

know, presented to the families before it was made public. They're okay with it.

We're doing seven months. The Army is doing 12. But you know, what that has the potential to do is shorten that dwell time that they're home, depending upon, again, future requirements. So I think if you look at it historically, we have seen an extension as more the norm. And that's what we would like to see in this case.

That said, I do want to see -- if there are Marines that go in behind these two units, I want to see them protected and have the same kinds of capabilities that the Marines on deck have now. So I would not rule out that a very small segment of one unit or another might be asked to stay on if we can't provide it otherwise for a short period of time.

Now, there may be some bridging requirement, but we would certainly want to minimize it. And I'm not even sure that it would happen.

Q What did your commanders tell you about their impressions on whether the -- you know, the instability in the Pakistan government? What impact is that having on operations, your forces, in terms of stemming the flow from the sanctuaries in the FATA and also command and control or coordination with the Pakistan military? Are those -- is that suffering because of the instability in the Pak government?

GEN. CONWAY: Well, my commanders, because of where they're focused, are not much in contact with Pakistan counterparts, first of all, Jim. But I think we believe -- I think the Pakistanis believe based on what you see with regard to their recent military maneuvers into the FATA that there are people there that represent a danger to Pakistan and to coalition forces in Afghanistan. That's long been an ungoverned area. I think we're all concerned that if it's not managed -- it must be managed by the Pakistanis -- it's on their side of the border -- if it's not managed that you could see attacks against other parts of Pakistan and certainly attacks into Afghanistan -- training and staging and recruiting all taking place up in there -- and all those things are dangerous really to both nations, not to mention the fact that there could be planning taking place up there for strikes elsewhere in western Europe or even the United States. So I think it is a real threat, one that the president or prime ministers of both nations realize and one now that happily Pakistan is taking some steps to remove.

Q (Off mike) -- did you -- did your trip up heighten your concern, you know, just from what you heard from a large perspective from a number of leaders? Did you walk away from the region saying oh, geez, this has gotten worse than --

GEN. CONWAY: I don't think more so. I mean, I think we've always appreciated that it's difficult. We had a dinner recently with the British ChoD in town and we talked about the strategic aspects of things and we came to an agreement -- Pakistan is a hard nut to crack and it's probably not one that we, coalition forces, are going to be able to solve.

It's going to require involvement on the part of the Pakistanis to settle the problem that's taking place on their sovereign soil. I don't know, to get at the essence of your question though, that I had a level of concern that was enhanced because we've always been concerned that drug production and the money associated with that in close proximity to safe haven are two major elements of a long-term insurgency and both those things need to be solved.

Q And after your visit how do you assess the current strength and ability threat from both the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan, and then ultimately how many Marines do you think you would like to put into Afghanistan?

GEN. CONWAY: Well, the threat is growing. I mean, if you simply chart year to year since about 2004 -- I mean, I think there was once a time when we thought that it was diminishing and weren't ready to put a bow on it but it was looking pretty good in Afghanistan. Well, that's changed over time and since about 2004 if you simply plot the attacks the threat is increasing, the numbers of attacks are increasing, the casualties are obviously increasing for the coalition forces associated with that. I wouldn't want to put a number on the number of Marines in Afghanistan. We will provide the Marines necessary to win this fight, hopefully sooner than later. We would want to see those Marines employed as an Air-Ground Task Force, given their own sector of ground and able to execute the counter insurgency methods and tactics that we found successful in Iraq.