Qaeda fighters on the valley floor would then surrender or try to escape to Pakistan via passes out of the valley to the east and to the south. To prevent that from happening, 10th Mountain and 101st Airborne Division infantry would air-assault into the low ground and establish blocking positions to seal those passes. The air assault would go in along here, and then the troops would march east, out the passes, to seal them at blocking positions between the mountains.

That was the plan. What actually happened was that the Afghan column never made it to the valley. It was halted by al Qaeda fire to the west of the Shahikot. But the U.S. Infantry air assault, the supporting effort in the operation, went ahead anyway. When they landed on the valley floor, those troops found themselves in isolated pockets under heavy fire from a well-equipped enemy ensconced in the high ground. It was now that U.S. troops showed their true colors.

There was a lot of hand-wringing at the turn of the century about the sad but inevitable passing from the stage of the generation that fought World War II, dubbed by some "the greatest generation." Implicit in much of that conversation was the notion that today's generation of young Americans aren't fit to lace the boots of their forefathers. I would respectfully argue that nothing could be further from the truth. In my book, I detail numerous examples of heroic leadership and troop performance under fire. Obviously, I don't have time to lay all of those out for you today, so let me just give one.

Two days ahead of Operation Anaconda's D-day, three teams of commandos totaling 13 men from Delta Force, SEAL Team 6, and other highly classified units crept through thigh-deep snow over frozen mountain ridges to penetrate al Qaeda's lines of defense around the Shahikot. One Delta Force team even rode in on all-terrain vehicles that had been specially rigged with infrared headlights and engines that ran particularly quietly. This was an extraordinarily dangerous mission. If any of the teams were compromised, the mission would be over, Operation Anaconda would be over, before it began. But they made it in by taking the most difficult, arduous routes, routes they knew al Qaeda would be unlikely to monitor. The team in all-terrain vehicles even rode through a minefield – not deliberately, I should add.

When they got into the high ground around the valley, the one SEAL team that was taking part in this made a momentous discovery. Right where they wanted to establish their observation post – on this finger-like ridge line jutting into the southern part of the valley – I can show you another picture of it here. For those of you that can see that, this is looking north to south, and that's the ridge line pushing up there. And the SEALs wanted to establish an observation post right there.

When they got to their observation post, this is what they found. There was an al Qaeda heavy machine gun manned by a five-man team. As you see, that machine gun is cunningly disguised from overhead eyes in light blue plastic. And the al Qaeda fighter on the right is outfitted in the latest in mountain camouflage wear.

That machine gun was in a position from which it could have shot down every helicopter flying into the valley. Every national overhead asset the United States has had flown over that valley and missed that machine gun. If that SEAL team hadn't made it into the valley, Operation Anaconda would probably have ended in disaster before the first infantry troops were on the ground. Instead, the SEALs, together with an Air Force AC-130 gunship, took out the position just two and a half hours before the air assault force landed in the valley. That is the post-attack picture.

Together with soldiers and airmen in the valley, these teams turned the tide in Operation Anaconda. Despite a couple more calamitous decisions by senior leaders that cost seven American their lives, U.S. forces managed to kill probably 200 to 300 enemy fighters, using their own weapons and by calling in air strikes.

Anaconda was by no means a complete success. The failure to fight an effective battle of encirclement allowed hundreds of al Qaeda fighters, including some very senior leaders, to slip away to Pakistan, where they are now protecting Osama bin Laden. This need not have happened had Central Command and the Pentagon opened their eyes to the possibilities before them in December 2001. But, were it not for extraordinary men like those 13 commandos, it could have been a lot, lot worse.

Every day, soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines in Iraq and Afghanistan are performing similar acts of bravery, heroism, and outstanding military achievement. Today's generation of young Americans, I would argue, is living up to the high standards set by their forebears. They have earned our pride and they deserve the best strategic leadership we can give them. I thank you for your time.

MR. DONNELLY: I have a few questions. But first, Gunner? Then Fred.

MR. SEPP: Thank you. I'll still be brief. One of the key tenets of Army doctrine – actually all American armed forces doctrine – is to train as you will fight. As a matter of fact, at this panel last week the U.S. Army director of force management was here talking about something that you were just addressing, which is this idea of, in the redesign of the Army, to simplify the structure of its organizations in order to enable what's colloquially called "plug and play" and, you know, a very ready mixing of headquarters in disparate units. But in fact, at the combat training centers this is never done, or almost never done – one of their exceptions being heavy-light rotations, which is a mix of tank units and light infantry units that is done on occasion, but only with extensive preparation at the National Training Center.

But my question would be that, despite the difficulties that you cite in your book about these commanders and staffs that have never worked together before, they're thrown into battle not knowing their superiors, not knowing their subordinates, does in fact this mixing, this plug and play actually work in Anaconda, and would it be a validation of the Army's design for the future?

MR. NAYLOR: I would find it hard to argue that it was a validation for plug and play. I think the rule that ought to be followed is train as you fight, whenever possible. And I think I say in my book that in the higgledy-piggledy way that this force was thrown together to fight the operation, the Pentagon and CENTCOM were tearing that rule right from the book and sort of ripping it into tiny little pieces.

There was a lot of back-slapping going on in Bagram while I was there, preceding the operation, about how much was being accomplished by such a disparate set of organizations. And I suppose some of that was justified, because it was an extraordinarily broad collection of organizations that had been brought together. But what was being missed was how much stuff, particularly intelligence, was falling through the cracks.

There was, as I detail in the book, just a few days before the operation kicked off, an intelligence report that came in to Gardez, where the Special Forces were running the Afghan force out of and where those commando teams were also based. The CIA got basically a sort of disaffected squad leader from the enemy forces in the Shahikot, essentially walked up and gave them a lay-down of how the al Qaeda forces were structure in the valley. It turned out to be remarkably accurate. That report was sent up to Bagram from Gardez and all but disappeared. I asked the Rakkasan S2, the Rakkasan intelligence officer if he'd ever seen it and he said no. And he was mightily frustrated that he hadn't, as you can imagine.

At times in military operations, you're going to have to detach a unit and cross-attach it to another organization. I don't think it's realistic to expect forces only to fight with their organic components. And obviously, the U.S. Army trains so that personnel and units are supposed to know the same standards, the

same doctrine, and can be moved around to a degree without deleterious effects. But that principle was pushed to the breaking point in Operation Anaconda, particularly in the planning process. The friction that arose, particularly between the task force from the 101st, Task Force Rakkasan, and the Special Operations forces over where the air assault should go in, was a prime case in point. Just about everybody except the Rakkasans wanted the air assault to go in on the high ground. The special operators wanted the air assault to go in here and the infantry to march west into the blocking positions, and the Rakkasans were insistent on landing here. At one stage, Colonel John Mulholland, the Task Force Dagger commander, was heard to rail in frustration, “Whoever heard of a plan where you seize the low ground?” I would find it very hard to argue that Operation Anaconda proved that the plug and play concept was viable or one to be pursued at all costs.

MR. SEPP: Well, let me extend that question to another doctrinal concept of jointness. The doctrinal goal of jointness is to achieve an optimal combination of available forces, and sometimes of available leaders and personalities. An immature understanding of that is usually derided as what’s described as the elementary school soccer league idea of jointness, which is where everybody gets to play in the game. But in your research and your study here, did jointness work? There’s two questions here. Did jointness work as doctrinally intended – bringing together the best resources? And having said that, knowing things went wrong, as you describe, in your estimation would a different mix of forces really have made a difference?

MR. NAYLOR: First of all, no, I don’t think jointness as you describe, taking the best forces possible and committing them against – the most appropriate forces, if you like, from whichever service, I don’t believe that that principle was really followed.

I describe in the book that Task Force 11, which was the classified Special Operations task force that included SEAL Team 6, Delta Force elements, elements of the 75th Ranger Regiment, the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment, and other classified units, was commanded by an Air Force brigadier general whose background was in flying C-141 transport planes. The mission was, depending on how you define it, in Afghanistan, for those guys, it was a man-hunt and in Operation Anaconda it was a deep operational tactical reconnaissance mission on the ground. There was little in his resume that could have prepared him to make the sort of tactical decisions that he decided to apportion to himself at a critical stage of the operation.

I also describe how the main force element of Task Force 11 was a squadron from SEAL Team 6. Now, I have no anti-SEAL agenda. But in speaking with a lot of folks from the Special Operations community in preparing for this book, they were fairly unanimous in their view that naval special warfare elements were not the ideal force to send into the mountains of a land-locked country on a deep, Ph.D.-level reconnaissance mission. Some of the SEALs did superbly well, as I detailed in that anecdote that I just gave. But others were thought to have made some basic mistakes by the folks I spoke with – who were not SEALs, I should add.

So to get to your point about jointness, what really frustrated a lot of the Army special operators was that there were Delta Force squadrons available that hadn’t been used in Afghanistan, and already Joint Special Operations Command, which runs all of these forces, had decided to bring the SEALs out of the toolbox and apply them to the problem before they had rotated all three Delta squadrons into the country.

MR. SEPP: Well, you anticipated my question about the naval special warfare units. Because, to coin a phrase, some of my best friends are SEALs, some of my best students are SEALs, and they hold a particular interest in the way that they’re represented or, in some cases, not represented in the book.

But the last question is about – since you mentioned the commander of the Special Operations task force, TF 11. You know, the key question for a commander is always where should you be during the battle. And in this particular case, to inform the audience of this, the commander is actually 1,100 miles away on Masirah Island attempting to direct the battle from there. And this is a technology question, or a question about the seduction of technology. Is the idea that the overhead platforms that are provided – the unattended aerial vehicles, the P-3 Orions, the AC-130s – has technology moved to the point where you can actually influence

the battlefield, not just manage the battlefield but lead a battle – there being a distinction – from a distance without having to be right on the front line, or is this still an illusion?

MR. NAYLOR: It's definitely an illusion, but it's a very seductive illusion for some commanders, I believe. Just a quick minor correction. The Task Force 11 commander himself, at the time of Anaconda, was in Bagram at the operations center that was being run by the SEALs and the Rangers. They all had different slices of that operation center, the SEALs, the Rangers and the 160th Special Operations aviation regiment. But his main headquarters, the so-called JOC, or joint operations center for the task force, was on Masirah Island, which is a tiny desert island off the coast of Amman, 1,100 miles away.

At a critical moment in the battle, shortly after a SEAL from Task Force 11 has fallen out of a helicopter in an attempt to insert a SEAL special reconnaissance element on the top of the highest mountain in Afghanistan, a big one in the Shahikot – Takagar [ph]. That attempt led to sort of a cascading series of events that ended up with seven Americans dying on that mountain. But at a critical moment in the fight, the Air Force one-star – his name was Gregory Trebonne [sp] – decided to take the command and control of that operation away from two Delta Force officers whose resumes and experience, one would argue, had better prepared them for making tactical decisions of that nature, and one of whom was actually in line-of-sight communications with everybody in the battlefield. And instead, he in Bagram took command and control away from them and then handed off control of the fight to his staff on Masirah Island.

And so you ended up for a portion of – and he did so because he believed that simply having satellite communications and a Predator feed from a Predator unmanned aerial vehicle flying over the battle would enable his staff to better fight that fight than the two Delta Force officers, one of whom was in Bagram with a Predator feed and one of whom was right next to the valley with narrow-band satellite communications installed in his vehicle, as well as line-of-sight communications. I think I would argue – and according to the U.S. Special Operations Command investigator of this episode, the Task Force 11 commander eventually acknowledged – that that was the wrong thing to do. But it was a decision made because of an overpowering belief in the power of technology. And I think that those beliefs are still misplaced.

MR. KAGAN: Sean, I want to take the opportunity to say what an honor it is for me to be able to comment on the superb work of contemporary history that you produced, which offers a great number of extremely important lessons to the American military and the American national security community as we go forward.

And I want to pick up on the theme of lessons. The American military and America in general have been remarkably blind to events in Afghanistan since the Soviets withdrew. And all sorts of opportunities, really, to study a first-class case of failed counterinsurgency and learned lessons from it in the Islamic world have gone by the board. It became less and less excusable over time when, in the 1990s, Lieutenant Colonel (Ret.) Les Grau published a translation of the Soviet Frunze Academy "History of the War," which included a lot of tactical vignettes, and then he published another work about the mujahideen tactics. And these books were widely read, and you point out in your book that these were well-known, and of course you could get them in the Internet very easily at the time.

And so it's astonishing to me as I read through your book and I see endless cases where the most basic familiarity with the lessons that you could take away from those documents and case studies were blithely ignored. Examples: If you don't control the high ground in Afghanistan, you don't control the battle, period. That's hardly a lesson that's unique to Afghanistan, but it comes through virtually every vignette. The difficulties of working with indigenous Afghan fighters, particularly in the areas of coordinating air support and ground support, major problems the Soviets never really overcame, should have been a high point of focus in this operation. The importance of artillery and close air support, particularly close air support that could loiter, like helicopter gunships or, in our case, AC-130 aircraft also.

My question to you is, very simply, how is it that a commander like Hagenbach, the Rakkasan commander, how is it that these guys didn't pick up on these lessons when they were so readily available?

MR. NAYLOR: That's an excellent question. I know that the special operators certainly did to a large extent. The Les Grau books were highly sought after not only by the Army Special Forces personnel in Task Force Dagger, which had been sort of the main U.S. force involved in defeating the Taliban on the ground, but also by the Advance Force Operations reconnaissance elements, which were, amongst others, the three teams that I mentioned going into the valley ahead of time. That force was commanded by a Delta Force lieutenant colonel called Pete Blaber, who believed very, very strongly that in order to operate effectively in Afghanistan you had to read every piece of military history that you could get your hands on about the portion of the country you were going to be fighting in. You had to know the culture as well as possible. You know, you really had to immerse yourself in the history, the geography, and the culture.

Obviously, the conventional commanders had come late to the fight, so they hadn't had as much time to get spun up on this. Now, I can't tell you did they or did they not, you know, read the books. I wouldn't be surprised if they had. But I think they also, in the case of the Rakkasans with regard to the high ground, that decision, which was a very controversial one in the planning about landing here instead of back here, was taken partially on safety grounds. I mean, the Rakkasans felt they had very strong reasons for doing that.

The reasons as outlined to me were landing the valley to the east would have meant landing at a higher altitude, flying at a higher altitude. The floor of the Shahikot Valley itself is at 8,000 feet. And the difference in altitude between the two valley floors would have meant that instead of putting the maximum number of infantry on the Chinook helicopters, which is 43 infantry per Chinook, you would probably have had to about halve that number. And since one of the elements that CENTCOM had been nickel-and-diming into the country was the Chinooks, described by General Hagenbach as the long pole in the tent of the Operation Anaconda plan. The Rakkasans felt that it wasn't wise to go into the high ground there. Others on the Mountain staff, the division staff overseeing the Rakkasans, disagreed and felt that there were landing zones and that that could have been accomplished. A lot of the special operators also, both from the AFO side and from the Task Force Dagger side, as I mentioned in my talk, were frustrated with that.

So, you know, I don't want to necessarily pile on the Rakkasans here and say that they didn't do any history. I know that they had their arguments for not seizing the high ground. But perhaps they hadn't realized the threat that they would be exposing themselves to by not doing that.

MR. KAGAN: And that leads actually very well to my next question. We obviously badly underestimated the size of the al Qaeda force that was present in the Shahikot Valley, which should have surprised no one. Operational intelligence of that variety is extraordinarily hard to come by and had been lousy throughout the Afghan operation for a wide variety of reasons. So we should have been, it seems to me, prepared to deal with the possibility that there were more or fewer fighters there than we expected.

When we discovered that there were more, it seems to me that the leadership should have been cognizant of the fact of having an extraordinary opportunity. As it's turned out, our failure to exterminate that force has left them, as you pointed out, in a very good position to continue to maintain the al Qaeda network, the destruction of which was the major objective of going in here.

So my question is why do you think it was, or do you think it was, that as it became clear that there was a larger force in the Shahikot, did we realize what an opportunity we had and was there discussion at the higher levels about how best to take advantage of that opportunity? And if there wasn't a discussion like that, why do you think that was?

MR. NAYLOR: As it became clear on the first day of the battle that the enemy was far more numerous, far better armed and in far more dominant terrain than had been expected, the first decision that the senior U.S.



commander, certainly that General Hagenbach had to make was whether or not to pull out forces and re-caulk, as the Army would say. Now, there's some question, if he had done that whether there would have been – you know, by the time you'd re-caulked, are there going to be any enemy left to attack.

But that decision essentially had been taken and the orders were about to be given when Pete Blaber, the Advance Force Operations lieutenant colonel I spoke of earlier, heard about it, got on the radio, and called in to his deputy who was in the Mountain tactical operations center with the following message, which was: It would be a huge mistake to pull out of this valley. This was – the words he used were “the battlefield opportunity of our lifetimes.” And he continued by saying, If the conventional troops pull out, my three teams are going to stay in. Because they were all calling in very successful air strikes at that point. He said, My three teams are going to stay in and we're going to keep on killing till there's no more killing to be done.

As it turned out, once that message was relayed to General Hagenbach, he got with his two deputy commanding generals, they went outside for a talk, they came back in, and they decided that rather than pull everybody out, they were going to pull out the most beleaguered Infantry force at the southern end of the valley, reposition, reinforce success towards the north of the valley where they hadn't been in such trouble, and then the initial plan was drive south down the – not “drive” literally, but push south down the eastern wall of the valley towards this area here, where the bulk of the enemy seemed to be, while isolating the Whale here, the mountain that was called the Whale, that also appeared to be very heavily defended.

The reason why there weren't that many options available to General Hagenbach was that there weren't that many forces available to him. He only had, really, a battalion-minus of infantry to throw at the problem as a reserve. I heard – this may be apocryphal, but one colonel told me that during the height of Operation Anaconda – the theater reserve in Afghanistan was approximately one platoon. So it wasn't as if he could just throw a couple of thousand troops in concentric circles around the valley. He had Special Forces and Afghan militia teams that were supposed to be doing that. It's apparent that it wasn't a noose that they drew around it, because so many enemy fighters escaped.

MR. KAGAN: So basically the failure of the political leadership at the highest levels to provide adequate resources into the theater made it very difficult for the forces on the ground to seize an opportunity that will never probably come again.

MR. NAYLOR: I would say that's correct. Now, I don't want to put words into General Hagenbach's mouth. I can't tell you if he'd had three other infantry battalions at his disposal what he would have done with them. But certainly since he didn't have them at his disposal, it's almost a moot point.

MR. KAGAN: All right. I'd like to go back to a point that Gunner made before about the Army's desire to be able to do plug and play. And something that I think comes very strongly out of your presentation as a major impediment, and also that I've seen in my own experience as a major impediment to that, which is the Army's fixation on building teams without necessarily thinking about what the consequences are of doing that all of the time. And in this case, I think, although it's very easy to say that it's critical for a SEAL team or a Delta Force team or a SF A-team, or even for a company or battalion of the Rakkasans, to have a good esprit de corps and good teamwork, it gets to be a real problem when the leaders of those teams, who've emerged from those communities, continue to see themselves as part of the team, in competition with other teams. And you've got a situation in which American Army officers with superb war records, with superb experiences and so forth, have to prove themselves to members of communities other than their own before they can be taken seriously. I wonder if you can talk a little bit about how much you think the Army's fixation with team building is actually hindering the effective cooperation of its units in this regard.

MR. NAYLOR: That's a good point. The thought occurs to me that, in this regard, in this context, building teams usually involves—if you're building teams from different organizations – it usually involves tearing up teams at the same time. And that's the problem that I got at earlier with the plug and play issue. It's not

impossible to have officers from different communities who work in an extremely cohesive team together and whose subordinate elements therefore work in an extremely cohesive team together.

A good example of that was the three elements that were co-located at the safe house in Gardez, which is about 10 kilometers north of the Shahikot Valley, where the CIA, Special Forces Task Force Dagger elements were located and Pete Blaber had his AFO headquarters. The lieutenant colonel from Task Force Dagger, called Lt. Col. Chris Haas, Lt. Col. Blaber from Delta Force, and the top CIA Special Activities Division operative who was present – who I refer to as “Spider” in my book, as that’s one of his multiple noms de guerre – formed what was very clearly an extremely tight team and each enjoyed the others full trust and confidence. That did not appear to be the case, despite an awful lot of sort of lip service to the contrary, in Bagram amongst all elements.

I think that the point you raise about building a particular esprit de corps in an organization turning into a negative when people from that organization have to cooperate with different organizations is a valid one. I’m not a social scientist. I can’t tell you whether it’s possible to have your cake and eat it in that regard. I’ve got to believe it is, because there are examples, just as occurred in Gardez, where that happens. But what I think it requires is a strong-minded commander at the top to knock heads together at the first sign of parochialism, to step in and say we’re not having any of that. Of course, it also requires that message to be driven home at multiple stages of schooling and so forth as an officer or an NCO goes up through his career.

MR. DONNELLY: Okay, if I could have two bites at Sean before we turn over to the general Q&A. There are two things I’d like to kind of draw you out on. We’ve mentioned the obsession with command and control technology. Another thing that struck me very forcefully is the other side of our technology obsession – that’s the obsession with precision fires. And in your book you make it very clear that calling air support, when it was there, had occasionally very great effects.

But I think you’re also quite eloquent on just exactly what the lack of artillery – which is also a decision that the Army has now functionally institutionalized, taken to an institutional level – what difference that made. And that was that simply, particularly in an engagement like this where spotting targets was very difficult, that simply suppressive fires, not simply to try to harass and interdict a particular spot – and this is particularly clear in the case of al Qaeda mortar fire, going the other way – obviously low-tech traditional fire support and suppression fires played an important role in the conduct of this fight.

MR. NAYLOR: Yeah, you’ve just about made my point for me there. That’s absolutely correct. There were quite a few questions after Operation Anaconda about why hadn’t there been artillery. And some of the on-the-ground commanders – Gen. Hagenbach and Col. Wiercinski – were sort of forced, I felt, to sort of explain why it really wasn’t such a big deal because they’d been put in a very difficult situation of defending a decision that they had no part in making. When you talk to their subordinates, particularly those whose jobs involved coordinating fires and being fire support officers, it was very clear that those organizations were not happy about the fact that they did not have artillery. And as you very appropriately point out, on several occasions during Operation Anaconda the ability to just blanket a hillside with artillery fire would have been an extraordinary plus in the hands of the Rakkasan commanders.

If you do a Google search or something, you’ll see various excuses about why it wasn’t there. None of those excuses hold up. You’ll see folks saying, well, we didn’t have the helicopters to lift it in. Well, no kidding. But that goes to the point about not having force in the country.

MR. NAYLOR: Yeah, exactly. Secondly, folks, I’ve seen folks raise the question of whether the helicopters could have lifted artillery pieces into that altitude. I got the stats from Boeing on that, and it would not have been a problem. I talked to the Rakkasan fire support officer, I asked him would you have sling-loaded them? and he said, I probably would have internally loaded them. You know, would not have been an issue. Even one Howitzer, I think, doesn’t weigh as much as 43 infantrymen.

Third, you'll hear folks say it would have required more infantry to defend them. Well, again, that goes to the point of there not being enough force in-country. But in fact, as far as I know artillery doctrine, an artillery battery is manned to self-defend itself. It's not supposed to require any extra troops to defend itself.

Let's put it this way, to speak personally. I spent the better part of a day flattened against wadi in the north part of the valley while mortar rounds and 12.7-mm heavy machine gun bullets flew in and zipped overhead. And I would certainly have applauded a few outgoing artillery rounds at that point in time.

MR. DONNELLY: My final question may be less of a question also but, again, the comment that I'll ask you to respond to, at least. To me, just echoes between the planning phase of this, or the lack-of-planning phase or the disconnects in the planning phase or the assumptions of the planning phase between Anaconda and what was to follow in Iraq are really quite striking. The issue of the force cap, the issue of limits on support forces – like division and corps slices, particularly apropos of the 101st – that seem to belie to me a DoD attitude or an OSD attitude wherein the purpose is to fight with the minimum essential force, or the minimum necessary force, rather than to, particularly when you're conducting what is essentially a raid, to try to conduct as violent, as overwhelming, and as simultaneous an operation as is possible.

The one thing that really struck me in the book was how long it takes the sequence of events to unfold, really, in the relative timeframe and, apropos of that, the absolute lack of rehearsals. I didn't see reference to any rehearsal other than guys practicing getting on and off the helicopter, which, particularly when you bring together disparate communities in a kind of a pickup operation, strikes me as asking for trouble.

But again, just this idea of let's do this as precisely, as nonviolently, as painlessly as possible seems to be a theme of recent U.S. operations. And if there's an obsession for Special Operations forces, it seems to me that there's a counter-obsession, or a phobia, about conventional forces in their traditional planning methods.

MR. NAYLOR: Yeah, I think that they are complementary obsessions on the part of some of the senior decisionmakers and policymakers. I can't get inside the heads of those guys to tell you what they're thinking and what their rationales are. I suspect we'll find a little bit more out when the major books on the Iraq war come out. I notice Tom Ricks is sitting here, and he's working on one. So maybe you can ask that of Tom.

MR. NAYLOR: But I think that's absolutely right. What appears, certainly, from the outside of the corridors of power to be an over-simplification of some of the lessons to be learned or the ground rules to be drawn up – Special Operations, good, heavy conventional forces, bad – and you'd like to think that there could be a little bit more nuance in some of this, but sometimes there doesn't appear to be.

Now, let it be said that sometimes in the case of the United States Army, the Department of the Army and the senior leadership of the Army, is not always its own best ally in these situations. If you want to convince senior leaders that you are being sensible about the force that you're deploying and you're not asking for bells and whistles that you don't need, it would probably be a good idea not to deploy your air defenders to Uzbekistan when you're putting a headquarters up, as the Air Force complained to me was done. One of the issues with Operation Anaconda had to do with the planning beforehand for air support. And some of the enlisted tactical air controllers that would normally have deployed with the 10th Mountain Division were left behind. But, the Air Force would point out, they took their air defenders with them. Now, whose air force they thought they were going to be shooting down, I'm not sure.

So you also heard from some of the folks in the Coalition Forces Land Component Command headquarters that sometimes the big army seemed to be more worried. One senior officer told me about how many rotations at the National Training Center this war in Afghanistan was going to screw up than, actually providing forces to support the war effort. So there's a certain amount of blame to be spread around all sides.

QUESTION: I'm Tom Ricks from the Center for Strategic International Studies. Sean, you make a great case that a series of horrible decisions came out of OSD in the lead-up to this battle, effectively making it, if not a defeat, not really a victory. But at the senior level of military command, do you have any sense of what General Franks was doing, how he was handling this, and why he didn't say, hey, these were a series of horrible military decisions, I'm the military commander, here's why we're not going down that road?

MR. NAYLOR: Other than to relate third-hand accounts, no. This was one of the more frustrating parts of researching the book, was to figure out where the responsibility lay between OSD and the CENTCOM headquarters for some of these decisions. And different people you spoke with had different perceptions of where that responsibility lay.

I know for a fact – at least it's been reported to me by multiple sources – that the decisions were certainly conveyed by Tommy Franks in cases. For instance, the decision to deny any artillery to the conventional forces going into Afghanistan, to the Rakkasans, to the Mountain Task Force, he conveyed at the same time as giving his grudging acquiescence to the deployment of eight Apache helicopters – which he had initially opposed. Now, a brigade is usually supported by a battalion of Apaches in the 101st. He eventually signed off on eight single Apaches, one company's worth. And at the time he did that, he told the CFLCC headquarters, Don't even think about asking me for artillery.

Now, was he saying that because of his own military judgment? Or was he saying that because he had been ordered not to deploy artillery by OSD? Or was he saying it because that was his interpretation of the body language that he was reading at OSD? I don't know. I would have liked to have asked him those questions, but when I made repeated requests to him to be interviewed, even after he had retired, I was told that he didn't have the time to be interviewed by me.

So that's the best I can give you on that. I know that some of the decisions were certainly being nickel-and-dimed by OSD and allegedly by Rumsfeld himself. I heard that from folks inside the building, saying that requests for forces would go in to OSD and they'd come back out with all kinds of questions on them and so forth, that there was almost a unit-by-unit examination of every single soldier that was requested to go down-range. So it wasn't all coming out of CENTCOM.

QUESTION: Richard Stewart, U.S. Army Center, Military History. We were talking – plenty of blame to go around, certainly, for the Army on this – but there's some for the Air Force as well. Just recently they've come out with a fairly extensive study, "Anaconda: the Air Power Perspective," which I can probably sum up with their conclusions of the Army just doesn't know how to use air power, therefore it was all their fault. But from your book and from my own observations, it does seem like there's plenty of fault to go around – with the Air Force planning staff that was on-site, with the Air Force staff back in Saudi Arabia. So if you give me sort of your impressions of where the bubble really was lost on close air support, because the first one and two days, as you remember, there was no good air support.

MR. NAYLOR: Yes. Just to address that Air Force study that you referred to, I attended the release briefing on that in the Pentagon, and I read it closely. Frankly, as I suppose I'm something of an authority on this battle now, I did not think too highly of it. Some of its conclusions, I thought, were very – were sound. But they used some spurious information and in fact some quite incorrect information to back that up. And they didn't seem to have interviewed anybody in the United States Army about the issue. And when asked about that, the head of the Air Force's lessons learned operation, which produced the report, said, Well, it's called an air power perspective.

MR. NAYLOR: So I think that the point you raise about what was the Air Force doing in the run-up to this is a good one. A couple of points stick out. I never got a solid answer from the Air Force, whose complaint has been that Coalition Force's air component command headed up at the time by Lt. Gen. Mosley – now Gen. Mosley, the vice chief of staff for the Air Force – was informed late of the operation. Now, the first message

that got sent to them was on the 20th of February, the night of the 19th-20th, which was a full 10 days before Operation Anaconda kicked off. So that raises the question how much advance time do they actually need.

One of the problems was that Mosley was traveling in Saudi Arabia at the time, lining up basing rights for the war in Iraq – which goes to my point about leadership’s attention was already being drawn to planning for the war in Iraq rather than successful execution of the war in Afghanistan. The information seemed to sort of die in Mosley’s headquarters for a couple of days before it got up to the appropriate levels, and then folks’ hair got on fire and people started making telephone calls asking are we set up for this and so forth.

The Air Force had air liaison officers in both the Mountain and the Rakkasan staffs. And I never got a clear answer from the Air Force about why those officers, who work in an Air Force chain of command, where they’re an air liaison officer for an Army colonel or an Army two-star general, they are not rated by him and they are not in his chain of command. They’re in an Air Force chain of command that goes back to CFACC, which was in Saudi Arabia. And I didn’t understand why, in what must have been reasonably regular communication up that chain of command, they didn’t occasionally say, oh, by the way, we’re planning the biggest battle of the war.

On the other hand, clearly the under-estimation of the size of the challenge that awaited U.S. forces in the Shahikot didn’t make this issue a front-burner issue for anyone, as far as I could tell, in the Mountain headquarters or the subordinate headquarters – Rakkasan, Dagger – until the troubles arose in the Shahikot.

MR. DONNELLY: If I could just ask Sean to elaborate a bit about this issue – not with a spirit of beating up on the Air Force, but more in underlining some of the planning problems. One thing you haven’t talked about is the Afghan part of the operation and how crucial fire support was and what the expectations were to make that force – which, as you pointed out in the book, was meant to be the main effort – in order to enable that force to do what was intended.

MR. NAYLOR: Yeah, and this actually underlines a couple of points that I try to make in the book, one about the impact of having a whole hodge-podge of task forces involved in planning an operation and information that disappears between the cracks and the right hand not knowing what the left is doing and so forth. And also the issue of when you rely on air power, that means air power has to deliver.

As I mentioned before, the Afghan force, which was in about 30-something rickety non-tactical jinga trucks along with a few four-wheel drive vehicles manned mostly by Americans, was supposed to come around here and sweep into the villages and basically go almost door-to-door rooting out bad guys. The Afghans were a little concerned about enemy forces that they expected to encounter on the Whale. Unfortunately, they were not deliberately misled by the Special Forces officers who were with them, who had misunderstood somehow and had drawn the false conclusion that there were going to be 55 minutes of nonstop bombardment of the Whale prior to the Afghan column – nicknamed Task Force Hammer – arriving.

Now, what appears to have happened is that at some stage in the evolution of the plan, the amount of time for the handful of preparatory fires that went in, delivered by air power prior to the arrival of friendly forces in the valley, that window was at some stage about 55 minutes long, from the first bomb being dropped to the last bomb being dropped. Not nonstop. And certainly there was never a plan for any more than a handful of bombs to be dropped on the Whale. But the Special Forces officers, like LtCol Chris Haas, told Ziolideen [ph], the Afghan column leader, Don’t you worry about any enemy on the Whale; you’ve seen what our tremendous air power can do in this war so far, and we’re going to bring all of that to bear against the Whale. We’re just going to bomb that thing for 55 minutes. You know, don’t worry about that all. And Ziolideen and the Afghans are like, okay, cool.

So they roll up, after various mishaps, up to about here, and they’re staring at the Whale, and they’re looking at their watches and it’s about time for this bombardment to occur, and one lone bomber appears high in the

sky and drops a stick of bombs – depending on who you talk to, it was either five, six, or seven bombs. But the bottom line, as one officer put it to me, it looked like a bomb per grid square—you know, one, two, three, four, five, six. And the first bombs drop and all the Afghans are jumping up and down, “Yea, Go America.” And then everybody’s waiting for the rest of the fearsome bombardment to occur. And they’re waiting. And it doesn’t occur. And it slowly dawns on them that that’s it.

At that point, morale, which had already suffered from a series of truck crashes and a fratricide incident that had killed one Army Special Forces warrant officer and three Afghan fighters, started to plummet. Ziolideen turns to Chris Haas and says, in a combination of Dhari-Pidgin English, he said, Ko jas planes?

Before anybody asks why was a Pashtun speaking Dhari, it’s because he knew that Haas didn’t speak any Pashta, but he did speak some Dhari. So they sort of communicated in this – Ko jas planes?, which means Where are the planes? And he repeated this again – where are the planes you promised us? And Haas, of course, was empty-handed. And for the rest of the day, they desperately tried to get air power delivered to that terrain feature, which was blocking them from entering the valley, and they could not, mainly because all available air power by this stage was being delivered to these positions to help pin the al Qaeda forces on the high ground back from possibly even overrunning the beleaguered infantry positions on the ground.

There was a definite perception in Task Force Dagger that once the U.S. infantry, which was the supporting effort to their main effort, came under fire, all bets were off as far as their treatment as the main effort and the apportionment of fires to them as the main effort.

QUESTION: Otto Kreisler [ph] with Copy News Service. Sean, the Army has never been noted for liking to have its mistakes aired, notably in public. I was just wondering what kind of feedback you’ve gotten from the big army on your book. How are they taking it?

MR. NAYLOR: Actually, the big army, which I would argue doesn’t come into my book, really, for an awful lot of criticism. I think criticism, albeit implicit in most cases, would probably be apportioned by somebody reading my book to the CENTCOM-OSD chain of command and then to some of the Special Operations headquarters, particularly Task Force 11-Joint Special Operations command.

The Army, and particularly the representatives who fought in the battle, have been uniformly positive. I’ve had very nice communications from Colonel Frank Wiercinski, who commanded Task Force Rakkasan, now BrigGen Frank Wiercinski, from then-Major General now LtGen Buster Hagenbach, who was the CJTF Mountain commander, and from a whole range of other officers from the battalions and companies that fought the operation. I’ve had a little bit of push-back from some in the Naval Special Warfare community and, at least as communicated to me from the uniformed military, that’s about it in terms of negative comments. Otherwise, and I’m not trying to toot my own horn here, but it’s been overwhelmingly positive.

QUESTION: Thank you. Jonathan Rauch of National Journal. How large a factor were preparations for the Iraq war? In other words, if not for the Iraq war, how much difference do you think it might have made?

MR. NAYLOR: I think that if the Iraq war hadn’t been on the horizon and the Army / the Pentagon had deployed the 101st, even just two infantry brigades and a sizable aviation brigade combat team, you would have had the opportunity to conduct a much more decisive battle of encirclement in the Shahikot Valley. Would that have happened? I can’t tell you. But certainly the opportunity would have been there. But by taking the vast bulk of the 101st Airborne Division off the shelf, the war in Iraq certainly hindered this operation. Even at the time of Operation Anaconda, when you asked folks in Bagram why isn’t this here, why isn’t that here, folks would kind of shuffle and look at their shoes and sort of mention, like, well, you know, this isn’t the only theater we’re probably going to be fighting in. And things like that. So the perception was apparent in Bagram even then that they were being robbed of combat power at least in part because of the war in Iraq.

QUESTION: Norm Olson [sp], consultant. Very good briefing, a particularly impressive combination of candor and diplomacy. I wish if you could expand a little bit – what's the implication of the lessons learned for this action in the overall global war on terror?

MR. NAYLOR: Well, I suppose the implications are as I mentioned. Certainly Tahir Yuldash, the head of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which is essentially the al Qaeda franchise in Central Asia, was commanding troops in the operation and got away. I've seen articles that say that he is now the day-to-day commander of al Qaeda forces in the northwest frontier province of Pakistan, in the tribal areas. So clearly that effect occurred. In addition, of course, the troops he's commanding are probably in significant part folks who fought in Operation Anaconda and then came away. There's also less conclusive but certainly some circumstantial evidence that suggests that al Zahiri might have been present in the Shahikot.

So those are the concrete implications – those guys are all still around. In terms of how might we do things differently or how have we done things differently, that all depends on folks learning the correct lessons. And it also depends on how you define the war on terror and whether you include the war in Iraq in the war on terror or as a distraction from the war on terror, or a distraction from the war on terror that eventually became part of the war on terror. You know, I'm not sure I want to wade into that topic right now.

But I think some lessons have been learned. I was certainly more impressed in the slice of the invasion of Iraq that I was privileged enough to witness with Third Squadron, 7th Cavalry out of 3d Infantry Division. The close air support was much more effective, much more tightly worked and better planned than it had been in the Shahikot. And I know that the Army and the Air Force had gotten their heads together on that topic between the two fights.

Is there anything else that I'm not addressing? Clearly, how Joint Special Operations command deploys its forces is a lesson – or at least is a subject that I think Operation Anaconda raises a lot of questions about. You know, I was talking to somebody recently from that community who's a SEAL, who said, you know, we're still making a lot of the same mistakes in that community. So take that for what it's worth.

MR. DONNELLY: I would just add one concluding remark. One thing to remember about Anaconda, although an opportunity in the anti-al Qaeda fight was clearly missed, it did have an important effect in Afghanistan, in changing the war in Afghanistan, which subsequently has become a very successful – not a counterterrorism fight against al Qaeda, but has been a very successful counterinsurgency operation. And today al Qaeda and the Taliban are really quite marginal players in the struggle for the future in Afghanistan. So if Anaconda was not realized or was not the decisive battle in the al Qaeda war, it was a very crucial and perhaps the last – and if you read the book, which again I will commend to you – one thing that Sean points out is that these forces were massing for a counterattack. So within the framework of the fight for Afghanistan, it did have an important effect.

MR. DONNELLY: And thank you all on behalf of AEI. Sean will be around for a few minutes to both sell and sign books, particularly the sell part. Thanks very much. See you again soon.