

that the Marine Corps would want to provide the four-star commander in ISAF. You know, we have two four-stars in the Marine Corps and I don't have a job for the guy once he, you know, once he left out there. So it's not something that we were vying for or even interested in at the time nor are we interested in it now necessarily. I just want to see the corps applied to its best use, whatever the nation might need.

Q But just as follow-up -- what you just laid out, are you making a push for that now because we're only about four months in -- ahead of a new administration?

GEN. CONWAY: Well, no. I mean, we continue to say that there is a window of opportunity here that the commander in Afghanistan is appealing to our military leadership for additional forces, and that when those additional forces are sent it looks a lot like a Marine mission. I would add, though, sort of, I think, putting the secretary's comments in perspective, when you throw the lever to decide to put more forces into a place like Afghanistan it is three or four months before it actually happens, okay -- four or five months maybe is not overstating the case -- because you've got to move equipment in. You've got to get your troops trained and ready to do those things to a degree. So there is a delay in sort of the flash to bang effect here that must be realized and in part I think that was maybe what the secretary was thinking as well.

Q A lot has been made of the -- (inaudible) -- of command there in Afghanistan. What's your assessment talking to your guys about how much to a degree it hinders that operation? Is it -- (inaudible) -- or is it fundamental to the problems we've seen there?

GEN. CONWAY: It's neither. It's learning the system and coming to grips with how a NATO-coalition force operates where you have several people essentially on the same ground. There is a -- an RC South commander who is a Canadian two-star. There are Afghan forces who operate in the area and the commander would say, I don't remember ceding this terrain over to anybody. You've got special forces that sort of, you know, don't have an assigned area and are operating throughout the region and that includes in some cases our own Special Forces. So you got to be careful in an environment like that that you don't have blue on blue and that some of these bombs we've talked about don't wind up impacting, you know, your own forces.

So there's a right way and a wrong way to go about. Mainly, it comes into calling for support and our people have learned that over time. It enhances things again when you have the Marine Air-Ground Task Force at work and you have bona fide air controllers who are pilots who are recognized by all authorities up and down what might be a veto chain. So our people are comfortable with it. It is a little more difficult to assimilate than you might be in a pure environment but it's workable and we're making it function. In the back there, sir.

Q General, General McKiernan said about a month ago that he did not have the authority to target drug -- opium trafficking operations in Afghanistan except in the context of going after -- targeting Taliban forces. Would additional forces in Afghanistan have a great impact -- have much of an impact without that kind of authority?

GEN. CONWAY: Well, I think that's a problem as I intimated earlier that has to be solved. My personal belief, and I think General McKiernan would agree with this, is that it should be solved through Afghan means. To have Western or coalition forces, let's say, coming in and taking aboard that issue has the potential to create enemy and that's certainly not what we want to do. A government program that takes advantage of alternative crops and causes its people to understand that there's a law that must be followed -- those types of things I think are much better coming out of the Karzai government.

So I think there is constant pressure on the part of the military to make the government aware of the fact that these are moneys that are coming out that are helping to resource the Taliban and the bad guys and it needs to be halted. But again, I think even General McKiernan would agree that it needs to be an Afghan solution. Not that we can't help, but it needs to be Afghan driven.

Q If I could just follow up on that specifically, does the government actually have the capacity to do any of that?

GEN. CONWAY: I think so. Increasingly, you know, the report from our guys is that the Afghans are fighters