



DEPARTMENT OF THE NAVY
HEADQUARTERS UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
3000 MARINE CORPS PENTAGON
WASHINGTON, DC 20350-3000

30 Sep 13

MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Subj: ACCOUNTABILITY DETERMINATION OF U.S. COMMANDERS FOR THE 14-15
SEPTEMBER 2012 ATTACK ON THE CAMP BASTION, LEATHERNECK, AND
SHORABAK (BLS) COMPLEX, HELMAND PROVINCE, AFGHANISTAN

1. Investigative History:

The insurgent attack at Camp Bastion on 14-15 September 2012 was a tragic event in an otherwise highly successful combat deployment by the Marines, Sailors, and coalition partners of I Marine Expeditionary Force (Forward) (I MEF (FWD)). The insurgent attack was the subject of several investigations by the operational chain of command. The Commander, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), forwarded these investigations to me "for a determination of whether adverse action [was] appropriate for US elements in command at Camp Bastion during the event." I personally conducted a thorough review of these investigations and directed four of my most senior, combat-experienced general officers to review these materials as well. Following my review, I requested the Commander, U.S. Central Command (USCENTCOM), investigate further, specifically examining the issue of accountability. The subject investigation is the result of that request.

2. Accountability Determination:

The Commander, USCENTCOM, approved the investigation findings that MajGen Gurganus and MajGen Sturdevant did not "take adequate force protection measures within the range of responses proportionate to [the] threat." I concur. More specifically, I believe that MajGen Gurganus and MajGen Sturdevant did not exercise the level of judgment expected of commanders of their grade and experience in their decisions related to oversight of a layered, integrated, defense-in-depth force protection plan.

3. Accountability Standard:

I have consistently held that commandership is a sacred responsibility. Commanders bear great authority and assume equally great responsibility for the performance of their commands. In combat or in peace, our Commanding Officers must meet a high standard of performance in the exercise of this accrued judgment, insight, and intellect; this standard is even higher for our General Officers. I share Secretary Cohen's views regarding the Khobar Towers tragedy where he stated: "A General Officer must demonstrate judgment, awareness, and resourcefulness well beyond that expected of more junior, less seasoned officers. Such an officer should, moreover,

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display insight capable of deep and broad assessment of all the varied threats arrayed against his command." As commanders, we make assessments, calculate risk, and take decisive action. In combat those tasks become exponentially more difficult, the information more imperfect, the risks more numerous and lethal, and the consequences of those decisions more perilous.

Combat operations, by their nature, contain inherent risks that cannot be fully mitigated. I do not expect my commanders to be perfect, and I do not expect them to make perfect decisions all of the time. Commanders have standard operating procedures; tactics, techniques, and procedures; and doctrine for guidance. However, in a dynamic combat environment, the commander will always face much uncertainty. As a Marine Corps, we intuitively focus on force projection...taking the fight to the enemy. Finding the precise balance between force projection and force protection lies with the subjective judgment ultimately reserved for those bestowed with command. The fog of war, the uncertain risks of combat, and the actions of a determined foe do not relieve a commander of the responsibility for decisions that a reasonable, prudent commander of the same grade and experience would have made under similar circumstances.

4. A Complex and Dynamic Environment:

As the Regional Command (Southwest) (RC (SW)) and I MEF (FWD) Commander, MajGen Gurganus's focus was broad, and his mission was complex. He and his Marines faced an evolving and determined enemy in places like Marjah, Kajaki, and Musa Qal'ah. MajGen Gurganus's area of responsibility spanned approximately 36,000 square miles and encompassed 196 combat outposts and forward operating bases within 19 districts. Our Corps excelled on this complex battlefield under MajGen Gurganus' leadership, despite the tragedy on 14-15 September 2012. We will always mourn the loss of Lieutenant Colonel Raible and Sergeant Atwell and honor their heroic sacrifice. The Marines and Sailors of I MEF (FWD) displayed the courage and selflessness our Nation expects from those serving in its defense. The unfailing courage and steadfastness of I MEF (FWD) during this deployment led to a more capable Afghan National Security Force, an increase in Afghan self-governance, a more self-reliant Afghan population, and greater strides in independence within Helmand and Nimroz Provinces.

While fighting a dynamic insurgency threat in both of these provinces, MajGen Gurganus and MajGen Sturdevant faced significant challenges. Beyond their control, RC(SW) reduced forces from more than 17,000 to just over 7,000 personnel in a period of six months. Concurrent with this force drawdown, higher headquarters denied MajGen Gurganus's request for a personnel increase for force protection around the Bastion-Leatherneck-Shorabak (BLS) complex. Faced with a resulting 60% personnel drawdown, each commander was forced to balance

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the ever-present and continuing mission of force projection against force protection requirements. In doing so, each commander had to consider enemy intelligence assessments, Afghan governance and force development, available physical and personnel resources, and estimates of the coalition partners' ability to handle force protection responsibilities.

Furthermore, coming into command at RC(SW), MajGen Gurganus inherited what the USCENTCOM investigation termed a "sub-optimal" force protection command and control (C2) structure. This C2 structure, the product of a long-standing Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between U.S. and UK higher headquarters, placed impediments upon his ability to achieve a fully integrated defense of the BLS Complex. In general, the MOU created C2 relationships contrary to the warfighting principles of simplicity and unity of effort, and precluded the assignment of a single commander responsible for overall force protection. Although MajGen Gurganus and his staff identified the deficiencies in this C2 structure and petitioned higher headquarters to amend it prior to the attack of 14-15 September 2012, Commander, ISAF directed RC (SW) to "work on a supported/supporting relationship instead."

5. Assignment of Accountability:

While I am mindful of the degree of difficulty RC(SW) faced in accomplishing a demanding combat mission with a rapidly declining force, my duty requires me to remain true to the timeless axioms relating to command responsibility and accountability. Responsibility and accountability are the sacred tenets of commandership.

As the RC(SW) Commander, MajGen Gurganus bore ultimate accountability for the lives and the equipment under his charge. While he worked to accomplish a challenging mission in the Helmand and Nimroz Provinces, MajGen Gurganus made an error in judgment when conducting his risk analysis regarding the requirements to achieve a unified force protection posture within the BLS Complex. Ultimately, MajGen Gurganus and his staff were doctrinally responsible for executing a layered, integrated, defense-in-depth force protection plan. While he addressed many aspects of these requirements with his higher headquarters, and was often turned down, in the end, I believe he could and should have done more.

MajGen Sturdevant did not adequately assess the force protection situation at Bastion Airfield and failed to devote the resources to actively participate in a layered, integrated, defense-in-depth force protection plan. He and his staff unreasonably minimized the force protection threats which, in turn, exposed his command to unnecessary risk. On final analysis, 3d MAW (FWD), a tenant on the UK's Bastion Airfield, remained responsible for assessing force protection

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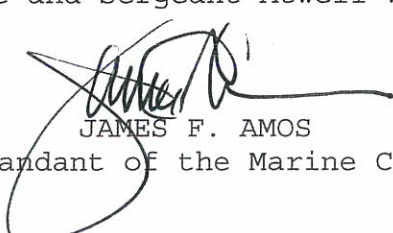
vulnerabilities and mitigating them with organic security assets. Marines can never place complete reliance for their own safety in the hands of another force. His failures to have an effective defense plan before the attack, to fully engage with coalition partners in the important force protection decision-making process, and to integrate his unit into the overall self-defense posture aboard Camp Bastion contravened the trust and confidence I had in him as a commander.

I believe MajGen Gurganus and MajGen Sturdevant are accountable for their force protection decisions at Camp Bastion at the time of the attack. As such, I have recommended to the Secretary of the Navy that the President rescind MajGen Gurganus's nomination for promotion to the grade of Lieutenant General, and I have requested his retirement. In addition, I have personally counseled MajGen Sturdevant and recommended to the Secretary of the Navy that he issue a Secretarial letter of censure to MajGen Sturdevant. I have also requested the retirement of MajGen Sturdevant. This action effectively ends the promising careers of two of our General Officers.

6. Conclusion:

Commanders must continue to take the fight to our nation's enemies while staying personally engaged with the force protection requirements of their particular combat environment. This balance of force projection versus force protection is especially difficult in coalition operations, a drawdown or redistribution of forces, or in distributed operations. Commanders must not allow their mechanical staff processes to filter out critical information and decisions that require their personal attention and considered judgment. In the final analysis, every Marine is a rifleman and every Marine Commander must properly position his command and his Marines to both successfully accomplish the mission and defend itself in any clime and place.

Our Marines have a right to demand that in return for their loyalty, selfless sacrifice, and brave service, the commanders in whom the Nation has entrusted its sons and daughters will take all appropriate steps to ensure their safety and well-being. A commander's actions must honor this right and justify our Marines' enduring faith. We owe this duty to the courageous Marines like Lieutenant Colonel Raible and Sergeant Atwell who so faithfully served our Corps.



JAMES F. AMOS

Commandant of the Marine Corps

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