

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH LIEUTENANT GENERAL MICHAEL OATES, DIRECTOR, JOINT IMPROVISED EXPLOSIVE DEATH DEFEAT ORGANIZATION (JIEDDO) SUBJECT: JIEDDO'S CURRENT EFFORTS TO RAPIDLY PROVIDE COMPREHENSIVE COUNTER-IED SUPPORT TO DEPLOYED WARFIGHTERS AND ITS DIRECT SUPPORT OF THE SURGE IN AFGHANISTAN TIME: 1:00 P.M. EST DATE: FRIDAY, MARCH 12, 2010

Copyright (c) 2010 by Federal News Service, Inc., Ste. 500 1000 Vermont Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20005, USA. Federal News Service is a private firm not affiliated with the federal government. No portion of this transcript may be copied, sold or retransmitted without the written authority of Federal News Service, Inc. Copyright is not claimed as to any part of the original work prepared by a United States government officer or employee as a part of that person's official duties. For information on subscribing to the FNS Internet Service, please visit <http://www.fednews.com> or call (202) 347-1400

LT. CRAGG: Without further ado, I'd like to welcome you all to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Thursday, March 12 -- I'm sorry -- for Friday -- excuse me -- March 12, 2010. Someone just joined us.

Please, can I get your name?

Q Yes. It's Sebastian Sprenger with InsideDefense.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, Sebastian. You're number 12. You're right after Greg.

A note to the bloggers and online journalists on the call. Please remember to clearly state your name and organization you're with prior to asking your question. If you have to place your phone on hold, please exit the roundtable, call back, or we'll hear your hold music. And also, if possible, please place your phone on mute to respect everyone else's time and listening as well.

Today our guest is Lieutenant General Michael Oates. He's the director of Joint Improvised Explosive Device Defeat Organization. Without further ado, I'm going to turn it over to Lieutenant General Oates. And we can start with an opening statement, and then we'll go to questions.

Sir, the floor is yours.

GEN. OATES: Thanks very much, Jennifer. And good afternoon, everybody. I guess I have a very short opening because I would like to give you plenty of time for questions. But I would like you -- for those of you that I have not yet met or worked with before, a little bit of short background on me. I've just given up command of the 10th Mountain Division after returning from Iraq, and assumed duties here as the new JIEDDO director on 30 December, so about two months into this gig at this

point. And I've had a chance now to assess the organization, and then see what our current demands are from overseas and fashion a way ahead.

So with a lot of things going on right now in JIEDDO, probably our major focus area is support for the Afghan surge. My experience through multiple tours in Iraq is pretty solid. Afghanistan, I've only been there to visit, but I'm pretty up to speed on what the current threat is there. So I'm very interested in taking your questions in the area of the threat or our technology or (inning ?) or our organization in particular.

And so to provide you the maximum amount of time, I think I'll probably quit talking, and see what's on your mind. So please go ahead.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Spencer was on the call first.

Spencer, please go ahead.

Q Hi. Thank you so much for doing this call. This is a rare and very special opportunity. So thank you so much. I wanted to just get a sense from you about how you perceive the difference in the IED threat in Afghanistan right now as opposed to what JIEDDO has focused on in Iraq in the past and, you know, in cases in Afghanistan in the past.

What's changed? What's changed the most rapidly? And where do you find -- if you have a resource deficit to confront, where you would put those resources?

GEN. OATES: Okay. That's a great question, Spencer. The current situation in Iraq -- of course, you know, the volume and the effectiveness of IEDs have dropped significantly in the last year. So the first thing is the Iraq that many of you remember from a couple of years ago has very much changed.

The type of IED and the volume of IED in Iraq from the really bad days of '06, '07, early '08 is very different than what we see in Afghanistan. Specifically, in Iraq we saw proliferation of military-grade explosives and projectiles as the primary explosive and a varying degree of sophisticated detonation capability, some of which was supplied by third countries.

In Afghanistan, the threat is expanding. That is, it's almost doubled the number in volume of IEDs in the last year. The number of casualties has reflected that this last year. The quality and type of IED is very different in Afghanistan: largely homemade explosive centered around two dominant types of fertilizer, potassium chlorate and ammonium nitrate and a very rudimentary detonation capability, the majority of which is what we called victim-operated -- that is pressure plate or trip wire -- followed by some command wire-detonated and, a third, remote control.

So, to summarize, the difference of IEDs between Iraq and Afghanistan -- declining in Iraq, significantly increasing in

Afghanistan. Degree of sophistication in Iraq high, degree of sophistication in Afghanistan low. Effectiveness good in both. That is we still see EFPs in Iraq, which are effective. And the fertilizer bombs because of the unimproved roads present a unique challenge for detection.

(Audio break) -- don't currently have any resource shortfalls to address this threat, but we are struggling to get additional ISR capability into Afghanistan to meet this emerging threat. And we still have a technological challenge (section ?), low-metallic or non-metallic IEDs like these fertilizer bombs.

And I'll pause for a follow-up on that.

Q Yeah, if I can then ask, what's the problem with the ISR capability not getting in there?

What have you identified, where the kind of bottlenecks lie? And what would be the kind of technical challenge, in terms of stressing? What could be overcome about that, from kind of the fertilizer-based materials?

GEN. OATES: The use of persistent ISR of course is that you can keep an eye on these roads, so that where the enemy enjoys some advantage, being able to plant these in unimproved dirt roads, persistent surveillance on those roads mitigates that advantage. Getting these persistent surveillance capabilities into Afghanistan is a transportation challenge.

We have significantly increased our persistent surveillance in Afghanistan over the last 90 days. But we have a great deal more that we're pushing in the theater. And it just competes with all the other tonnage and personnel requirements that have to be moved into Afghanistan to support the surge.

So to some extent, it's just a physics problem of how much you can actually transport into Afghanistan. I'm sure most of you are aware, Afghanistan's infrastructure is significantly less sophisticated than Iraq. And the ports of entry and lines of communication are significantly less than we have in Iraq, so quite a bit of a transportation challenge there.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Spencer.

Paul, please go ahead.

Q Hi, General. Paul McLeary from DTI. Thanks for talking to us today.

You mentioned third-country influence in Iraq. I was just curious if you've seen that in Afghanistan, you know, as far as the materials being used, the bombs going off, things like that. And also how do you defeat these different threats, you know, through technology,

you know, on-ground combat vehicles with underplating or jammers and things like that?

GEN. OATES: On third-country support, you know, the predominant support in Iraq, as you know, has been the Iranian regime in supporting radical Shi'a organizations, with sophisticated detonation and explosive capability, over the last years.

In Afghanistan, what we're seeing more is less credible evidence about Iranian support. Although that's still possible, we don't see a lot of evidence of it.

We do see evidence of support out of Pakistan. And so there's been a concerted effort to working with the Pakistani government, to shut down the trans-shipment of precursors and specifically with these ammonium nitrate-based fertilizers.

With regards to mitigating the threat, there's been significant work done to get MRAPS and the new MRAP-ATV to Afghanistan. These holes are more survivable than the humvees are against underbelly strikes, which is the predominant attack modality in Afghanistan.

Additionally we've provided a great number of rollers that we've put to the front of the vehicles. And that has -- of course finding good effect as well, because the number-one detonation capability is victim-operated or pressure plate.

And I'll pause for you to follow up on that, Paul.

Q No, sir. I'm going to let other people get a chance. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Paul.

Sandra, please go ahead.

Q Thank you, General. This is Sandra Erwin with National Defense.

I wanted to follow up on comments that you made at the AUSA show a couple of weeks ago. You mentioned that you're open, you're welcome to anybody's ideas, anyone who has a good idea about how to defeat IEDs. It just sounds like you really have not had the good ideas coming in so far, and JIEDDO has been around for several years.

Why do you think that's the case? I mean, there are so many high-tech companies out there. There are so many inventors, so many universities and academia everywhere, researching these things.

Why do you think that those good ideas haven't gotten to you yet? GEN. OATES: Well, first of all, Sandra, I'm not saying that we haven't gotten good ideas. We've had some great ideas.

The point I was trying to make is, I think we need to expand our outreach, because there are still small companies and individuals and persons in academia who have not wrestled with this problem. And we would like to get more -- you know, the intelligence of the crowd involved on this problem set.

So my comments there were more intended to inspire people to get a hold of us. It's also a challenge to our own organization, to open up our outreach even wider.

So what I'm describing is trying to improve our outreach, not that we haven't had any.

We have enjoyed tremendous support from industry and academia. But we have not yet hit a knee in the curve, in terms of detection. And so I'm trying to inspire people to look for some new ways. That was really my intent.

Q To follow up, your predecessor, General Metz, said in his farewell speech that one of the challenges he was turning over to you was contracting. And I just wanted to maybe have you expand on what specifically he was talking about.

I mean, are you saying that JIEDDO has to do a better job working with contractors or their contracting methods are not very effective?

GEN. OATES: General Metz's specific comments were that he was looking for an in-house contracting capability, because he felt like the current contracting regime was not as effective or speedy as he would like.

Now, I just asked for an outside organization to come in and conduct a review of our contract operations. And I've received their report. And we are in the process now of determining a couple of good work-aheads to address this problem.

JIEDDO is about speed in many cases, trying to meet urgent requirements. And so speed is a key component. Speed in contracting generally is inhibited by law and policy and trying to do due diligence, so we don't waste the nation's resources.

So that's always intentioned. And what we're seeking is more effective and more speedy contracting. And I think we have a good way ahead which, once I decide which option we're going to use here, I'll be happy to report back to all of you.

Q This outside organization, is that a private sector or a government/DOD organization?

GEN. OATES: No. I reached out to existing government personnel who have great resumes and are very objective about this, with regards to

JIEDDO. That is, they've not been involved in our contracting. And they gave us some really great advice. Q Thank you, General.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Sandra.

Sharon, please go ahead.

Q Hi, General. This is Sharon Weinberger with AOL News.

There's been a sizable investment in change-detection technology. And I'm just wondering how that's panned out for you in Afghanistan. And more generally could you address which technologies have been successful in Afghanistan? Obviously jammers not so much. What has worked?

GEN. OATES: I've seen the full range of change-detection technology, since about 2005 in Iraq, and am very familiar with it. I will report to you that there are several different ways this is used. We look at physical disruption to the ground. And we look at things that have altered physically in the environment. Most of these have been attempted from an airborne platform.

And we've had mixed reviews early on, but the technology is getting better. And I believe that the change-detection technology that we're going to insert, in Afghanistan, will pay us some dividends. There's, you know, always a search to try and find the one method that's going to help us find all these IEDs. And what I've discovered over the years is that there is no one separate solution.

But if you add a good new technology like change detection, to good offensive operations and an attack of the network that's operating in your area, it can be a force multiplier. And I expect this technology to continue to mature. And it is currently being used both in Iraq and Afghanistan. And that can only get better.

Q One quick follow-on.

You said that there's one change-detection technology that's about to be inserted into Afghanistan. Which sensor are you referring to or which technology specifically?

GEN. OATES: I'd rather not disclose that at this point, given that I'm trying to keep the enemy worrying about that.

Q Okay.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Sharon.

Jeff. Q Good afternoon, General.

I'm curious. This new IED task force for Afghanistan. Where does it stop and JIEDDO begin?

GEN. OATES: That's a great question. I get asked that a lot. The -- as you referred to it, the IED task force; we call it the integration group. And what Secretary Gates did was asked Secretary Carter to lead a six-month, high-energy effort to synchronize three different task forces -- the MRAP task force, the ISR task force and JIEDDO -- focused on the Afghanistan surge.

So I get asked a lot about whether this task force has supplanted JIEDDO, and that's not the case.

Secretary Carter is leading all of us, all three of our task forces, focused in a short-term effort to try and get as much capability synchronized and into Afghanistan as possible, and I am a full partner within that consortium. So we're working well together.

Q And what results has this task force produced so far?

GEN. OATES: The first thing was to synthesize all the urgent needs that were required from the Central Command and from Afghanistan. We've got all those aboard now, at least on most of them. We have already processed those requirements, and the -- and the first group of requirements has already been obligated.

I am spending out most of my budget that's remaining to meet these surge requirements, and that capability is already moving into theater. It will flow in over about the next three to four months, and some will be longer term, because there are block increments associated with some of these technologies to meet some of the (commander's/commanders' ?) requirements over there.

Q What --

GEN. OATES: The most important up-front technology that's addressed in this -- by this CSIG (ph), or integrating group, is this persistent surveillance technology that I spoke to a little earlier.

Q Are you talking about Task Force ODIN-Afghanistan?

GEN. OATES: Well, Task Force ODIN's already in Afghanistan. It was not really a part of this, but Liberty is, and Liberty is a U.S. Air Force surveillance capability which is building. It's in Afghanistan and building. That capability will increase.

But the other persistent surveillance capability is tethered-and-mounted capabilities that you're probably familiar with from Iraq, and these will allow us to gain near persistence there on the most vulnerable parts of the roadways in Afghanistan.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Jeff.

Elizabeth (sp), please go ahead. Q Sir, I'd like to ask -- Elizabeth Swanson (sp) from -- (inaudible). I'd like to ask your opinion about weapons-technical intelligence as a tool to attack the network. Do you feel that it's an effective enabler for force protection, targeting - sourcing and prosecution?

GEN. OATES: I absolutely do, but I will tell you that we're not optimizing it. It's one of my concerns, is that in the area of forensics, biometrics and weapons technical intelligence that we really need to take a fresh look at the synergy of those three disciplines so that we can focus our energies against the network.

I saw this play out in Iraq where we went from an intelligence-based process -- targeting, that is -- to a warrant-based or evidence-based targeting process. Eventually, we're going to get there in Afghanistan as the Afghan security forces develop a rule of law and a judicial system that can support that. So looking ahead, the WTI, biometrics and the forensic capability allow us to target a network more effectively. And we have got to do better there. We're not anywhere near where we need to be.

Q Okay. Thank you very much.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Elizabeth (sp).

Nathan, please go ahead.

Q Hi, General. It's Nathan Hodge with Wired's Danger Room blog. Also on the network side, I'd like to know if you could bring us up to speed on JIEDDO's investment in social science research and trying to better understand the social context of the social networks that sustain or support IED-making cells.

GEN. OATES: Thanks, Nathan. That's a -- that's a very good question and also an emerging technology that we think has great promise. As we look at the networks that use IEDs, first thing we have to do is understand them before we can provide any assistance in attacking or targeting them. And it's the understanding piece where the social science tools are really helpful. We have an organization within JIEDDO that innovates new social science analytical tools. Some have not panned out, but some are showing great promise.

I'll give you one specific example. We had a bright young person looking at some new databases; was able to achieve a much higher degree of competence about the physical location of the different tribes in Iraq. And why that's helpful is, if you add that to the other areas of information that a maneuver commander has in his battle space, knowing which different tribes are physically in his battle space with some high degree of confidence allows him then to begin to understand who the power players are in his area.

Now, fighting IEDs is a very local challenge; knowing who all the players are is very integral to that. And I'm very optimistic that

we're going to get great return on investment on the social science tools, analytical tools that we continue to develop.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Nathan.

Adam, please go ahead.

Q Hi, General. It's Adam Higginbotham from Wired Magazine.

Can you just tell me how IED networks in Afghanistan differ from those in Iraq?

GEN. OATES: There is some similarities, but I'll try and highlight the differences. The actual networks in Iraq were largely financed by al Qaeda or Sunni rejectionists who received other financing. The emplacements of the IEDs in Iraq were largely disaffected, disenchanted, unemployed Sunni males. Now, what we have -- and, of course, Shi'a militia groups in the south, obviously, account for a number of the EFPs in the south.

In Afghanistan, though, the Taliban is very much in control locally, and they have almost a military-style organizational structure, and their fighters are the ones that do the emplacement. And so there is a chain of command, if you will, within the Taliban, and they seek to use the IED's (higher ?) mobility and prevent us from interacting with the population to preserve their own criminal enterprise and certainly to harm or kill our soldiers.

So there are some similarities, but the actual command-and-control structure in emplacement of the IEDs is slightly different.

Q So it's not a cell structure?

GEN. OATES: You could use the term "cell." It looks a whole lot more like a very normal organization built along tribal lines or affiliated organization.

So there is a rudimentary command-and-control structure within the Taliban. So these things -- these IEDs do not find themselves on the roadway by serendipity. There's a direction for where they should be emplaced, and the order is given and they're emplaced. Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Adam.

Gina, please go ahead.

Q Hi, thank you. This is Gina Rosenthal (sp) from Tofler (ph) Associates.

Staying on this subject of the human network, I understand that JIEDDO is making a lot of progress in this area, but what do you think are still the biggest challenges or capability gaps that are still ahead?

GEN. OATES: The biggest challenges with the social networking piece is the cultural understanding. As we look at the networks -- and a lot of them are obviously local -- just understanding the dynamics that the language presents from Pashtu to Dari to Arabic and all the dialects in Arabic is a challenge in itself. And then when you start to look at the familial relationships and the tribal relationships, they are very, very foreign to most of us Westerners. The level of sophistication that you have to get to to understand actually how the network operates and who controls what in the society is -- we have a long way to go. Some of the analytical tools we have can be helpful, but fundamentally our challenge with social networking in Afghanistan and Iraq is still driven by significant cultural ignorance.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Gina.

Phyllis, please go ahead.

Q Hi, I'm Phyllis Zimblar Miller from the blog MrsLieutenant.blogspot.com. And what I want to know -- because I want to write about it -- is how people can contact you or whoever, and what is it that you're looking for. If you were going to write a little, you know, announcement, what would you say?

GEN. OATES: We have an open-source website and it is interactive, so we take questions on it. Within that website, we have several other mediums -- blog and obviously the phone, and there are lots of ways to get a hold of us.

So we are actively seeking people's ideas on the full range of whether it's training or the -- detecting the device itself, defeating it, or attacking the network. Try and stay away from the things that are clearly not germane to the IED business. We really don't have the time or manpower to deal with, you know, things that are not related, like tour lengths and the stress on the force. So we're focused very tightly on the IED as a weapons system and its impact strategically. So we'll -- I'm not sure if we can just -- we can pass that website over the -- and there's a bids process that we go through as well for people that are interested in approaching us with a proposal.

But stand by; we'll give you a website address.

COL. GRADY (sp): Hi. This is Colonel Grady (sp). Our website is www.jieddo.mil, and then you'll see the direct link to our bids process on that page, as well as a direct link to what we call Ask JIEDDO. And those questions are fielded and responded to almost immediately.

Q Okay. So that would be the best source for this, right? In other words, there's no one URL that goes directly and I would be an announcement of exactly what you're looking for and then links off from there.

COL. GRADY (sp): If you go to that bids page and you e-mail in through that bids link, you will be e-mailing directly to our bid team, and they have -- that's what they're there for, is to get back to you.

Q Okay. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, ma'am. Thank you, Phyllis.

Greg, you're next. Please go ahead.

Q Hi, General. Greg Grant from Defense Tech. Task Force ODIN was reportedly very successful over in Iraq, targeting bomb emplacements, and I'm just curious how successful it's proven in Afghanistan. And I'd be interested to hear whether General Stanley McChrystal's directive restricting air and artillery strikes has affected its performance there.

GEN. OATES: ODIN was very successful in northern Iraq, where it was principally located and is still located today. ODIN-Afghanistan is picking up right where ODIN-Iraq left off in providing near real-time surveillance and reconnaissance for the ground commander.

The difference right now is that we have significantly augmented that capability with this new Air Force asset called Liberty.

Afghanistan -- significantly larger than Iraq. A lot of unimproved roads. We require a lot more airborne capability, like ODIN. So that's why Liberty's being pushed in there so quickly. I really don't observe any challenges with General McChrystal's rules of engagement, with the use of ODIN or Liberty, because those two assets are tied to a ground force that's surveilling an area. And so where we can detect a hostile act or a hostile intent, the commander's still cleared to act in his own defense and always will be.

I think that the only ambiguity is when you can't clearly identify that what the person is doing is in fact hostile. And under those circumstances, you know, we choose now not to run the risk of more collateral civilian casualties. And so there's always been a requirement for positive identification. And with the new technology, that's a lot easier from the air than it used to be. But it's much better when it's done in concert with a ground force.

I don't really see any issues on that at all.

Q Could you say where in the country ODIN has been -- is or has been -- these new task forces -- where are they? Are they going down south, for example, or where they're being used most?

GEN. OATES: Yeah, ODIN currently operates in all parts of the country. Where it's exactly hangared, I'd rather not say in public. But I can tell you that the assets have been used throughout the country.

Q And General, one last question. The -- a number of officials have noticed or have noted that the Haqqani Network is probably the most lethal of the groups that the military's fighting over in Afghanistan. Could you talk specifically about their use of IEDs and how they may differ from some of the other insurgent groups?

GEN. OATES: Yeah. I've heard the same assessment about Haqqani, and they certainly are living up to their reputation. Their signature bomb is a potassium chlorate-based homemade explosive. And they are very active in RC East and to some extent to pushing down into RC South, but not as much as yet.

I believe Haqqani is clearly bent on seeking hegemony in Afghanistan, being the senior Taliban control, if you will. And he is very active and very lethal at this point.

So his bombs look like everybody else's, except the ingredient is different. Principally potassium chlorate is his signature weapons system.

Q Great. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. Thank you, Greg.

Sebastian, you're next. Q General, it's Sebastian Sprenger with Inside Defense. Secretary Gates indicated that there could be more sharing of counter-IED capabilities, MRAPs and other stuff, across NATO and with the Afghans.

What's the status of this? And who's getting what when?

GEN. OATES: Secretary Gates has been very specific about us increasing not only our equipment sharing but training support to the NATO allies. JIEDDO's point in this is that we will operate through EUCOM and through Joint Forces Command to support their requirements for training of the NATO allies.

The equipping piece is being done through existing laws, and quite frankly, JIEDDO's not in the -- we're really not in the major equipping role with MRAPs. I'd have to defer that answer to somebody else who's actually doing the larger equipment pieces. JIEDDO's equipping issues would be smaller, counter-IED enabling capability, usually in a handheld device area. And we'll do that through our combatant command partners in EUCOM and Joint Forces Command.

This is a relatively new initiative in terms of increasing this level of information-sharing and training support and equipment. And I expect you'll see a great deal of effort involved here in the next 90 days. I know that the issue on the MRAP vision is being discussed very urgently.

Q Have any MRAPs actually changed hands yet?

GEN. OATES: I don't know the answer to that. I just don't. I'd hate to speculate on it. I do think that that's very likely to occur here real quickly.

Q Can you say to whom?

GEN. OATES: A range of our NATO allies. And I -- who they go to first is up to, of course, the combatant commander. And I'm not really clear on what his initial priorities are for the MRAPs, but it'd be a great question for Central Command.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir.

Thank you, Sebastian.

Before we wrap up today's roundtable, I know there was one other person I believe that called in to the roundtable during the discussion. Who was that, please? Anyone else call in that I didn't get to? (No audible reply.) With that, I'm glad that most of us -- most of you all got at least two questions in. So with that, I'm going to turn it back over to Lieutenant General Oates for any follow-on statements. And with that, if anyone has any questions after this roundtable, please send them to bloggeroutreach@dma.mil or my e-mail address.

Sir, I'll turn it back over to you.

GEN. OATES: Thanks. And thanks, everybody. It's my intention to ensure that we have a very open and candid dialogue with you all as often as you would like to do this. Our mission -- you know, JIEDDO was created in an exigency of war to focus on the IED threat. And although we're only four years old, a lot of great things have been done. But we have a ways to go yet in ensuring that we can provide the equipment and training that's necessary for our soldiers as the enemy adapts his techniques and procedures.

Congress has been very generous with us. We enjoy flexibility in spending that the services do not, and so we can rapidly respond to warfighters' requirements. But once they announce those requirements, there is a tyranny of time to acquire and produce and, of course, transport. So nothing happens overnight, but I can assure you that we are in the urgent-response mode as often as we can push industry and (train ?) to make that happen.

I'm always open to constructive criticism. Our business is very serious. It's a matter of life and death. And so as you have questions for us, or observations, I would very much appreciate your input to us. And we'll always give you an answer. We can disagree on the answer, but you'll always get an answer, and your input is always welcome here.

And so if there's any of you out there that would like follow-on discussions and deep -- deeper detail on some of these issues, we'll certainly entertain your requests.

And I appreciate very much the opportunity to meet with you today. I'll pause briefly to see if there's any urgent ones left out there, and then I'll let you off.

LT. CRAGG: Anyone, follow-up questions?

Q You said urgent? Yes, I have another one. Sebastian Sprenger, Inside Defense. And let us in on what's -- discussions about the banning of fertilizers, both with the Afghans and the Pakistanis. And what are the obstacles here that are still in place?

GEN. OATES: Yeah. You know, it's a really good-news story. When General McChrystal identified the threat to troops of ammonium-nitrate-based fertilizer, none of which is produced in Afghanistan, went to President Karzai and, in very quick order, a presidential ban issued on ammonium-nitrate-based fertilizer, both in the country and for importation. There are some other uses for ammonium nitrate with regards to road work and mining, so it's not as easy as it sounds to just ban it and there's no impact.

It's also difficult to detect if it's brought clandestinely across the border, and so there's an additional requirement there to enable both the Pakistani and the Afghan security forces to reach a high level of confidence this stuff is not being brought across the border clandestinely.

You all know, because you've been watching this for a while, that the enemy certainly adapts, and that we've got to stay a little ahead of that game. So as ammonium nitrate becomes more difficult to employ against us, we fully appreciate they'll shift to some other forms. And we're already anticipating and preparing for those contingencies.

Did I answer your question, Sebastian (sp)?

Q Is there a ban in place with -- in Pakistan also?

GEN. OATES: There's not one in Pakistan that I'm aware of. I do know there's some serious discussions involving the Pakistanis with regards to both ammonium nitrate and potassium chlorate. There is --

Q Which was -- which was the Haqqani signature.

GEN. OATES: Yeah, roger.

Q Okay.

GEN. OATES: And that's largely derived from the same chemicals that are used to make safety matches. So the first thing, in the area of complexity, a lot of these homemade explosive chemicals are used for very benign purposes -- farming, treating roads, you know, mining -- and so flat bans also impact commercial industries. And so this is a very complex challenge.

Q Would a ban on the Pakistani side help, do you think?

GEN. OATES: I think it would be helpful. But of course, it would be up to the Pakistani government to assess the impact on their -- on their -- on their other industries that their -- what their farmers -- what the impact would be on their farmers. I just don't know. I can't assess that from here. I do know that, you know, we're dialoguing with our partners overseas to try and reduce these lethal accelerants. And like I said, it's very complex. They have been very helpful to date, and we'll just continue to work that.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. And thank you, Sebastian (sp).

With that, we're going to wrap up today's bloggers roundtable. And a note to everybody how you can access the transcript and the audio file from today's roundtable: If you visit www.dodlive.mil, click on the Bloggers Roundtable.

You've been listening to Lieutenant General Michael Oates. He's the director of JIEDDO.

Thank you so much, sir, for attending today. And thank you for the bloggers. This concludes today's event. Thank you again, sir.

GEN. OATES: Thank you.

END.