

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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SPECIAL INSPECTOR GENERAL
FOR AFGHANISTAN RECONSTRUCTION

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INTERVIEW OF: DR. THOMAS JOHNSON

Thursday, January 7, 2016

BEFORE:

DR. CANDACE RONDEAUX

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audio provided by the Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction.

1 P-R-O-C-E-E-D-I-N-G-S

2 {time not provided}

3 DR. JOHNSON: -- {proceedings in
4 progress} the University, and I had did a lot for
5 years in Afghanistan, so I was quite well known,
6 and after September 11th, (b)(3), (b)(6)

7 [REDACTED]
8 [REDACTED] to start doing briefings
9 on the situation, as I saw it and I had a brief -
10 - and I did that, and some people from OSD had
11 heard about it.

12 I don't -- they weren't actually
13 policy, they weren't in policy. It was -- the
14 business -- I'm not quite sure of this, but I
15 think it was the Office of -- office that dealt
16 with counter-proliferation, but they, for some
17 reason, got hooked into working on the IO
18 campaign.

19 So, I was called in, sort of
20 (inaudible) into OSD, for about three weeks to
21 work on the initial information campaign.

22 (b)(3), (b)(6)

1 (b)(3), (b)(6) [REDACTED]
2 [REDACTED]
3 [REDACTED]
4 [REDACTED]
5 [REDACTED]
6 [REDACTED]
7 [REDACTED]
8 [REDACTED]
9 [REDACTED]
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19 [REDACTED]
20 [REDACTED]
21 [REDACTED]
22 [REDACTED]

1 (b)(3), (b)(6)

2 [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED]

5 [REDACTED]

6 So, a lot of the people that we were
7 briefing for 2004, 2005 through 2009, I guess it
8 was, were basically a National Guard, a lot of
9 National Guard units that were heavily involved
10 with -- what was a training program called back
11 then? On my God. You know what I'm talking
12 about. What was our initial training? Not -- oh
13 gosh.

14 I forget what it was, but they were
15 basically involved in our training program, so,
16 it's the National Guard, and we would put on
17 three day seminars and they were -- we were
18 putting in different scholars and talking about
19 all different aspects of Afghanistan from, you
20 know, the Taliban to their economy.

21 But what was especially important,
22 what they wanted was briefings on Afghan culture,

1 which I usually did, and you know, I stopped
2 doing that after four or five years because I
3 thought that it was foolish exercise, and this --
4 I think this has implications to the present
5 research you're doing.

6 I mean, we were briefing on culture,
7 but basically, it came almost a box to be checked
8 before deployment, especially when you're dealing
9 with National Guard or the Reserve. The last
10 thing that they want to do before leaving their
11 families is to sit through three days or two days
12 of somewhat boring seminars, learning about
13 different aspects of Afghanistan, and that was my
14 clear impression. They just didn't really get
15 that, and plus, trying to explain Afghan culture,
16 you know, in a two hour seminar or one briefing,
17 considering that there's also briefings on
18 everything else you can think of, was basically a
19 waste of time.

20 In fact, you know, it's Federal adage
21 that, you know, too little education is actually
22 dangerous, so, and plus towards the end, (b)(3), (b)(6)

1 (b)(3), (b)(6) [REDACTED]
2 [REDACTED]
3 [REDACTED]
4 [REDACTED]
5 [REDACTED]
6 [REDACTED]
7 [REDACTED]
8 [REDACTED]
9 [REDACTED]
10 [REDACTED]
11 [REDACTED]
12 [REDACTED]
13 [REDACTED]
14 [REDACTED]
15 [REDACTED]
16 [REDACTED]
17 [REDACTED]
18 [REDACTED] [REDACTED]
19 [REDACTED]
20 [REDACTED]
21 [REDACTED]
22 [REDACTED]

1 (b)(3), (b)(6)

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1 (b)(3), (b)(6)

2 [REDACTED]

3 [REDACTED]

4 [REDACTED].

5 But you know, my general impression
6 was that theoretically, it was a wonderful idea,
7 especially if you're fighting a coat --
8 (inaudible) of insurgency, it's useful to be able
9 to have at least a minimal knowledge of the type
10 of culture that you're dealing with and the
11 desires and the needs of the people.

12 But in most instances, these sessions
13 turned out to be what I would call basically
14 checking the box before people were deployed. It
15 was too little, too short and too late, and I
16 think ultimately, it really had a tremendous
17 impact on our adventures in Afghanistan because
18 to this day, we've gotten better, but even to
19 this day, people really don't understand the role
20 of (inaudible) and they've always -- you know,
21 over the course of it, we're always sort of the
22 center of gravity, and I mean, you know, I would

1 -- you know, I'd brief them on what knowledge --
2 just the type of headgear that they would wear.
3 You could tell the type of tribe that they came
4 from in many instances, and you know, if you're
5 going to a CIRGA {phonetic} or a SHIRA {phonetic}
6 where the most important people in the village
7 would be sitting, and that type of information, I
8 would -- I learned out -- I heard later from my
9 students and others, proved very useful.

10 But in the whole -- you know, I spent
11 hundreds and hundreds of hours briefing deployed
12 troops and I'm not sure what good it had to do.

13 DR. RONDEAUX: Well, you know, that
14 kind of appends to one of the observations of a
15 decade of War, which was we didn't understand the
16 environment and --

17 DR. JOHNSON: Yes, like the number one
18 lesson -- I mean, we just did not understand the
19 environment.

20 DR. RONDEAUX: Yes. So, then you went
21 down range to work with (b)(6)

22 DR. JOHNSON: Yes, I served as -- you

1 know, (inaudible) was to CATRAS {phonetic}, you
2 know, I was sort of the (b)(6), you know, in was
3 (b)(6) common insurgency advisors, and this
4 is after -- you know, (b)(6) had already been at --
5 deployed on one tour, and then the guy that
6 followed him, if you'll recall, had an affair
7 with one of his under-lanes and was basically
8 kicked out, and they brought (b)(6) back.

9 Of course, (b)(6) is a wonderful guy.
10 He's Chief of Staff, I believe now, of the
11 Canadian Air Force -- of the Canadian Military
12 and Army, and I worked with (b)(6), because I got
13 close to the Canadian's. I was invited up a
14 couple times to their -- to their (inaudible)
15 academy, and I finally was -- was introduced to
16 their leadership.

17 So, when (b)(6) first deployed, he was
18 big on the common insurgency -- on the common
19 insurgency possibilities, because he wasn't
20 really sure how to do this.

21 So, he brought his entire leadership
22 staff to NPS, for a five day session, where we

1 basically scoped out what he was going to do,
2 relative to counter-insurgency, and it resulted

3 (b)(3), (b)(6)

4 [REDACTED]
5 [REDACTED]
6 [REDACTED]
7 [REDACTED]
8 [REDACTED]
9 [REDACTED]
10 My perspective is the reason the coin
11 never really succeeded -- now, again, it
12 succeeded in some places, but generically in a
13 general sense, it did not succeed because as
14 (inaudible) and (inaudible) themselves admitted,
15 we tried to perform coin, you know, via taxi cab.

16 They would go out and you know, and
17 spend eight hours maybe in a village, but as soon
18 as it got dark, they were back in their FOB, and
19 you know, the only way that you conduct coin is
20 to live with the people, and I'll cite a couple
21 of examples.

22 There were all Marines down in

1 Helmond. We never had any of our coinister's, if
2 you will, that were actually living with the
3 Afghan people, and you know, what was suggesting
4 both to American's and Canadian's, that we
5 actually let -- we rent houses from the
6 Canadian's and you know, we're there 24/7/365 and
7 it had tremendous implications, not only for
8 Intel, but we could have actually done coin, and
9 the way that I -- that it -- that I was proposed
10 it is, I called -- I called it that we wanted to
11 construct district reconstruction teams, you
12 know, where people live in villages. We may --
13 it could be done -- it was much like the coin
14 program in Afghanistan, or in the -- that the
15 Marines pursued in Vietnam, but we would have
16 maybe a company, but at the largest, would be
17 actually deployed in a village.

18 We would also have, you know, units of
19 the Afghan national army and more importantly,
20 we'd also have A&P, living with us, so we could
21 watch them 24/7.

22 I mean the Afghan national police,

1 from my opinion, and it -- is still the most
2 hated institutions in the Afghanistan because
3 they're an extractive organization, and you know,
4 they take. In my perspective, they're actually
5 net -- security negative in most places.

6 But if you would have been with them
7 24/7 actually out in the field, I think that we
8 could have corrected that.

9 So, you know, (b)(6) really impressed
10 me. He came. We helped to put together his
11 operation. You know, and when he was there, he
12 was -- you know, the big thing was, you know, how
13 this is going to be sustained because we knew
14 that the Canadian's were going to be leaving and
15 -- in 2000 and late 2009, 2010, and he made that
16 very clear, and we did all kinds of
17 reconstruction development programs in the
18 village. We built five miles of new canals,
19 which were all, you know, dug out by actual
20 employees, or actual villagers in (inaudible.)

21 So, we provided livelihood. In fact,
22 it's actually interesting, one of the asides was

1 in -- and I have given advice to (b)(6) about this
2 is that there -- they had a couple of schools in
3 (inaudible). They paid their school teachers the
4 equivalent of about \$80, \$60 if you were
5 uncertified and \$80 if you were a certified
6 teacher, for their classrooms, but we're paying
7 the ditch diggers, you know, I think \$90 or \$100,
8 the equivalence of \$100 a week -- a month.

9 So, initially all the school teachers
10 quit their jobs and joined the ditch diggers.

11 So, you know, we had to recalculate and in -- and
12 it was sort of one of the lessons that I learned,
13 is to make sure you know what the actual
14 specifics of a village economy is, before you try
15 to intervene into that village economy because
16 you can have a really detrimental impact on the
17 actual weight structure, and in that, the
18 employment and ultimately, the impact on the
19 education of the students.

20 But I think the Canadian's were very
21 -- and I worked with them very closely on this
22 program, they were very successful with their

1 operation. They lived basically in the village.
2 You know, there was -- towards the end of the
3 program, when we were doing deployments actually
4 into the village, and gosh, my mind is -- is
5 damned this morning.

6 You know, what do you call it when
7 you're doing -- you travel into the village? We
8 were -- we didn't even --

9 DR. RONDEAUX: Deploying?

10 DR. JOHNSON: Yes, we were deployed --
11 well, not deployed, but we were doing
12 recognizance missions and the like, and we
13 weren't even wearing -- at the end, we weren't
14 even wearing armor, because we -- we built so
15 much trust, and one of the great things that
16 happened out of the program, the Canadian program
17 was that 50 different villages in the DAM
18 district, which is south of Kandahar, signed an
19 open letter to the Taliban and basically told the
20 Taliban don't mess with this program, we like it.

21 You know, the problem of course, was
22 that the Canadians' didn't have the resources to

1 be able to expend it beyond another village, but
2 you know, every village in the entire district
3 wanted it, because not only of the type of
4 employment that it offered, but we set up -- we
5 set up -- we did help do Mosque reconstruction.
6 We brought in -- we brought in new water systems
7 for (inaudible) or whatever it's called and we
8 brought in prayer rugs, and we did a lot of
9 things that the villagers really liked, and we
10 became very close, and not one Canadian -- and it
11 -- towards the end of the tour, we were hit --
12 the Canadian's one convoy was hit and a couple
13 were killed by an IED, and we would -- you know,
14 we would be rocket from some of the Taliban, that
15 was just -- every once in a while, but very
16 seldom, did they actually get into our base.

17 So, you know, of all of the time that
18 I spent helping both the US and the Canadian
19 military, I think the proudest thing that I have
20 to say over my -- over my 12, 13, 14 years of
21 involvement in this business was my role in the
22 (inaudible) which I still view is really a bottle

1 of what we should have been doing at the counter-
2 insurgency level.

3 DR. RONDEAUX: So, let me pause here
4 and sort of go back to some -- a couple of things
5 you said, that I would like to explore.

6 The first is actually, you know, your
7 observation around the political economy, the
8 local political economy, and how --

9 DR. JOHNSON: Right.

10 DR. RONDEAUX: -- quickly things can
11 shift, because that is certainly one of the
12 contentions, I think, you know, for myself and
13 for others, who are subject matter experts in
14 this program.

15 There is a real, you know,
16 misunderstanding, certainly on the part of the
17 military, if not, you know, just universally,
18 pretty much every Westerner there, about the
19 distorting impact of walking into, you know,
20 MILONE district or (inaudible) or DAM and saying,
21 you know, we've got 'x' amount of dollars for you
22 guys to dig ditches, and what that does actually,

1 you know, to the local economy.

2 So, you know, because it really does
3 make a difference and I think one of the --

4 DR. JOHNSON: That was all over the
5 country.

6 DR. RONDEAUX: Yes, I mean, one of the
7 problems we encountered constantly was the
8 problem of cert money, for instance.

9 DR. JOHNSON: Oh, yes, absolutely.

10 DR. RONDEAUX: Can you talk about
11 that?

12 DR. JOHNSON: Yes, I saw that -- I saw
13 that when I was in Salerno, with some of the cert
14 money that was used in post. Very little
15 research was being done on -- and you know, and
16 Salerno had one of the first training teams,
17 which I have a very mixed feeling about.

18 Actually, I mean, (inaudible) and
19 (b)(3), (b)(6), what's his name? (b)(3), (b)(6)

20 [REDACTED] They asked me to be
21 deployed on the first one as the Afghan expert
22 because they actually deployed social

1 scientists/anthropologists that didn't know
2 anything about Afghanistan.

3 I went for a couple of months before
4 I left, because I had just -- I just didn't like
5 the program.

6 But you know, I saw this time and time
7 again, throughout Afghanistan, where we'd go in
8 with cert money or other types of USA ID money
9 and for a program in a local area, and with no
10 knowledge of what the political economy of that
11 area was, and we ultimately had detrimental
12 impacts on it.

13 I mean, my example of how we basically
14 stopped all the school, we end -- you know, we're
15 there with humanitarian ID and we're giving
16 employment to people building five or six miles
17 of new canals in an area that was lush with fruit
18 trees and vegetable gardens, and you know, that's
19 what these people spent their lives on. So, it
20 did have tremendous impact on their long term
21 economic, you know, development.

22 But at the same time, we were paying

1 them too much money and we took teachers away,
2 and you know, one of the big problems that we had
3 in Afghanistan throughout our tour is that we
4 made Afghanistan -- we made Afghan's the
5 dependent on us economically, and this led to
6 corruption.

7 I mean, you know, we were viewed as
8 occupiers, you know, five, six years into our
9 involvement, but there Afghan's didn't want us to
10 leave, especially the businessmen, and others,
11 because of the corruption and they recognized how
12 much money they were making.

13 I saw this all the time in Kandahar,
14 when I was with (b)(6) that the people were very
15 nervous about the Canadian's, and ultimately the
16 American's leaving because the money was going to
17 drop up.

18 I mean, there were -- there were --
19 the corruption was so bad in Kandahar, I mean,
20 there was an actual sort of -- what's the word
21 that I want to use? There was sort of an illegal
22 business for -- you know, we were -- USAID and

1 others would give money to build community
2 centers out in -- you know, if it's (inaudible)
3 and other places in the districts of Kandahar,
4 and one of the regular things they did is that
5 people that were actually paying for the
6 construction of these different buildings or
7 whatever they were, if it was schools or district
8 centers, well, the Afghan's who had Polaroid of
9 pictures of a completed one, and they would go up
10 -- because these were not permissive areas and
11 usually the people didn't want to travel out and
12 look at the -- at the -- the actual results of
13 their money on their own.

14 So, the people in Kandahar, this was
15 sort of a black economy type of thing. They
16 would show pictures and the people would say,
17 "Oh, good, there is it. It's finished."

18 So, you know, they -- but thousands of
19 dollars just went into somebody's pocket. The
20 building was never really built. There were --
21 the people that were funding it were showing a
22 picture, and they walked away, and I saw this

1 happen on a number of occasions in Kandahar.

2 But the overall message that I'm
3 trying to say is that we -- the corruption was so
4 bad, they became so dependent on us, that the --
5 you know, people that wanted to view us as
6 occupiers and really wanted us to leave, did not
7 want us to leave because of all the money that we
8 were supplying different families.

9 I mean, we made (inaudible) brother a
10 zillionaire -- you know, a multi millionaire in
11 Kandahar, because he had control of the -- of --
12 and he -- and (inaudible) brother, before he was
13 killed, they controlled the cement business down
14 there, and the amount of money, I mean, that they
15 were charging for cement was so outrageous,
16 relative to the international market, you know,
17 you would have -- you would have Jersey walls --
18 there is Jersey walls, as you know, all over
19 Afghanistan, and what they -- the Afghan's were
20 charging for those things and what we paid for
21 them was just -- I don't have a number, the
22 figures in my head, but there were 10 or 15 times

1 more than what you would expect to pay, you know,
2 in the United States.

3 You know, we just -- we just let the
4 Afghan's rip us off, and I really don't know why.
5 A lot of it was oversight, but you know, keep in
6 mind -- people got into -- people in the south
7 especially, that I witnessed in my many trips to
8 Kandahar, got into this whole mind set that, you
9 know, the American's are here basically to feed
10 our -- feed our pockets.

11 You know, you drive from the main road
12 from the Kandahar air field to downtown Kandahar
13 and just loaded with different cement building
14 businesses, I mean, and the -- you know, and the
15 -- with the Canadian's.

16 They rented a whole fleet of trucks
17 and cars from a (inaudible), you know,
18 (inaudible) younger brother, and they were paying
19 hundreds of thousands of dollars a year, just in
20 renting cars from these people, that you know, if
21 you would have gone to -- if you would have had a
22 Hertz or something like that, probably could have

1 done it in a -- in a tenth of the cost.

2 But the -- the other -- one of the
3 other -- I guess what I'm saying is that one of
4 the -- the real lessons that I had, that I walked
5 away from was, you know, we were never going to
6 succeed because the corruption was just so
7 massive.

8 Now, Afghanistan has always had an
9 interesting way of doing business, and in some
10 instances, a lot of the business practices would
11 border on corruption, at least relative to
12 western terms, but the corruption was so grand in
13 Afghanistan, especially in Kandahar, where most
14 of my time was spent, that it crossed the
15 threshold that basically turned all the local
16 population that was not part of getting the
17 money, away from (inaudible) government and
18 basically, that is one of the reasons they didn't
19 have legitimacy.

20 I mean, there is a direct correlation
21 now, and I would almost say causation between the
22 lack of legitimacy and the -- and the -- and the

1 corruption that was going on, you know, via US
2 dollars that were flowing into that country.

3 DR. RONDEAUX: So, how do you think --
4 I mean, you mentioned a couple of people that I
5 know well, and you know, you probably know this
6 already, I think, when we were in the Bahamas
7 ages ago, I might have even just come freshly off
8 of some end-bed with the Canadian's down in
9 Kandahar.

10 So, I spent a lot of time there, not
11 as much as (b)(6), of course, but certainly
12 enough --

13 DR. JOHNSON: (b)(6) is a very good
14 friend of mine.

15 DR. RONDEAUX: Yes.

16 DR. JOHNSON: I'd see him on a weekly
17 basis.

18 DR. RONDEAUX: Yes, he's a good friend
19 of mine, as well.

20 So, you know, there is (inaudible),
21 there is GOOLAGA {phonetic} and some of them kind
22 of known and talked about what are the dynamics,

1 and you know, (b)(6) has covered this
2 excellently, both in his coverage for the Globe,
3 but also, you know, for his book, you know, and
4 we've all sort of touched on the (inaudible)
5 problem down there, which was going on, I think
6 at the time you were there.

7 DR. JOHNSON: Yes, it was. You know,
8 I tried to tell (b)(6) to be very careful with
9 WALLY {phonetic} but you know, he was a big guy.
10 I mean, he controlled the -- he controlled the
11 legislature down there, and (b)(6) met with him
12 regularly had a pretty good relationship with
13 him.

14 But he was -- he also had his own --
15 his own private dealings that were less than
16 stellar and legal. So, but (b)(6) used him
17 politically and felt that he needed to have a
18 good relationship with him, and of course (b)(6)
19 also had a good relationship with ZEEK, which was
20 absolutely critical when the proverbial shit
21 really hit the fan in Kandahar in 2009 and 2010,
22 and it was ZEEK's people rather than -- and his

1 malicia, rather than the police or the ANA solved
2 the problems, when the -- the Taliban had really
3 infiltrated in the vicinity.

4 Of course, he is now -- I can't
5 believe the guy is still alive. I mean, he's
6 Kandahar police chief and he's doing a pretty
7 good job, from everything I hear, but I just
8 can't believe that he's still alive. He's got to
9 be on the top of the hit list for the Taliban.

10 DR. RONDEAUX: Well, don't think that
11 those are the only people that would like to see
12 him dead.

13 DR. JOHNSON: Yes, no, others too.
14 But there is -- there is -- he is -- there's
15 tribal reasons too, as you know.

16 DR. RONDEAUX: Yes, I do. What is --
17 I mean, you have ZEEK and his reputation and also
18 like (inaudible), those two in particular, they
19 have very strong reputations.

20 Yes, yes, they're tough. Yes, they
21 know how to connect with the problem that you see
22 at the border, particularly in (inaudible), but

1 at the same time --

2 DR. JOHNSON: Well, I understand ZEEK
3 is not spending much time in (inaudible) anymore.
4 You know, he is living in Kandahar.

5 DR. RONDEAUX: Right, no, I know that,
6 but you know, in the beginning he was in
7 (inaudible) --

8 DR. JOHNSON: Right.

9 DR. RONDEAUX: -- and then --

10 DR. JOHNSON: Yes, he controlled
11 (inaudible).

12 DR. RONDEAUX: Yes, right, I mean, so
13 generically speaking, these two men, ZEEK and
14 (inaudible) had such a tall reputation, you know,
15 poor -- on the one hand, being tough on the
16 Taliban, but on the other hand, certainly abusing
17 their power --

18 DR. JOHNSON: Right.

19 DR. RONDEAUX: -- which goes to the --

20 DR. JOHNSON: Right.

21 DR. RONDEAUX: -- question of --

22 DR. JOHNSON: Yes, they did. The

1 strong men, have always, you know -- you know,
2 strong men and the -- the reason leaders don't
3 like War Lords, the others, we like to call
4 regional leaders, but I mean, that is part --
5 that is part of -- you've got to understand that
6 Afghan -- and as you know, Candace, Afghanistan,
7 one of the keys to understanding Afghanistan and
8 this (inaudible) and his new book that's coming
9 out on the Afghan army, which I reviewed, has
10 brilliant sections on the patrons/client
11 relationships, and to understand Afghanistan, you
12 have to understand patron/client relationship,
13 and you know, and that's why the KHAN's and the
14 War Lords haven been so important over the years,
15 and the regional leaders, because you know, it's
16 this long running sociological dynamic between
17 patrons and clients, and ZEEK surely has the
18 clients. He surely is a patron.

19 DR. RONDEAUX: Yes.

20 DR. JOHNSON: And a lot of this power
21 comes just from that.

22 DR. RONDEAUX: Absolutely, and you

1 know --

2 DR. JOHNSON: A fierce warrior.

3 DR. RONDEAUX: Well, I mean, and the
4 War Lords were a central part of the strategy in
5 a stated way, you know, (b)(3), (b)(6)
6 [REDACTED]

7 DR. JOHNSON: Of course, and --

8 DR. RONDEAUX: -- and you know, made
9 sure that that was -- (b)(3), (b)(6)
10 they needed to cultivate a coop them. I don't
11 think -- you know, I didn't see that as a very
12 successful strategy, partially for the reasons
13 that you enumerated, which was people really
14 didn't know the culture, they didn't understand
15 the environment. They were always working
16 through inter-locker and intermediaries --

17 DR. JOHNSON: We were used by them.

18 DR. RONDEAUX: Sure.

19 DR. JOHNSON: We were used by them.

20 Early on especially, I mean, we had our favorite
21 War Lords. Busch came out, I think in Fall of
22 2003 and said that we would no longer give aide

1 directly to these War Lords, you know, be it
2 (inaudible) or be it ATA {phonetic} or be it
3 (inaudible) or whoever, but we were no longer --
4 I think it was Fall of 2003, where Busch said he
5 wasn't going to -- we would no longer give direct
6 money to these guys, (b)(3), (b)(6)

7 [REDACTED]

8 [REDACTED]

9 But you know, the War Lords -- but
10 that was -- they were -- they used us, but the
11 tribes used us tremendously too. I mean, you
12 know, from the early -- the terrible running --
13 the terrible party that was killed going to
14 (inaudible) inauguration, I think they were
15 coming from (inaudible) or -- yes, I think they
16 were coming from Jalalabad to Kabul or --

17 DR. RONDEAUX: Yes, in DAIBAD
18 {phonetic} yes.

19 DR. JOHNSON: Yes, yes, that we --
20 yes, that we hit, or you know, and that was
21 basically suddenly travel scores, and this
22 happened hundreds of hundreds of times, and you

1 know, nobody speaks about this better than
2 GOPAL's book.

3 If you really want to understand how
4 we were used by the tribes, just read GOPAL's
5 book. It's the best thing out there. He really
6 gets into some of the nuances and how we were
7 used and how -- and the other thing that I really
8 found interesting about his book was, you know, a
9 good percentage of the people in Gitmo should
10 never have been in Gitmo. I mean, they were
11 given away by tribes. They were given -- they
12 were given away by other -- by other, you know,
13 traditional tribal enemies that claimed they were
14 Taliban, and GOPAL really highlights and
15 documents this in his very, very good book.

16 DR. RONDEAUX: But did you -- I mean,
17 when -- that's a very -- you know, for me, that's
18 very -- an issue very close to my heart, having
19 spent a lot of time at Bagram at the prison and
20 sort of following those issues.

21 You know, I just wonder, you know, in
22 your travels in Kandahar, particularly with the

1 Canadian's or perhaps with the American's, you
2 know, the detainee issue was discussed as a
3 potential liability only in -- you know, only in
4 Crystal's terms, right?

5 But ultimately, it's not entirely
6 clear to me, that it -- it was ever taken onboard
7 that this was a strategic liability, and that the
8 targeting in particular, you know, that you
9 discussed here, in terms of people within tribes,
10 you know, tribal others using their connections
11 with American's or others, to target their
12 enemies, you know, that's something also, I don't
13 think we really hear enough about it. I don't
14 think we've --

15 DR. JOHNSON: Oh, no, no, that's one
16 of the real tragedies of the War and you know,
17 again in turned the people against us.

18 You know, when you kill a -- you know,
19 it as almost as bad as some of the collateral
20 damage. I mean, one of the -- one of the truisms
21 of -- in Afghanistan is that, you know, you kill
22 an innocent child or child or woman and you lose

1 that village forever, just because it's an honor
2 base society and revenge, I don't want to -- you
3 know, I don't want to get too -- you know, too
4 overly general, but you know, this is a very
5 important honor base society.

6 You know, when you do things, and half
7 the times, when the -- if you talk to the actual
8 tribal's that were involved, that were -- that
9 maybe were hit by another tribe, or hit by us,
10 because they were given away as Taliban, we lost
11 that at least that section of the -- segment of
12 the tribe, be it an extended clan forever, and
13 this has played tremendously through the -- see,
14 the Afghan strategy in Afghanistan, which a lot
15 of people don't realize is -- you take -- and I
16 think a lot of people realize it, but they don't
17 really come out and say it is that they knew that
18 they couldn't beat us tactically, so they wanted
19 to make -- just like (inaudible) did, they wanted
20 to drive us into making mistakes.

21 They wanted to -- the Taliban read it
22 now. They wanted -- they recognized that they

1 were fish swimming within the ocean of people,
2 and they recognized -- so, you know, they wanted
3 us to have warfare to chase around the
4 (inaudible) students who would resort with, you
5 know, go into a city and just pray for us to drop
6 our 500 bomb -- 500 pounders, hoping that one
7 went astray and killed Afghan innocence, because
8 they recognized that in an environment, in an
9 honor based society, that (Inaudible) has, that
10 you would lose that village forever, and that's -
11 - you know, that's really what happened. That's
12 what happened.

13 Our early CT campaign where we did
14 completely cultural -- up until 2004, 2005, where
15 it was basically a CT campaign, and now, we --
16 now, everything that we do, we call CT in
17 Afghanistan, but you know, that's just go give us
18 some cover, I think for some of our military
19 actions.

20 But we did so many culturally brain-
21 dead things early on, that we turned a lot of the
22 villagers away, and you hear -- you hear in the

1 press and the Pentagon come out and say, "Well,
2 you know, but only 15 percent of the people
3 support the Taliban."

4 But if you read Myles, Myles said that
5 was -- that's all you needed, you needed between
6 15 and 25 percent of support for the insurgency,
7 and insurgency could not lose.

8 So, you know, the problem we had in
9 Afghanistan is not only that 15 to 20 percent of
10 people support the Taliban, it's like a normal
11 curve, and outside of the two -- you know, 3.2
12 standard deviations away from the mean, everybody
13 else is fence sitters, and those fence sitters
14 were basically fence sitters because they wanted
15 US money.

16 Now, as soon as the US money went
17 away, you know, they -- you know, they might go
18 with the government or they might go with the
19 Taliban. But you know, we just did so many
20 things that weren't thought out systematically,
21 that ultimately doomed our mission in
22 Afghanistan, at least from my opinion.

1 DR. RONDEAUX: Well, that's absolutely
2 -- you know, I certainly concur with that view,
3 and you know, I'm sure the OSD, as well.

4 I'm sort of -- I am curious though, I
5 kind of want to pull on a little bit of string
6 here, actually.

7 I mean, you mentioned the angle and
8 for those are uninitiated, people who will not
9 necessarily remember that many of the people,
10 needers and War Lords, various (inaudible) in the
11 south, but obviously, you know, in places like
12 GOZNI, you know, that malice trench was very
13 strong and very influential --

14 DR. JOHNSON: But the Taliban ran them
15 out.

16 DR. RONDEAUX: Of course.

17 DR. JOHNSON: I mean --

18 DR. RONDEAUX: It took it from their
19 mouths.

20 DR. JOHNSON: Yes, I mean, if you take
21 a look -- if you read Myles book on Gorilla
22 Warfare, it's unbelievable. In fact, I just

1 lectured on it yesterday, to my seminar on -- I'm
2 teaching a course on common insurgency and
3 insurgency, military history, and yesterday was
4 our session on Myles theory of, you know,
5 people's War and Gorilla Warfare.

6 You know, I used Afghanistan as an
7 example. If you take a look at the Taliban, I
8 mean, they almost to -- read that 120 page book,
9 it would -- should be required reading on the --
10 you know, for all military officers, especially
11 if you buy this notion that the type of
12 Consulates that we fought in Iraq and
13 Afghanistan, and terrorism and all of this is
14 going to be the same things that are -- our
15 grandchildren's children are going to be fine,
16 and if you buy the QDR's, that's what they're
17 basically saying.

18 You know, Myles should be required
19 reading and the Taliban read Myles, and they --
20 and they really followed a lot of his dictates,
21 and very interesting, actually.

22 DR. RONDEAUX: I mean, so, that raises

1 the question about their sort of tactical shift,
2 you know, circa 2009/2010 when they -- in
3 (inaudible) if you'll remember --

4 DR. JOHNSON: Oh, I've written on --
5 you'll probably -- I've written two papers --
6 published two papers on the codes of conduct,
7 yes.

8 DR. RONDEAUX: Yes.

9 DR. JOHNSON: Yes, the codes of
10 conduct are very interesting. I mean, they
11 recognize -- Myles talks a lot that the -- a
12 Gorilla leader, an insurgent leader has to be
13 respected by the people. He has to be a model
14 for the people.

15 The LEHEIGH's {phonetic} which is one
16 of the chapters in my new book, served not only
17 IO purposes, but it also served for that Myles
18 purpose.

19 I mean, you know, the (inaudible)
20 never really -- you know, (inaudible) had some
21 control over the units that were operating in
22 Helmond, but you know -- and do you know what's

1 happened to the CURE? I keep asking. I hear
2 he's out -- he's not with Mansula or Ursula, and
3 that he's just waiting to see where he's going to
4 fall, because I've always -- you know,
5 (inaudible) is very important.

6 But the point is, is that, you know,
7 neither the -- neither of the three SHERA's in
8 (inaudible) and (inaudible), ever really had
9 control over the units that were operating there.

10 So, you know, they came out first in
11 2006, with this code of conduct, and a lot of it,
12 if you read it carefully, and I have, not only
13 instructs what their leaders need to be, to be
14 true leaders of the people and examples for the
15 people, but it also had tremendous IO value for
16 them, because a lot of the LEHEIGH's -- a lot of
17 the chapters in the codes of conduct were
18 actually, you know, sort of the (inaudible) of
19 what the (inaudible) regime was doing.

20 So, they talk a lot about, you know,
21 you can't be corrupt, you can't do this, you
22 can't do that, and a lot of it was for IO

1 purposes, but it's very interesting that it -- if
2 you take a look, and I did this in one of my
3 publications on the code of conduct, I think my -
4 - my 2010 article in Central Asian Survey, which
5 were -- where I compare the 2010 and 2009
6 LEHEIGH's, but a lot of it is in direct
7 relationship to what KAZAR {phonetic} and also
8 what they -- what's going to happen in the
9 future.

10 It wasn't until the 2009 LEHEIGH, that
11 the Taliban really laid out what their
12 administration was going to look like, and they
13 were -- and they -- they put the -- they put the
14 lines of control and administration, very
15 explicitly.

16 The other thing that I want to say,
17 just while I'm thinking about it, was the thing
18 that we never really understood and would sort of
19 band us, was -- and what really want -- was
20 probably one of the biggest things that -- going
21 to the Taliban was -- and people have written
22 about this, but I don't think to the extent that

1 they should have, was their justice system.

2 I mean, the codified justice system,
3 you won, whoever paid off the judge, and the
4 prosecuting -- the defense attorney, the most
5 money, and then it took about eight months or
6 something to get settled.

7 When I was in Kandahar, almost every
8 conflicts between clans and families were between
9 water and land rights, because there were no
10 proper titles given out for lands in the south,
11 after the Soviet invasion in 1979, and also, a
12 lot of the people that left, don't forget that,
13 you know, three and a half million went to
14 Pakistan initially and close to three million
15 went to Iran, and that's when the population of
16 Pakistan -- Afghanistan was only 15 million.

17 So, you had, you know, possibly over
18 one-third of the country leaving, which left a
19 lot of land.

20 So, the point is, there were -- when
21 I was in Kandahar, we would constantly see
22 problems with different clans fighting over land

1 and water rights, and you know, and -- and a lot
2 -- and a lot of this land was -- and water was
3 supposedly owned by Kandaharian businessmen who
4 live in Kandahar, that Taliban had forced them
5 out.

6 One of the big things the Canadian's
7 were constantly trying to do is, we had lists of
8 the leading KHAN's in the different districts and
9 we were trying to get them to go back, but they
10 would not because they had been -- you know, the
11 Taliban always wanted to create a void within the
12 traditional village political system.

13 But you know, the point is, is that I
14 talked to numerous Kandarian businessmen. The
15 last people that you would expect to support the
16 Taliban, that would regularly go down to
17 (inaudible), and that's where down, you know, in
18 the (inaudible), where for a long time, until our
19 special forces hit their court, and we turned
20 their judges into mobile judges, that would go
21 around to the different districts and usually
22 give a two or three day notice, when they're

1 going to come into a town or into a district to
2 have courses ruled on.

3 But these Kandaharian businessmen
4 would go down to (inaudible) and within 24 hours,
5 they would get a ruling by the Kandahar -- by the
6 Taliban justice system, the judges, and the case
7 is settled, and we never, as -- never, never
8 understood the -- how important such a justice is
9 to the -- to the rural, and to the urban Afghan,
10 and if it was one thing that we should have done,
11 is we should have pushed (inaudible) much, much
12 harder on putting together a rational legal
13 system, but the system was a joke, and the
14 Taliban won the hearts -- the trust and
15 confidence -- I don't use hearts and minds, the -
16 - they used the trust -- they won the trust and
17 confidence of numerous people because they gave
18 justice.

19 It wasn't the type of justice we would
20 always like to see, but you know, they gave
21 justice in much -- much of it, of course, was
22 based on Shri Long.

1 DR. RONDEAUX: They certainly did, and
2 you know, obviously, we -- we haven't actually
3 spoke to -- report on the judiciary, but we are,
4 of course, dealing with corruption, and you have
5 mentioned that many times and --

6 DR. JOHNSON: Well, you should look at
7 the judicial system. It's critical valuable --
8 it's a critical value -- variable that
9 historians, I would say, really helped to -- the
10 DAM, the Kabul regime, you know, especially in
11 areas outside of Kabul.

12 The justice system just was terrible
13 and the Taliban really, really played on this. I
14 mean, all Muslims, especially Afghan's, I mean,
15 the sense of justice is very, very on their needs
16 as an individual person, and when they don't --
17 and the lack of justice is extremely, extremely
18 important, and it's something we just didn't
19 focus on.

20 DR. RONDEAUX: Yes, yes, I've written
21 about that a lot, as well.

22 So, listen, I'm curious, I mean, I

1 know we're kind of into an hour here, and it's
2 kind of long, but I do have, you know, just
3 either one or two more questions, and I'm sure
4 Krisanne and Sonya may have their own or their
5 hands are tired from writing.

6 DR. JOHNSON: Well, we can always have
7 another interview. I've got a meeting at noon.
8 So, I have to leave here within 15 minutes, but
9 we can always have -- you know, we can always
10 have another conversation.

11 DR. RONDEAUX: Good, well, let's plan
12 on that. Let me ask you one last question
13 therefore, about sort of the NATO coordination
14 problem --

15 DR. JOHNSON: Sure.

16 DR. RONDEAUX: -- which is really
17 important, and you must have gotten an eyeful of
18 that --

19 DR. JOHNSON: Yes.

20 DR. RONDEAUX: -- with the Canadian's.
21 You know, it seems to me like that was something
22 -- you know, we allude to it in my report, you

1 know, I have sort of a draft out there, but it's
2 been hard to kind of capture the complexity of
3 trying to have like, you know, you've got
4 American's, you've got French.

5 I mean, in Kandahar, you know, even in
6 2009, there were so many commands roaming around
7 doing their own thing.

8 DR. JOHNSON: Right.

9 DR. RONDEAUX: The structure just
10 wasn't -- it just didn't seem workable.

11 DR. JOHNSON: Well, you know, you've
12 got to remember, I don't think it was until 2008
13 with McCURRAN {phonetic}, wasn't McCURRAN the
14 first time the US actually also was commanding
15 ISAF?

16 DR. RONDEAUX: Yes.

17 DR. JOHNSON: Wasn't it?

18 DR. RONDEAUX: Yes.

19 DR. JOHNSON: Yes, and so, it was the
20 first -- it wasn't until 2008, I believe, that
21 you actually had a commander that was the same
22 for US forces and ISAF, and so, that was one of

1 the problems.

2 For the, you know, first seven years
3 of the War -- well, the War -- well, the first
4 couple of years of the War, we never let ISAF out
5 of Kabul because we didn't want them to interview
6 with our CT.

7 You know, but after that, especially
8 starting in 2003, I mean, this became a real
9 problem, and not just the lack of command
10 coordination, but every country, and there's
11 nothing that we could really do to change this,
12 had their own rules of engagement, and you know,
13 many of the rules of engagement, and Chris Mason
14 and I have written, were basically written for
15 passive countries.

16 I mean, we talk about -- we talk about
17 the coalition of 42 countries, and Obama talked
18 about that in his West Point speech, but you've
19 got to recognize that like 40 of the -- 30 of
20 those countries -- that 25 of those countries had
21 less than 100 people in country, and 12 of them
22 had less than 10.

1 So, I mean, you had -- of course, you
2 had -- you had the French, you had the
3 Canadian's, you had the British, you had the
4 German's, you had a small contention of New
5 Zealand and Australia special forces, but they
6 were very good. You did have some Dutch, but you
7 know, the rest of the coalition was basically a
8 coalition of passivists, and they never left --
9 they never left their FOB's.

10 I mean, up in (inaudible) when I went
11 up to take a look at the initial Afghan local
12 police program and the first one that they
13 instituted was up in WARDOC, I used to -- you
14 know, the week and a half I was up there, I mean,
15 we were in view of the Turkish FOB, and the
16 Turks' never left their base. They never left
17 their base.

18 So, I -- you know, you raise a very
19 legitimate point, for many years, we didn't have
20 -- we didn't have concentrated command between
21 ISAF and US forces, but even when we did, you
22 had, you know, individual ROE's, which were very,

1 very different from the US ROE's, and the Taliban
2 knew this, and they -- you know, I ruled -- I
3 wrote an article a couple of years ago, on
4 Taliban innovation and that's one of the things I
5 focused on.

6 The Taliban recognized -- they knew
7 what countries were the -- you know, they knew
8 the Italian's were in Iraq, and they knew what
9 the Italian's ROE was, and they took advantage of
10 this, and so, you know, this was another real
11 problem.

12 But there is not much you can do.
13 United States can't dictate a rule of engagement
14 on another country. That's left up to the
15 individual country, so I don't know how you get
16 around that problem.

17 DR. RONDEAUX: Yes. It is
18 complicated. Well, listen, I mean, first of all,
19 you've been very generous with your time. It is
20 -- you've given us a full hour, and I know you've
21 got things to do.

22 We probably will follow up. I know my

1 colleagues, certainly either Krisanne or another
2 colleague of our's, Greg Bauer, might be in touch
3 later down the line.

4 DR. JOHNSON: Please do. I mean, you
5 know, I mean, I teach on Monday and Wednesday.
6 So, you know, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, I'm
7 just doing my own research, so I usually -- and
8 if I don't have set meetings, I'm usually
9 available.

10 So, feel free to call me any time.
11 Like I said, I have tremendous, tremendous
12 respect for your work. I think you've gotten
13 most of the stuff right, that you've written on.

14 So, anything I can do to help, I'm
15 more than willing to do it.

16 DR. RONDEAUX: I really appreciate
17 that. Well, good luck teaching.

18 (Off the record.)
19
20
21
22

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C E R T I F I C A T E

MATTER: Interview of Dr. Thomas Johnson

DATE: 01-07-16

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