

## MEMORANDUM FOR THE RECORD

Interviewee: **General Austin, Commander CJTF-180**  
Date: October 23, 2003  
Location: Coalition Joint Task Force (CJTF)-180 Headquarters, Bagram Afghanistan  
Participants: Zelikow, Hurley, Scheid, Cors  
Drafted by: Kevin Scheid  
Reviewed by: Philip Zelikow  
Additional Info:

General Austin welcomed the delegation to the base and provided an overview of operations and conditions. He indicated that he had recently returned from Iraq and that it has many more soldiers than the 12,000 in Afghanistan, yet Iraq is roughly the same size. He was proud of the way the US forces were working together in the theatre indicating that the US military has come a long way in the past 7 to 10 years.

He is working the Al Qai'da threat in the region, working narcotics threat (this will be a bumper crop year for poppy), and remnants of the Taliban army. In short - working the two toughest targets, CT and CN, while trying to conduct nation building. One of the obstacles is the Afghan militia forces (AMF). They work generally for the provincial governors. In one instance, Ismail Khan has nearly 4,000 troops. While not a formal army or a military challenge, they are a problem for stability.

The Pakistani border region is another challenge. What we consider a border is meaningless to the tribes in the area. The way he is trying to deal with this is through the formal Tripartite Commission of the US, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Gen. Austin is the US representative to this commission. There is a military subcommittee that is held at the "06" level among the three parties. The impression left with us was that this is a slow process with very little to show for itself at this point.

General Austin reflected some frustration with his lack of detailed information about the border region. For example, there was a recent meeting in Augarot (spelling?) "...with lots of Arabs," but the General had no insight into what had happened there and why. The Pakistanis provided nothing. What he knows he has learned from the open press. He believes that ultimately the US border strategy should be to focus on the centers of influence, not the entire stretch of border.

In regards to the press, Gen. Austin believes that the press has exaggerated recent security concerns in the country. He cited a recent incident where the press reported 100 Taliban fought with the local police in a gun fight. He asked his officer stationed there and nothing had happened. Often tribal fights get misinterpreted as Taliban attacks, as well. While these are dangerous, they don't reflect the terrorist threat in the provinces.

To work the border, Gen. Austin believes he needs more Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) to cover the area. He needs better and more HUMINT in the areas. The heavy platforms that he might otherwise draw upon for this mission are being used for Iraq right now. Further, he could use more short take off and landing capability, or STOL in the border region and the northwest provinces.

There have been more instances of contact in the past six months, but they're hitting them hard.