

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH GENERAL GEORGE CASEY, JR.,
ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF

SUBJECT:

THE ARMY'S MANPOWER AND EQUIPMENT NEEDS IN IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN

MODERATOR:

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MS. WERNER: Good afternoon and welcome to the National Press
Club for our luncheon featuring General Casey. My name is Theresa
Werner of Associated Press Television and a member of the National
Press Club Board of Governors. I'd like to welcome to the Club
members and their guests in the audience today, as well as of those of
you watching on C-SPAN. We're looking forward to today's speech, and
afterwards I will ask 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 from the guests and members of the general public who
attend our luncheons and not necessarily from the working press.
(Laughter.)

I'd now like to introduce our head table guests and ask them to
stand briefly when their names are called. From your right, Jim
Michaels, USA Today, military reporter; Michael Bruno, deputy managing
editor, Defense Aviation Weekly; James Rosen, correspondent, McClatchy
Newspapers; Eleanor Clift, Newsweek Magazine and a panelist on The

McLaughlin Group; Mr. Dick O'Brian (sp), guest of General Casey; Tom Vandenberg (sp), military correspondent, USA Today; Mrs. Sheila Casey, wife of General Casey; Angela Greiling Keane, Bloomberg News and chairman of the NPC Speakers Committee -- I'm going to skip General Casey and come back to him -- Katherine Skiba, Washington correspondent, Milwaukee Journal Sentinel; Brigadier General Anthony Cucolo, chief of Public Affairs and guest of the speaker; Andrew Gray, military affairs correspondent, Reuters; Josh Rogan (sp), a defense and foreign policy reporter with Congressional Quarterly; Lolita Baldor, AP Pentagon reporter; and Chris Castelli, chief editor of Inside the Pentagon. (Applause.)

This a very important time for the United States Army.

In nearly six years of war in Afghanistan and more than four years in war with Iraq, the Army has borne the greatest share of the U.S. military's wartime load. While the Army's recruiting and retention have held steady despite the wars, there are signs that this could change. Mid-level officers are beginning to leave the Army in considerable numbers. The Army also faces mounting bills to repair or replace worn equipment. And even as it pays the rising cost of today's conflict, the Army must pay to prepare for tomorrow's conflict by growing its ranks and developing new weapons.

Today's speaker, General George W. Casey, faces those challenges every day. General Casey is the Army's top officer, the 36th chief of staff of the Army and a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. General Casey assumed his present position in April, after spending nearly three years commanding the coalition forces in Iraq. During that difficult period, the insurgency in Iraq grew in strength, and thousands of Americans were killed and wounded.

General Casey's goal as commander was to get the Iraqis to assume more and more responsibility for their own security and political situation. He did not believe that that could happen by augmenting U.S. forces there. To the contrary, General Casey resisted calls to boost troop numbers. In late 2005, he expressed the hope that U.S. troop levels could be reduced by 30,000 in early 2006. But after a Shi'a shrine in Samarra was bombed in February of 2006, the opposite happened. Today, 162,000 U.S. troops are serving there.

General Casey once said, it's always been my view that a heavy and sustained American military presence was not going to solve the problems in Iraq over the long term. Some, including Republican presidential candidate John McCain, have criticized General Casey for his resistance to boosting troop levels in Iraq. But that criticism did not stop the president from nominating him, and 83 members of the Senate voted to confirm him in February.

General Casey's career is a distinguished one. He was commissioned a 2nd Lieutenant of Infantry from Georgetown University School of Foreign Service in 1970. Since then, he has commanded at every level of the Army, from platoon to division, and has served all over the world. General Casey holds a Master's Degree in International Relations from Denver University and has served as a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council of the United States.

Please give a warm Press Club welcome to General George Casey, chief of staff of the Army. (Applause.)

GEN. CASEY: Thank you. Thank you very much, Theresa.

I want you to know that I have a great -- I feel a great affinity for this audience as probably the only other people in Washington that couldn't get leave this -- or vacation this time of year. (Laughter.) And as I look out here at this bank of cameras, surely there must be something else going on in Washington today -- if only we'd have done this yesterday.

I would also like to recognize a group here, much to my pleasant surprise, who are representatives of my father's West Point class, the class of 1945. They've come with their spouses here from all over so, wonderful to see you.

How about a big hand for those folks? (Applause.)

I'd like to talk to you for a few minutes about the Army and how about we see the future strategic environment, and then I'll be happy to take your questions.

As Theresa said, next month our country will have been at war for six years following the September 11th attacks on Washington and New York. And the Army has been a leader in this war and in the liberation of 50 million people from oppression and tyranny. It's also been fully engaged in the difficult processes of consolidating these successes and providing security while developing local government institutions and the capability of other countries to govern and secure themselves.

Over time, these operations have stretched, and as a result stressed our all-volunteer force, but we remain a resilient and committed professional force. Our immediate challenge is to balance the current demands on the all-volunteer force with the need to transform and to build readiness for the future. That's no easy task, and it will require the full support of Congress and the American people.

As I said, I'd like to spend a few minutes talking about how we intend to deal with this challenge and how we see the future strategic environment. Let me do the environment first.

As we look to the future, we view it -- or we try to envision it in a way that will help us shape our armed forces. And as we do that, two things seem clear to me.

First, security experts are almost unanimous that the next decades will be ones of persistent conflict. And I put together a transition team shortly after coming back from Iraq, and I sent them out, and I said, go talk to people that think about the future. Ask them what they think the world is going to look like in 2020. And they did. They went to universities, they went to think tanks, they went around to the intelligence agencies, they went around the government. And they came back and they said, you know, we're surprised at the almost unanimity that the next decades that we face

here will be ones of what they call persistent conflict.

Now, what I do mean by "persistent conflict"? I believe that we -- we're going to face globally here a period of protracted concentration among state, non-state and individual actors who will increasingly use violence as a means of achieving their political and ideological objectives. I also believe that this protracted confrontation will be fueled by six important trends that will act as accelerants to the existing frictions and tensions of the international community and make conflict more likely. Let me just run through those.

The first one, the positive and negative impacts of globalization. You know, the benefits of increased global connectivity and technological advances will have dramatic positive effects on global prosperity; there's no question about that. But they will also be used to export terror around the world, and if left unchecked, the unequal distribution of wealth will likely create have and have not conditions that can attract willing foot soldiers to extremist organizations.

Some analysts predict that -- project that by about 2025 around 2.8 billion people will be living below the poverty level.

Second, the competition for energy. The competition for energy over the next decades will cause a variety of international frictions as we begin a fundamental transition in terms of both the types and the sources of the fuels that we need. Again, analysts are projecting that by about around 2030, largely driven by the burgeoning and growing middle classes in China and India, the demand for oil will outpace the supply. And as they look at it, what they see now is that investments in infrastructure and alternatives is probably not on a pace to bridge that gap.

Third, demographic trends will likely increase opportunities for instability as the populations of some less developed countries almost double in the next 15 to 20 years. This will create a youth bulge that will create a population that's vulnerable to any government and radical ideologies and make the task of governing in some of these less developed countries even more difficult.

Fourth, climate change and natural disasters are likely to compound the already difficult conditions in developing countries and may cause humanitarian crises and regionally destabilizing population movements. The desert is advancing at the rate of about 50(,000) to 70,000 square miles over the course of a year.

Fifth and probably the most troublesome to me is the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and particularly when these weapons of mass destruction are linked to terrorist groups and can be used in catastrophic terrorist attacks. I believe that would be globally destabilizing and undercut the confidence that spurs the economic growth and development of the entire global system. As we look today, we see there's somewhere over 1,200 identified terrorist organizations, and some of them, most notably al Qaeda, are actively out seeking weapons of mass destruction. And I have no doubt that if they get them they'll attempt to use them.

And then, lastly is the trend of failed to failing states that can provide safe havens for global or regional terrorist groups to prepare and export terror, and those states and those ungoverned spaces require vigilant attention from us all.

So when you take these trends and you combine them with hostile regional powers and extremist ideologies, it's fairly understandable why the future is predicting persistent conflict in the years ahead.

Now, the other thing I asked my transition to do is I said, okay, you go out 13 years, go back 13 years to 1994. Tell me what the country was doing then, and they did. Then, they came back and said, well, you know, we were basking in the glow of the great success in Desert Storm and the end of the Cold War. We were scanning the horizons for a peer competitor and not finding one.

We were cashing in on the peace dividend. And oh, by the way, we were reducing the size of the Army from 780,000 down to around 480,000, and the other services were affected as well -- and that in a time where we projected peace. And a lot of the challenges that we have -- or had with the Army prior to September 11th -- or after September 11th were caused by decisions that were made in that period.

My second point is that whatever forces we build for the future must be versatile and they must be led by agile, adaptive leaders. Now, while I risk undermining my own predictions, one thing we know is that we won't get the future exactly right. And so our forces, any forces that we build have to be optimized to deal with uncertainty and with a wide range of operations and engagements.

The Army has a vision to build that force, and we've been executing that vision for the past several years. And it seems clear to me after my initial assessment here as the chief of staff that we need to continue along these lines and transform our current force into a campaign quality expeditionary force that are capable of supporting the needs of our combatant commanders across the spectrum of conflict from peacetime engagement to conventional war.

Now, let me talk about how we deal with the immediate challenge of balancing the current demands on the force with the need to preserve that force and build for an uncertain future. Today's Army is out of balance. We're consumed with meeting the current demands and we're unable to provide ready forces as rapidly as we would like for other contingencies, nor are we able to provide an acceptable tempo of deployments to sustain our soldiers and families for the long haul. This is a temporary state and one we must pass through quickly if we're going to preserve and sustain our all-volunteer force and restore strategic depth.

Soldiers, families, support systems and equipment are stretched and stressed by the demands of repeated deployments and insufficient recovery time. Army support systems -- for example, health care, education systems and family support systems -- were designed for the pre-9/11 peacetime Army and we need to expand those and adapt them to sustain an Army at war.

So over the next several years, I think there's four things that we need to be able to do to put the -- and we will do -- to put the Army back in balance. Those four things are: First of all, we have to continue to prepare our soldiers for success in the current conflict. We have a moral obligation to send our soldiers into combat adequately prepared for what we're asking them to do. Second, we need to reset these forces expeditiously as they return from combat to prepare them for future contingencies. Third, we need to continue to transform to meet the demands of the 21st century. And lastly, we need to sustain our soldiers, families and civilians.

Now, let me just say a few words about each one of those. First of all, we will continue to prepare our forces to succeed in the current conflict. We've made great strides in equipping our soldiers and have continually adapted our training and equipment to keep pace with an evolving enemy. We remain committed to providing our deploying soldiers with the best available equipment to ensure they maintain a technological advantage over any enemy.

I have visited all of our training centers in the last three months and I am pleased with the way that we are replicating the environments that our soldiers and leaders will face. We will continue to provide tough, demanding training to them, to give them the confidence that they need to succeed in these complex environments. Our military success in this difficult war is tied to the capabilities of our leaders and of our soldiers. And we won't fail to prepare them for success.

Second, we will continue to reset our units to prepare them for future deployments and future contingencies. Over the last six years, as units have deployed and redeployed from combat, we've built and consumed readiness daily. In my travels, I've seen the impact of sustained combat on our soldiers, leaders, families and our equipment.

This reset process allows us to return deployed forces to a ready state as quickly as possible. And this resetting process is a constant process that will go on as long as we have forces deployed. But it's the commitment to providing the resources necessary to reset our forces that's absolutely essential to ensuring we continue to commit ready forces to war and are prepared for future contingencies. In addition to fixing and upgrading our equipment and retraining for future missions, we will also work to revitalize our soldiers and families. This is necessary to reverse the cumulative effects of sustained high operational tempo.

Third, we will continue to transform the Army to meet the demands of the 21st century. Transformation requires a holistic effort to adapt how we fight, how we train, how we modernize, develop leaders, station our forces and support our soldiers, families and civilians. Transformation is a journey; it's not a destination.

There are several aspects to this transformation. One, we need to increase the size of the Army; we need to grow. Second, we need to continuously modernize the Army.

Third and fourth, we need to change and adapt organizationally, to change from what are basically Cold War organizations to

organizations that are agile and adaptive for the 21st century, and we need to change our institutions. And our -- as I mentioned, some of -- a lot of our institutions are optimized for how the Army was prior to September 11th. That's changed. I don't see us going back where we were in the near future. We need to adapt these institutions. And as some of you who have been involved in institutional change know, or the change of large organizations, until you change the institutions, you don't really cement change in the organization.

We need to adapt our reserve components. We've changed the paradigm. They're no longer the strategic reserve that is mobilized for, quote, "the big one." We're using them on a recurring basis. We need to level with them and tell them that the paradigm's changed and adapt that.

And then we need to grow, change our education systems and our training systems, to ensure we produce agile, adaptive leaders. Now those are the six things that really underpin our whole transformation effort.

Let me just say a little bit more about two of them, and then please feel free to ask me about any of the others.

As I said, we need to increase the size of the Army to allow us to provide sufficient forces for the full range of future contingencies. As you know, I think, we have an authorization to increase the size of the Army by around 75,000 soldiers over the next five years. We'll do that as fast as we can.

This gross -- growth will allow us to revitalize and balance our force, reduce deployment periods, broaden the capabilities of our units and strengthen the systems that support our forces.

We will also need to continuously upgrade and modernize our forces if we're truly to put our Cold War formations behind us and to provide our soldiers a decisive advantage over every enemy. Army modernization envisions both the rapid fielding of the best new equipment to our forces that are fighting every day and future combat systems. We are ultimately working toward an agile, globally responsive Army empowered by modern networks, surveillance sensors and weapons that are lighter and less manpower-intensive, and employed in modular units that are able to operate effectively, again, across the spectrum of conflict with joint and coalition partners.

Finally, the fourth thing that we need to do -- and remember, prepare, reset, transform -- the last one is sustain. And that's to sustain the Army's soldiers, families and civilians.

Recruiting, training and retaining our soldiers, the centerpiece of the Army, can only be done by transforming quality recruits into soldiers who are physically tough, mentally adaptive and live by the warrior ethos, and also by caring for their families, who are impacted by their commitment and by their service.

These warriors are our ultimate asymmetric advantage, the one thing that cannot be matched by our adversaries now or in the future. These superb soldiers and their families deserve the best support,

stability and compensation.

Moreover, we recognize the strain on the families, and we are acutely aware that families are playing increasingly an important role in maintaining morale and readiness. We will ensure that they are supported through solid, funded programs and supportive communities.

We also have a moral obligation to our wounded warriors and to the spouses and over 5,000 Army children who have lost their soldier since September 11th.

Recent decisions to expand the size and increase the readiness of the Army reflect clear recognition by the president, the Congress and the secretary of Defense of the dangers America faces, the importance of our mission, and the central role that ground forces will play in defending our nation and our interests.

Though these decisions have put us on a path to enhance the depth and breadth of Army capabilities, implementing them will require several years, considerable resources and sustained national commitment. But it's what we need to do to ensure we have the Army to lead us through this era of persistent conflict.

Now, to wrap this up, on the 10th of April I was walking to the podium to assume responsibilities of chief of staff of the Army, and I had one of those knee-wobbling moments as I realized I was getting ready to assume responsibility for an organization that was already the best of the world at what it did, or -- and I was also amazed at my temerity, that I might make it -- try to make it even better.

Your Army is a resilient organization, and while it is unquestionably stressed and stretched, it remains the best in the world. And we are that way because of our values, because of our ethos and because of our people.

And I had the opportunity last Saturday in Baghdad to pin a medal on one of those people. It was Staff Sergeant Kenneth Thomas from the 1st Squadron, 7th Cavalry Regiment in the 1st Cavalry Division. In late February of this year, Sergeant Thomas and his squad were on a patrol. It was a riverboat patrol down the Tigris River. They came under heavy fire from one of the banks. The Iraqi policeman that was with them abandoned his machine gun. Sergeant Thomas jumped on the machine gun and began to engage the enemy as enemy rounds ricocheted off the protective plates around the machine gun. They tried to punch their way through; they couldn't. They went to the other bank, got everybody out of the boat into a depression. They were safe from the rounds but they were pinned down and couldn't move. The squad leader turned around and looked at Sergeant Thomas and said, "Find us a way out of here."

Completely exposing himself, he ran up the bank, only to find that their exit was blocked by a fence. He took out his wire cutters and began cutting the fence, not knowing that the fence was electric. He got a jolt and was thrown back. He got back up and continued to cut the fence while his gloves melted, and he cut the fence until it was open enough for the whole squad to escape.

As the squad was coming through, one of the soldiers was -- got stuck in the fence. Sergeant Thomas went back, knowing he was going to get another jolt, freed the soldier and moved the squad away. He then collected his squad, assaulted a house and cleared the house and put a position on the roof to provide suppressive fire. After two hours of heavy fighting, Sergeant Thomas and his squad was finally evacuated. And for that, I was able to award him the Silver Star. Those are the kind of people and the kind of commitment that are represented in the men and women of your Army; in fact, of all your armed forces.

So thank you very much. It was a pleasure to be here today on a slow news day in Washington, and I look forward to taking your questions. (Applause.)

MS. WERNER: Thank you, General.

With the Army currently under enormous stress, can it continue to meet the demands of it in Iraq and beyond without reinstituting the military draft?

GEN. CASEY: As I mentioned, we're out of balance. The demand for our forces exceeds the sustainable supply. Right now we have in place deployment and mobilization policies that allow us to meet the current demands.

If the demands don't go down over time, it will become increasingly difficult for us to provide the trained and ready forces for those missions that I spoke about.

But right now there is absolutely no consideration, at least within the Army, being given to reinstituting the draft. We're not to that point.

MS. WERNER: Have you decided what to do with the planned increase in size of the Army? Will it mean simply more combat brigades, or other new units with new skill sets?

GEN. CASEY: Thanks. It will be a balance. About 40 to 45 percent of the new -- of the additional troops will be applied to increasing the number of combat brigades that we have. We need to do that, again, so that we increase the number of units that are available to rotate. The rest will be put out across the force in a balanced way to fill the additional skills that we need.

We talk a lot about the brigades. I mean, that's kind of our unit of measure for the Army. But for every one of those brigades, there are thousands of other forces that support them to ensure that they can do the jobs they need to do. And we're applying the bulk of this increase to those other areas to give us -- to give us the balance we need.

MS. WERNER: If Congress passes a law requiring long-term rest periods for soldiers equivalent to tours of duty, would the Army physically be able to continue logistically?

GEN. CASEY: The -- from my position, we prefer not to be limited

or restricted by any kind of congressional action. We need the flex -- I mean, this is hard enough, filling these units to deploy so they deploy with the forces, the troops that they need to get the job done. Any restrictions, any external restrictions that are put on just compound the complexity of the task and make it even harder for us to do that. And so we'd very much prefer not to be hindered by additional restrictions. As I said, it's hard enough as it is.

MS. WERNER: General Cody today announced that the policy of deploying troops for 15-month tours will last until at least next summer. Can you talk about the reasons for this? And are you worried that this will demoralize or further stress the force?

GEN. CASEY: We're -- we're looking very closely at this policy. And let me just go back to the history of this. As we looked out at what we were facing here in 2007 and 2008, we recognized that we needed to increase the tour for soldiers on the ground for three main reasons. One, it gives the commander on the ground additional flexibility. And I've been in the position where I had to extend units before, and it takes a lot of command energy to make the case for why you need to do this.

And what was clear to us is that we were facing -- they were facing a period where they might have to extend a brigade a month for a period of time. And that doesn't work for the soldiers, you know. Private Casey, his unit gets extended, okay, and then Private Keane's (sp) unit is next in line, they know they're next in line, but they don't know if they're going to be extended or not. So it creates a level of uncertainty. So by doing this, we were able to get a level of predictability for our soldiers and families that we probably wouldn't have.

And lastly, probably most importantly, we were getting ready to send soldiers back that would not have had the time to recover and fully prepare for the mission again; and 12 months at home became more important than 12 months on the ground. And that's why we went there.

Now, as to what happens when we come off of that, what I've told the soldiers is that 15 months is temporary. When we come off of that, I don't know. We will come off as quickly as we can. But it will be driven primarily by the demand for our forces in Iraq and Afghanistan.

MS. WERNER: Do you support the idea of actively recruiting foreign nationals abroad and illegal aliens in the U.S. and offering them citizenship for service?

GEN. CASEY: There's a policy issue with that, and I certainly support the policy. But it is -- I have been in Iraq where we have had ceremonies where hundreds of soldiers who enlisted in the American family and achieved their citizenship while they were part of the American Army were actually sworn-in as citizens. And I must tell you that it's a hugely moving ceremony, and to see the commitment of these young men and women who are originally from other countries to the United States is heartening. So I certainly would like to continue that policy.

MS. WERNER: Going back to the previous question on extending troops for 15-month deployments, how likely is it that you will have to extend soldiers beyond the 15 months next spring?

GEN. CASEY: What I've said about the 15-month program, again, it's temporary. I don't know when we're going to come off. I don't see going beyond the 15 months. I've been there in Iraq. I've watched the nature of the combat and the stresses and strains that it puts on these soldiers. I've watched soldiers go through a 90-day extension. It's hard, but frankly, 90 days in Iraq goes like that. (Snaps his fingers.) Anymore than that it puts our soldiers at a level of stress and a level of risk that right now I'm not comfortable with. So I would be very -- it would be hard for me to recommend going beyond that, that 15-month period, and as I said, we want to get down from 15 months as quickly as we can.

MS. WERNER: How long can the Pentagon sustain the surge in Iraq without breaking the Army?

GEN. CASEY: The Army -- as I said, the Army is a very resilient organization. The surge was and remains a temporary function, and right now I think we're on record here as saying the surge can be sustained through the spring without changes to the existing mobilization and deployment policy. And that's where we are, and we're going to wait and see here what happens, what the commanders on the ground recommend here in the coming months.

MS. WERNER: You said the Army is out of balance. What specific criteria must be met to make the Army in balance?

GEN. CASEY: The things that we need to do is we need to continue our transition to these modular organizations. Now we're undergoing the largest organizational change since World War II as we're building -- we're changing from our, really, Cold War organizations into organizations that are much more relevant to the environment that we'll be operating here in the 21st century.

We need to complete that transition and then we need to continue to fill those organizations with the appropriate numbers of people and with the appropriate skills, particularly for their non-commissioned officer and officer leaders.

Second, we need to fully equip all of our units. And there's a lot of equipment right now that is in Iraq or in the depots that's not available to our units. All of our units need to be fully equipped.

The third element of getting back in balance is training -- finding the opportunity to train our soldiers for, as I said, operations across the spectrum of conflict. Right now, we are focused -- our training programs are focused primarily on counterinsurgency training, because that's what we're doing. And because of the short deployment times, that's all we have time to do. And we need to get back for -- to full-spectrum training, training for a conventional war as well as counterinsurgency, as quickly as we can.

So those -- and lastly we need to adjust our deployment and our dwell policies so that we get back to the ratio that we feel is

sustainable, which is one year deployed, three years back for the active forces and one year deployed, five years back for the reserve component forces. And it's going to take us a while to do that, but those are the main components that we need to rectify to get back in balance.

MS. WERNER: Is the U.S. media telling the whole story about the Iraq War?

GEN. CASEY: (Laughter.) I had Bob Woodward out to speak to my -- a group of the newly selected generals, and somebody asked him that question. And he said, what do you think, General Casey? (Laughter.) So I don't have anybody to point to here.

Here's what I said then, and I think it's the way I feel about it. I believe the media does the best they can to cover what is a very broad and slowly unfolding operation. And it's very -- you know the old story about the elephant, the three blind men and the elephant? Somebody's holding the tail; somebody's holding the trunk. And somebody's holding the leg, and they all think it's different. I mean, it's so big, it's hard to cover.

Now we always get the complaint that they're not telling the positive side. Unfortunately a lot of the positive things that happen there in Iraq and Afghanistan don't reach the level of international significance. I mean, it's the slow improvements in the villages and in the security forces. They just happen day after day. It's very difficult to get your arms around those.

What I think is probably the most debilitating for me is the images and the images of violence and car bombs that get on the, you know, 24-hour news shows that play 10 or 12 times an hour. And you can't help it, when you're bombarded by that, thinking, this is all messed up; this is terrible. And so it creates an impression that is not necessarily what, you know, what's going on.

Yeah, there is violence, but there's also progress, and it's a very difficult story to tell. And I -- because I'm here in the Press Club, you know, like any organization, there are a huge number of dedicated young and old journalists that are out there risking their lives every day to tell the story and to tell it right. I think the media community ought to be proud of that, but it's a tough story to tell.

MS. WERNER: What is the most under-reported story about the Iraq War?

GEN. CASEY: The successes -- as I said, there's progress. For the time I was there, there was progress in Iraq every day.

And I was back there over the weekend, and there continues to be progress. I mean, the surge is having the intended military effect. Our guys are seeing progress on the security front.

What remains to be seen is whether the Iraqis can take advantage of the opportunity and create the political accommodation that it's going to take to succeed. Now, we -- people have said time and time

again, there's no military solution to this. You know, we're providing an opportunity for political accommodation, and the Iraqis need to take advantage of that.

MS. WERNER: Do you think the politicians in the U.S. are moving the goalposts for success in Iraq?

GEN. CASEY: No. No, I don't think so. I mean, that's kind of a broad question. I mean, "politicians" is -- you know, is pretty broad. You know, we have had as an objective to build an Iraq that can secure, sustain and govern itself. That's been the objective since -- you know, since right after I got there, and we're continuing to work toward that objective. So I don't know that people are trying to move off of that right now. It's hard enough just to get there. Probably not a good answer, but it's a pretty broad question.

MS. WERNER: We are hearing somewhat optimistic reports on security in Iraq. Can you give us some specific numbers or trends that you saw or heard from commanders there last week?

GEN. CASEY: Specific numbers, no. But I visited each of the three Army divisions, one south of Baghdad, one in Baghdad and one in the northern area.

In the northern area, the commander told me that he believes that the Nineveh province, where the Mosul, the second city of Iraq is based, is about ready to move under Iraqi control, and that would be the first Sunni province that would take that step. There are seven of the 18 provinces that are already under Iraqi control. That would be a significant step. And he says he's getting more and more comfortable, and the security forces in that province are ready to move forward. He is also having progress in the province of Diyala, which is just north of Baghdad, and they are re-establishing control over that area. So pretty good progress up in the northern area.

In Baghdad, the commander told me that they thought that they had cleared about 50 percent of the city, and they were continuing to work toward clearing the rest of it. And I think you'll probably remember that this is a very -- the Baghdad operation is very much a joint Iraqi and coalition operations with Iraqi security forces and coalition forces working together to secure these districts. And so he's got work to do. He recognizes that, but he sees Baghdad moving in a positive direction.

And then south of Baghdad, the third division, they felt they were having a very good effect by going into some areas where we had not been in for a while and rooting out terrorist organizations. So by and large, they're all being very careful not to overstate what they're seeing.

I mean, there's still an awful lot of work to be done in Iraq. But clearly the additional forces there are having a positive impact on the security situation.

MS. WERNER: How do you stay prepared for both the guerrilla and anti-terrorist war and a possible war against a major industrialized power?

GEN. CASEY: Yeah, that's a great question, and I talked about that a little bit in my remarks. You know, as I said, right now, because of the time that our units spend at home, we're only able to focus on the counterinsurgency aspects of this in unit training. We're still educating for full-spectrum operations. So in other words, when our majors go to school, our lieutenant colonels go to school, they're being educated on the full gamut.

The other thing I'll tell you is, the operations in Iraq and Afghanistan are war, and our units are operating and fighting 24 hours a day. And so there are certainly transferable skills from counterinsurgency operations to the major conventional operations.

We think we needed to have units home for about 18 months before we can do both, both the conventional training and the counterinsurgency training. So it's a combination of education, operations and time spent at home station that will allow us to maintain our conventional skills.

MS. WERNER: What do you think the most dramatic shift in terrorist tactics will be over the next 10 years?

GEN. CASEY: As I said in my remarks, the thing that concerns me the most is a terrorist organization employing a weapon of mass destruction against, you know, a major city, either in the United States or abroad. That probably is the thing I stay up nights and I worry about. So that's the major trend that I think I'd watch out for.

MS. WERNER: There has been much talk in the presidential campaign about whether candidates would engage leaders in countries such as North Korea and Iran. What would you advise?

GEN. CASEY: I'd call the State Department. (Laughter.)

(Chuckles.) That's a political question. I'll pass on that.
(Chuckles.)

(Laughter.)

MS. WERNER: Is persistent conflict inevitable --

GEN. CASEY: I used to tell the prime ministers of Iraq that I worked with, "Don't take military advice from politicians or take political advice from generals." (Laughter.) And so I'll stick to my own device (sic).

MS. WERNER: Is persistent conflict inevitable, or could political developments avoid it?

GEN. CASEY: Yeah, that's a great question. I mean, certainly the seeds of that persistent conflict are there. But there are -- there's a lot of positive things going on there. I mentioned the pros and cons of globalization. I mean, there's -- certainly there's progress. I think the expansion of the Internet, so that people all over the world can collaborate and share information -- I think it's

having a hugely broadening experience on educating all societies.

So there are a lot of positive trends, but right now, given the presence of these international terrorist organizations that are bent on destroying our way of life, it's hard for me to believe that we're really not in for, again, as I said, some decades of conflict and confrontation.

MS. WERNER: If Congress were to impose the beginning of troop withdrawals from Iraq, do you have completed plans to carry out that withdrawal safely? And long would it take?

GEN. CASEY: That's a real hypothetical. I don't want to necessarily go down that road. You know, we have in the past already closed bases and redeployed soldiers. The units over there know how to do that. And we plan all the time, I mean that's what we do, and we are constantly figuring out how fast it would take to do X or how fast it would take to do Y. And so we'll be prepared to do what we need to do, and I'll leave it at that.

MS. WERNER: What are your main concerns with the changes the House made to the administration's budget request for the Army for physical (sic/fiscal) 2008? What will be the impact of those changes for the Army if enacted?

GEN. CASEY: The House changes to the -- frankly, we're in pretty good shape with respect to the '08 budget on -- with what the House has done. The major concerns for me are primarily to the cuts that they've made in our future combat systems. It is the first significant Army modernization program in 40 years. I talked about it in my remarks. It is generating technological advances that we are putting into the forces that are fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan every day, and it is driving our technological development. And it will give us really the 21st century force that we need. I mean, you can only take these Cold War systems like the M1 tank and the Bradley fighting vehicle and put so much new technology on them. Ultimately, it doesn't work out.

So they've put some cuts against that. The level of cuts that the Armed Services Committee has put on it would be debilitating to the program. The Appropriations Committee has put a lower mark on it, but we have great support on the Senate side. That's probably my major, major concern.

There are also some marks against our reconnaissance helicopter. There was some concerns about the contractor's ability to follow through on it. We believe those have been rectified, and we think that will come out all right. But by and large, we've been well supported by the House in the '08 budget and in the supplementals. I mean, there's great support on the Hill and in Congress for the Army.

Thanks.

MS. WERNER: What are the roles of air and space capabilities in the Army, and do you plan to spend more or less on them?

GEN. CASEY: First of all, space is becoming increasingly

important to us as we network our formations together and put information capabilities down to the lowest level to empower our soldiers. You know, if you think of those Verizon commercials, where the guy goes out in the middle of nowhere and he's got his network behind him, that's what we're building for our soldiers. And to do that, the platforms in space are a big part of that.

On aviation, aviation modernization is one of the elements of our modernization program.

I think some of you will remember that we had a very modern, forward-looking helicopter called a Comanche that we canceled a few years ago because it basically was going to cost too much money and really wind up giving us less of an Army-wide aviation capability than we would have had with it. And so we continue to upgrade and modernize our aviation.

Our aviation assets are making a huge contribution in Iraq and Afghanistan. In fact, both places I went, they said, "We need more helicopters." I said, "I don't know if we can do that." So space and aviation are integral parts of the Army's future.

MS. WERNER: A recent study found higher rates of child abuse in families where a parent is deployed. Is this a problem that can and should be addressed at the top level of the Army?

GEN. CASEY: It's a problem that needs to be addressed at every level of the Army. And as Sheila and I -- my wife, Sheila -- and I have been traveling around the Army in these first hundred days or so, we have talked to family members every place we've gone. And there is -- as I said in my remarks, there is no question that the repeated deployments are having -- are wearing on the families and the children. And there's a cumulative effect to that. A young spouse stood up at Fort Bragg and said, "You know, General, it's not the same running a family readiness group for the third deployment as it is for the first." And that's what we're seeing.

We are redoubling our efforts within the Army to enhance what we're doing for families. We just funded family readiness group assistance, paid assistance to every battalion in the Army. And we put another \$100 million toward family programs just for the rest of this year. And there's about \$5 billion in our five-year program for family programs.

But there's an awful lot we could do. When you talk to the spouses, they tell you, "Look, General, we don't necessarily need a bunch of fancy new programs. Fund what you got and standardize them across the installations." And that's what we're doing. But it's something that we are taking very, very seriously because again, as I said in my remarks, families are so important to that soldier's decision to remain with the all-volunteer force. And we are asking more of our families and we need to elevate our game yet -- even more to meet those requirements.

MS. WERNER: What can civilian citizens do to support the troops and feel more a part of the war effort?

GEN. CASEY: Say thank you. And I must say I see it every time I'm out in civilian clothes, walking around an airport or something, and I see people walking up to soldiers just saying, "Thanks for what you do." I'll tell you a story. I was on vacation. I was in Arizona. And I was in civilian clothes. And these two soldiers, who were clearly recruits -- you know, brand new -- they came in and sat down at the table next to me and we kind of chatted. And people stopped -- I mean there must have been five or six people that stopped and said thank you. And then they went to pay their check and they said, "The lady over there paid your check."

So I got up to leave, and the soldier stood up and said, "Excuse me. Are you General Casey?" And I said, "Well, yes, I am." He said, "I thought you were taller." (Laughter.) So just say thank you. (Laughter.)

MS. WERNER: What are the prospects in Iraq, and how will this war end?

GEN. CASEY: Look, I have always felt that success in Iraq was achievable. It will take patience and it will take will.

And the terrorists are out to undermine our will, our national will to prosecute this. But as complex and as difficult and as confusing as you may find Iraq, it is -- we can succeed there, and we will succeed there if we demonstrate patience and will.

You know, we forget sometimes that the Iraqis lived under Saddam Hussein for three and a half decades. They're not going back there. And I've watched them several times during the course of my tenure there -- when they want something to happen, like in the first elections and the second elections, it happens. And right now there's just so much residual mistrust left over from the time under Saddam Hussein that they're not quite ready to go forward. But they have an educated population, they have oil wealth, they have water, they have some of the most fertile land that I've ever seen. In a decade or so, this will be a remarkable country if we stick with it. It's imminently doable.

Thanks.

MS. WERNER: We are almost out of time. But before asking the last question, we have a couple of important matters to take care of.

First, I want to remind our members of future speakers: September 7th, William Brody, president of Johns Hopkins University; September 19th, Ken Burns, documentary filmmaker; September 21st, Cristian Samper, acting secretary of the Smithsonian; and on September the 8th is the National Press Club's 10th Annual 5K Run, Walk and Auction, so for more information and to register, check out the website at press.org.

Second, I'd like to present our guest with our typical gifts, the NPC certificate and coffee mug. (Soft laughter.)

GEN. CASEY: Thank you. Thank you very much.

MS. WERNER: And our last question: Why is the Army giving up that fine green uniform to wear and for what? (Laughter.)

GEN. CASEY: For a beautiful blue uniform, which has been the traditional color of the Army, all the way back to the Revolutionary War. And we're still working on that. Okay? Great question. Thank you very much, Theresa.

MS. WERNER: Thank you. (Applause.)

I would like to thank all of you for coming today. I'd also like to thank the National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booze, Howard Rothman for organizing today's lunch. Also thanks to the NPC Library for its research. The video archive of today's luncheon is provided by the National Press Club Broadcast Operations Center. Press Club members also can access free transcripts of our luncheons at our website, www.press.org. Nonmembers may purchase transcripts, audio and videotapes by calling 1-888-343-1940. For more information about joining the Press Club, contact us at (202) 662-7511.

Thank you, and we're adjourned. (Sounds gavel.) (Applause.)

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