

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH COL. JEFF HAYNES, USMC, FORMER COMMANDING OFFICER, REGIONAL CORPS ADVISORY COMMAND-CENTRAL, 201ST CORPS, AFGHAN NATIONAL ARMY VIA TELECONFERENCE TIME: 8:30 A.M. EST DATE: TUESDAY, DECEMBER 9, 2008

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CHARLES "JACK" HOLT (chief, New Media Operations, Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): With us on the Bloggers Roundtable today we've got Colonel Jeff Haynes, who is the -- actually, I guess I should introduce you as the former commanding officer of Regional Corps Advisory Command-Central, the 201st Corps, Afghan National Army, from Afghanistan, just recently left, and have kind of -- we didn't get a chance to catch up with you before you left country, so let's take the opportunity to do that now. You've got some things you want to talk about.

So, Colonel Haynes, the floor is yours.

COL. HAYNES: Okay, everybody. Thanks for having me on tonight. Hopefully, everyone was able to read the one-pager I sent out as far as topics for tonight. We'd like to describe the RCAC very briefly for those who don't understand. It is a -- about a 750-man or service-member organization from five NATO countries. And basically, it does the mentoring for all of 201st Corps, which is basically RC East, and that is Kabul province, Wardak, Lowgar, Kapisa, Parvan, Panjshir, Nangarhar, Kunar, Nuristan and Laghman.

And I was in command of that organization and I had a staff of about 25 Marines plus several National Guard and Navy and Army personnel. In addition to commanding the organization that did all the mentoring, we mentored the corps staff, and my counterpart was the 201st Corps commanding general.

Coming out of this tour, I have several -- several observations. First, I think we seem to be fixated, as a country, on getting more U.S. troops into Afghanistan, which is certainly a good thing. But I think another question that needs to be asked is what is the ANA doing for us with the fight? How well are we and the ANA are leveraging the strengths and mitigating the weaknesses of the ANA? And are we relying too much on U.S. and coalition forces to do the heavy lifting in the COIN fight?

I do not think we're doing enough with the ANA. We're not -- we're demanding enough out of the Afghan National Army, considering the investment we put into them. In some cases, we hold them back. In other cases, I think we need to be kicking them in the tail and getting them moving.

One thing I wanted to kind of throw out on the table -- next -- more importantly, this being a counterinsurgency fight, you know, you have several lines of operation: security, governance, information, economic development. And I think we lack a holistic vision and we don't synergize our resources, being money from USAID or activities of different NGOs or security forces built on the Afghan and coalition side.

We don't -- I don't believe we synergize those resources and those activities and efforts well enough to make a lasting, enduring difference in the areas outside of Kabul, 99 percent of the country. Sometimes I think we're a little bit too focused on the urban areas, but this is a rural counterinsurgency, insurgency. It derives its strength from a number of places, but some of that strength comes from the population in the hinterlands. And we need to energize these resources -- I'm talking about developmental resources, our COIN enablers, as I like to call them -- to permanently isolate the population -- or the insurgent from the population.

And further, I have nine observations I list in the word document that hopefully all of you -- you all saw before coming on tonight or, I guess, this morning, for you guys. And I won't read all of those, but those are the things that we can talk about through our -- throughout our conversation here.

But basically, I think, in a nutshell, we need to be a little bit more thoughtful in the way we're fighting this war and focus more on the population, less on the enemy. We need to synergize resources for a permanent transformation of the environment to permanently isolate the insurgent from the population. And at the end of the day, if we could transform chosen valleys -- and we -- in the 201st Corps, we chose Tagab Valley in Kapisa province to start this transformation process.

If we could transform strategically our well-picked valleys, I think we could start to transform the environment and turn this fight around.

That's all I have for an opening statement.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Well, thank you very much.

Andrew, you were first on line. Why don't you get us started?

Q Great. Colonel, Andrew Lubin from U.S. Naval Institute's magazine Proceedings. Thanks for joining us again.

Sir, yesterday there was the -- in The Wall Street Journal -- big article, and to summarize it, it sounds like they want the coalition force to pull back around Kabul and do a hedgehog. That can't be an effective long-term strategy.

But your Kapisa province and Tagab strategy -- you'd be a blocking force. Why aren't people putting more effort into operations such as what you're doing? What -- and what do you hear back from the General Cones, McKiernans and the upper-level officers on this?

COL. HAYNES: Well, being that article just came out, and I'm out of country -- I'm back on Okinawa now -- certainly haven't heard much from them. But I do not believe at all that we should bring in forces to Kabul. I think that's a mistake. It's obviously a decision well above my pay grade.

But that's one thing the Northern Alliance and other forces throughout Afghanistan history has called whatever government was in power to do, is to pull forces into Kabul, and then you leave the rural hinterlands open to the insurgents. And this being a rural insurgency, you need to be out in the countryside, again, isolating the population from the insurgent and protecting that population, keeping the insurgent from getting strength and support from the population. So bringing in forces to Kabul -- I do not think that is a good idea at all.

Now, approaches to Kabul, like what we're doing in Tagab province, that route -- they call it MSR Vermont -- runs north-south through Tagab and Kapisa province, Tagab district. By transforming that valley, you're severing one of the major routes that runs east and west and, you know, from east to west from Pakistan to Kabul -- you're severing that route by developing the Tagab Valley. And I think that provides you protection for Kabul by fighting them not necessarily -- deep would be inside of Pakistan, on the Pak border, but fighting them -- more or less middle -- you know, halfway between the border -- in this case, the Kunar province area. And Kabul halfway would -- you know, you could call it Tagab about halfway. So fight them in the middle and -- instead of fighting them in the city itself.

Q Guys, can I follow up on this? There's only a few of us.

Then could you talk to us about Golden Spike? Because that was just coming on right before I left. That would be a relative success story about keeping them out of Kabul and fighting them on, you know, out -- 50 miles out.

COL. HAYNES: Yeah, Golden Spike was an operation. And when I talk about Kapisa and Golden Spike and Tagab, I'm talking about ANA -- an ANA campaign that was conceived, planned and executed by the ANA without any assistance other than ETTs and the RCAC and my staff. And the execution of Golden Spike was the culmination of the first major phase of the (Naghlu ?) campaign -- not to give you too many place names.

Essentially, Golden Spike was -- consisted of a kandak, about a 650-man battalion-size force, moving from central Kapisa or northern Tagab, and moving south and linking up with another kandak that came from the south. And basically, we connected the dots between the (Naghlu ?) reservoir and the northern portion of Tagab district, and conducted a link-up operation.

And part of this operation involved a lot of CMO activities. We did HA drops, we did MEDCAPS, did shuras with the population. The ANA were out -- the ANA general officers and religious officer and mullah were out talking with the population and talking about further developmental opportunities that are only arising for Tagab.

And by doing so, you're demonstrating to the population that the Afghan government does care about them and are willing to -- the government is willing to invest in those people. And in turn, those people are now turning in IEDs, and tell us where the IEDs are. They're calling the brigade commander and kandak commander on cell phones and telling them where insurgents are located.

So it really is -- Golden Spike was really a true success story. And the neat thing is that none of the coalition forces would go down in southern Tagab, because it was supposedly ruled by the bad guys and it was supposedly too dangerous. So the ANA said, "No, not going to happen on my watch," and 201st Corps went in there, and not only went in there, but they -- they cleared the

entire route and conducted HA ops. And they continue to conduct HA and combat ops in that -- in that strategic valley.

Q Great. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right.

Chuck?

Q Good evening, Colonel. We recently talked with one of your counterparts with 207 Corps, I believe it was. Q 205th.

Q 205?

Q 205.

Q Okay. And one of the kind of the disturbing things that he talked about was that there was an entire province in his area of operation that had no Afghan army presence. And when I -- I tried to question him about whether there were enough Afghan troops, and I don't think he -- that I communicated very well.

201 Corps, is it fully manned? Are there enough Afghan troops to begin to take and hold the ground? Or do they need more troops?

COL. HAYNES: Well, 201st is fully manned, as a corps, for a corps table of organization. But is the corps big enough to control the battlespace that they've been tasked to by the minister of defense? Absolutely not, especially given the fact that the police are not coming online as fast as we would like.

Once the ANA clears an area and starts doing some of these more soft approaches, with HA and CMO, we need to be able to backfill areas that the army has cleared with police. And we just can't do that right now. And we were screaming for police in Tagab, as the ANA would go through there and make things right.

The ANA does not have enough depth to just sit there and hold ground for an extended period of time. That's ground that's already been cleared of the enemy. And we needed to backfill that with police.

So number one, my point is that the corps itself, a corps is not big enough to manage the battlespace that it's currently charged with. And number two, if we had police to backfill, in some of the areas where the corps is operating now, that would help mitigate the lack of force out there.

Now, certainly General Cone and the leaders in Afghanistan recognize this. And they're working through an accelerated program to grow the Afghan army. I believe it's 134,000, is their target. And that's great news, as long as we do it right.

My concern is that we do not build too many more headquarters, that we just make larger companies and larger kandaks, because there's a leadership shortage of good officers in the ANA. There's a shortage of competent, non-corrupt, dedicated officers in the ANA.

Now, there's a lot of great officers. There's just not enough of them to start building more kandaks and more brigades. So as part of this expansion plan, the Afghan army is going to have to figure out how to select and develop leaders for these kandaks, companies and brigades.

Q And a quick follow-up: Your counterpart with 205 talked about how they were working on independent logistics and independent air support. How is 201 doing with those type of necessary but kind of advanced military operations? COL. HAYNES: Yeah. Let me tell you, July, late-July or early-August, we did what we were told was the first ANA heliborne assault in ANA helicopters.

Now, certainly we've had 201st Corps and U.S. Army 47s and Black Hawks. But we put ANA soldiers in Mi-17s, right out of Pul-e-Charkhi; 201st Corps.

We used 3rd Brigade troops and put them up -- (inaudible) -- in Southern Parwan. And that is significant, because it was summer, so that the temperatures were in the 90s.

And the altitudes are in excess of 8,000 feet, and if you know anything about aviation, you know that's quite a strain --

Q That's real thin air.

COL. HAYNES: -- (inaudible) -- helicopter. And it has a lot to do with -- (inaudible) -- altitude and the performance of the aircraft. And they've done very well when given the opportunity to work with the Afghan airframes. And you know, of course, my 2nd Brigade guys out there with the 173rd during the summer did a lot of air assault ops, but I don't necessarily count those, because those are heavily mentored and -- with U.S. Army airframes.

But to answer your question, the ANA has come a long way in using their own helicopters. We just couldn't get enough rotor time in those ANA helicopters. I actually personally flew in ANA air quite a bit in those Mi-17s, the ones that have -- built by the Czech Republic. They're very reliable, a great airframe for that environment.

You also talked about logistics. I'll tell you, in extreme eastern Kabul province, Sarobi district -- I wish we had a way of having a map up that we could all see, but if you know where Sarobi is -- and just on the northern side of Sarobi is Naghlu Reservoir, and then you get into Kapisa province.

Third Brigade, very, very well-led brigade that by -- General Zamrai (ph), conducted -- like we talked about Golden Spike, and what was significant about that was the logistical demands that were put on the ANA. Not only did we have 113s out there, mechanized vehicles; we had all the HA and CMO activities we were conducted that -- conducting that are very intensive on the logistics side. Transportation -- (audio break) -- ground transportation and lift and that type of thing. And they did very, very well conducting those operations.

Also, 1st Brigade in Wardak and Lowgar have built a lot of their own positions with their own logistics, and engineers have the equipment. And the 1st Brigade along Highway 1 in Wardak province -- they were doing that throughout the summer.

So progress is being made. I'll also tell you that in Tagab province the ANA is building their own FOBs, and that's bullet number eight, about the

expeditionary FOB concept. Instead of waiting on the standard process -- it takes about an hour -- excuse me, a year -- to build a camp -- these guys in the ANA figured out how we could break the code and do it in about a couple months, as long as we could get the contracts lined up for things like gravel and HESCOs.

But out in Tagab we ordered them some containers, shipping containers, and made those into living quarters. They made them into living quarters. They moved them out there. They built their own berms with their own heavy equipment. And they have their own OPs they've built out of just rocks and sandbags and a lot of 'dozer work, and they're getting after it on their own.

Now that's -- some of that's engineering, but of course the logistics tail to support the engineering effort is pretty significant.

So things are -- things were going well when I left, and the guys just sent me a few pictures a couple days ago. And they're out there at the 4/2 -- (inaudible word) -- in that new FOB in Tagab.

Q Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right, Troy.

Q All right. It's a good time as any. Welcome back, sir. It's good to talk to you again. I'm glad you got back to your home station there safe. This is Troy Steward from Bouhammer.com.

First question: Corruption is a root problem to the ANA's ability to progress. You've already mentioned it a few times and you know it's been going on forever. In what ways can we as a coalition force eliminate this significant piece of their culture, that's ingrained in their culture? What ways have you tried that were successful?

COL. HAYNES: Well, that's a -- that's a tough one. I personally talked to General Wardak -- not Minister Wardak, but General Wardak at 201st Corps. And he was very concerned about corruption. He led by example in eliminating corruption whenever he was alerted to it and could prove it.

I had what I called red lines, anything to anyone's ammo, weapons and the like -- or explosives -- or -- we were going go to all-stop and investigate that. And in some cases -- in one case, in fact, early on, I had to threaten to pull an ETT off of a kandak because the corruption was just absolutely, just, you know, beyond comprehension. And they were putting my guys in danger. And the ANA did the right thing and they investigated the corruption. They found the -- certain soldiers to be guilty. And they relieved a kandak commander. And it was a great news story, not because we had to fire somebody, but because they replaced a substandard commander with a very, very good commander. And that's 2/2 Kandak up in extreme northern Kunar and Nuristan. And that kandak are doing great things right now still.

But there is a lot of corruption. We have other places, due to ethnic ties, that quite frankly some folks need to go away and they weren't made to go away, because they were that well-connected. And it is -- it is -- it is a problem, absolutely. It is by no means everywhere. It's not in every unit. But in limited cases it's very bad and it needs to be dealt with. And I don't -- I do not know how to deal with it at the higher levels. I know some of the leadership of 201st Corps went up to MOD and tried to get some things resolved

and they couldn't, due to a variety of reasons. But what worked for us, though, at the lower levels was, when we knew of corruption, we identified it without emotion, just the facts. And we urged the Afghans to take it on as an Afghan problem and solve it themselves, and 90 percent of the time, and especially when they were allowed to, they did.

Q Okay. Was your -- (inaudible) -- did your corps commander -- (inaudible) -- for kandak commanders or brigade commanders to fire or relieve the ANA commanders at any level?

COL. HAYNES: You know, on paper, supposedly they're allowed to relieve people, but it was very, very difficult for the corps commander to relieve the kandak commander, and impossible for a corps commander -- at least during my time and with the 201st -- for a corps commander to relieve a commander senior to a kandak commander.

Q All right. It hasn't changed much, then.

Okay, thank you, sir.

MR. HOLT: All right. And Greg.

Q Yeah. Colonel, I was wondering -- since we're on the topic of corruption here, I'd just be curious. And there are a couple kinds of corruption, I guess. There's, you know, corruption out of necessity, just to survive, and then there's a different kind I think you referenced, I think. Could you just explain a little bit more, when you speak of corruption, are you talking about soldiers selling weapons, ammunition, just to get enough food, or get enough money so they can get food to their families, or are you talking higher level of corruption?

COL. HAYNES: Oh, I don't know of any cases where anybody sold a weapon so they could feed their family, because the soldiers are -- you know, they're paid better than they used to be. And a lot of fuel seems to disappear. Some of the trucks only get one to two miles to a gallon, if you know what I mean. And when we find an Afghan truck that only gets that kind of gas mileage, we take it and we put it in maintenance, and they get the message.

I don't believe it's out of necessity. I believe it's out of short-sightedness and plain criminal activity, quite frankly.

Q That's something that you can only address at the highest of levels, it sounds like, hmm?

COL. HAYNES: Yeah. I mean, there's low-end stuff going on, guys stealing from one another, but that happens in a lot of organizations. That's nothing to get too wound up about. That's a leadership issue they deal with at the lower levels. But when massive amounts of fuel are disappearing and money that was designated for food purchases out in the eastern zone disappears, then we got some problems. And we've been addressing that.

Q In the recent news reports someone referenced earlier that part of this incoming brigade is going to be going to Wardak and Lowgar provinces because of the deteriorating security situation there. And since you've got some on-the-ground experience, could you speak about what's happened over the past year or so? How bad are things getting in that area?

COL. HAYNES: We know that the ANA was directed, presidential priority, to provide security to Highway 1, and we all know how important that is. And the 1st Brigade did a fine job of getting out there with the few forces they had, and they (were a ?) kandak, which really hurt them, with the few forces they had, on the route -- on Highway 1 and the route that runs north-south through Lowgar province, and put out positions and built their own fighting positions with their engineering capacity they have.

And they made a difference. They cut back on a lot of the IEDs we were seeing in the middle of the summer, and a lot of the attacks were reduced significantly -- I can't give you any percentages off the top of my head, but significantly reduced later into the fall.

So the road got a little bit safer, got somewhat safer. But -- and the reports I'm reading is, you know, some places that the Taliban are -- if you believe what you read in the open press, are -- they own the battlespace out there, in some cases, and that's certainly unacceptable. And our senior leaders recognize that, and I guess that's why they're putting the additional troops into Wardak and Lowgar. I mean, that's going to be a tough place. There's some valleys out there, particularly a valley that connects Highway 1 into -- over to Lowgar province. That's going to be a tough fight in there.

But it's -- I think certainly it's the right thing to do to get more capable U.S. forces in there, into Wardak and Lowgar, to clean things up. And then hopefully by then we'll have more of the ANA deployed out there, and they can assume a larger role in the fight.

And part of it, quite frankly, is, again, getting those police up. If we can get the police protecting the highway and get kandaks off the highway and out into the hinterlands, where the Taliban are held up, and getting there and clear out some of those feeder valleys, I think we'd be that much better off for it -- get the army doing army things and the police doing police things.

Q Who's doing the MP training mission? Is that ISAF, or has the U.S. taken that over?

COL. HAYNES: The U.S. is doing that through the PMTs.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right. Got a few minutes left here. Anybody -- any follow-up questions?

Q I got one. Colonel, Andrew again. Can you talk to us about the economics, what's happening in Tagab Valley? Small business programs and the microloans -- have the PRTs done anything, or is this coming from your ETTs and the ANA's?

COL. HAYNES: Well, the PRT for that area is located up at Bagram, and they -- just geographically, it's easier for them to get to northern Kapisa, and the location of the corps headquarters and the RCAC are located at Policharki. It's certainly easier for us to -- now that we've -- (inaudible) -- route to enter from the south and to get into Tagab. And what we've done is, we've started in ANA, PRT and 201st Corps to work some of these economic and development projects. And it's gone well. We've started with a couple pilot programs, and one being -- we've introduced saffron. We've got funding. And right before we left in October, the contractor working with the population

there in, I believe, the Camp Shuntay (ph) area in southern Tagab, planted only about 6,000 square meters of saffron, but that's a labor-intensive crop that can be fairly profitable, about -- after the second season.

We've CERPed a project that -- some projects out there for wells. We've also contracted and had NGOs teach pomegranate packaging to the population and pruning techniques that'll increase the yield of pomegranates.

And with all the traffic we have out there, the ANA, you know, working on the road, some small businesses in the form of just, you know, stands with -- selling snacks and drinks and that kind of thing -- they've popped up in the area.

So that's putting a little bit of money into the economy. And we encourage the Afghans and the Marines to purchase things from these small stands, just to engage the population every chance we get.

We're very willing and open when it comes to dealing with the population. We get out. The ETTs and the ANA are out with the population talking to them, kind of a grassroots approach to transforming that battlespace down there and taking it away from the Taliban, the HIG and the type of folks that run around in lower Tagab.

But we certainly want to listen to the population, see what their needs are, without turning it into a welfare state. We're very aware if we just start giving them stuff, they're just going to want more, more, more and not appreciate it. So whenever we provide something for them, we make them become part of the solution. If they want an irrigation well, well, we may provide the well, but they're going to dig the ditches. That type of approach.

Q Okay, great. Thanks.

MR. HOLT: Okay.

COL. HAYNES: And it's working well.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Okay. Anything else?

(Cross talk.)

Q I have a quick follow-up. What's it going to take on this -- the military set a goal of increasing the size of the ANA, almost doubling the size of the ANA. What's it going to take to make that happen, to turn that into the competent force that we'd hope it would become?

COL. HAYNES: Well, leadership. And leadership, to me, and what I've seen in the COIN environment, in this environment, when you have small units operating somewhat independently, if you can select good leaders, that's most of the challenge right there.

Equipment, yeah, we can give them AK-47s, you can give them an M-4. Don't really are. The leadership's got to come first. Units with the good leaders, they seem to solve their logistical problems; they seem to have less corruption; they seem to make mission. So, yeah, it's going to be more complicated, then. If you're a CSTC-A force generation guy, I mean, you're going to have a hard life working through this problem, because it is very complex, it does involve a lot of money. And the consolidated fielding concept

seems to be a win, and providing somewhat trained and equipped kandaks coming out of KMTC. They have a stop at the consolidated fielding center where they're equipped and further trained, and they get out to their corps and they're that much more capable and ready to go.

But it's going to take a lot of organization, a lot of timing and phasing of gear and equipment. But at the end of the day, if you don't have good leadership, it really doesn't matter. And certainly you're going to need good, competent, capable ETTs that are very, very aggressive and ready to get out, get after it, off the FOB, not be -- not worried about getting shot at. You have to get after it.

And that's what we've done in 201st Corps. And it hasn't been free. I mean, we've taken some casualties and lost some great Americans. But that's what it's going to take to win this fight and grow this army as quick as we want to grow it.

But the other thing is -- I mean, we can have a super-capable Army and great leadership, but if we don't understand COIN and we don't connect PRT-like capabilities -- the Provincial Reconstruction Team-like capabilities to the ANA, I don't think we're going to be successful.

We're not going to be successful very quickly.

We've got to understand the COIN involves more than just chasing bad guys. And sometimes, I think our orientation is too much on the enemy and not on the population. We've got to win the population.

We've got to give the population something -- or not give, but help the population achieve something worth their fighting for. They need to be part of the solution. And if they have a level of prosperity and safety and rule of law, et cetera -- not necessarily government from Kabul; that may just be a bridge too far for a while. But if they have a standard of living and a way of life that they're ready to fight for, then I think we've won. But we're only going to achieve that by having them engaged in helping with the development, helping with the job creation, being part of the solution, just not on the sidelines as U.S. and coalition and Afghan forces run up and down these valleys.

MR. HOLT: All right. I think we had one more.

Q Yeah, this is Troy. If I could ask one more --

MR. HOLT: Okay, go ahead.

Q Sir, is -- this kind of tailspins or tails on to the last question. Is developing and enforcing an Afghan uniform code of military justice -- in your opinion -- is it crucial for the Afghan army to become a disciplined fighting force?

COL. HAYNES: They need some kind of disciplinary process. If it's UCMJ -- you know, they need some -- they do need some type of UCMJ, I think. Does it have to be just like ours? No. It has to be something that works within their culture. But there does have to be some sense of accountability in the Afghan army. And right now, consequences for behavior, good or bad, just doesn't seem to be there, doesn't seem to be as timely or as dramatic, I guess, as it needs to be.

Q Which leads to -- which leads to corruption, because there's no -
- there's no accountability and no enforcement, and then leads to soldiers not
really caring about their country, just there for a paycheck.

COL. HAYNES: Yeah. Left unchecked, certainly. MR. HOLT: All right,
sir. Well, we're about out of time, here. Any closing thoughts, Colonel?

COL. HAYNES: Yeah. Again, I just want to emphasize the Afghan
National Army needs the tools to win in the COIN -- in the COIN fight. And
that's -- a lot of that's setting conditions for economic development.

And the Afghan army -- National Army also needs to be competent enough
and given the opportunity to own the battlespace. When they own battlespace,
they own the problem, they do very, very well. If we over-partner and we do
everything with the U.S. Army and other forces, the Afghan army is not going to
develop. They're going to be more prone to sit on the sidelines and watch the
coalition forces do it. And we're going to be there for a very long time with a
whole lot of Americans.

MR. HOLT: All right, sir. Thank you very much for joining us today.
And we do appreciate it. And well, hopefully, we can -- we can speak again,
perhaps on your new mission.

COL. HAYNES: Okay.

MR. HOLT: All right. Thank you very much.

Q Hey, Colonel, thanks for your time tonight.

Q Thank you.

Q Thanks very much. Bye.

END.