

**Transcript from background interview with Marl Boal and Katherine Bigelow
(15 Jul 2011)**

Mike Vickers – MV
Phil Strub – PS

Mark Boal – MB
Bob Mehal – BM

Katherine Bigelow – KB

MB – Katherine is going to somehow figure out how to turn my disorganized screenplay into a terrific movie – and a great recreation of the events

So since we last talked, just to catch you up, to speak, on what I have been doing. I took your guidance and spoke to the WH and had a good meeting with Brennan and McDonough and plan to follow up with them; and they were forward leaning and interested in sharing their point of view; command and control; so that was great, so thank you.

I met with Acting Director Morrell today at Langley and continued to talk to various people in the IC.

MV- This was a follow-up? You've met with him before – correct?

MB- Yes correct; this was a follow-up.

MB – So intel stuff is going great and pretty well along on that, before I talked with you; but let's say between 2nd and 3^d base on that. The WH stuff, I think is in good shape as well, so the last leg of the stool is obviously DoD. So that's what, hopefully we can talk about some of that here, but I wanted to give you sort of inside baseball.

One of the things we had talked about was eventually I will be going, hopefully going, down to SOCOM and talking to somebody down there – maybe McRaven or whoever-still on the horizon.

MV- I have some news for you on that front. So, and have you talked to Sec Panetta – as the Director, though.

MB- Yes.

MV- I know he is very interested in supporting.

MB- We're going to have dinner at some point, but I didn't want to interrupt - travel plan to Afghanistan.

BM- Part of that discussion was from the last movie.

MV- I'm sorry, what?

BM- Part of those discussions, were in reference to the movie they were planning on making.

MV- Yes, okay; but I know he is interested and supportive.

MV- So from the DoD point of view, here is what we can do, first off to just give you some context; the people who were involved, were very few, so to put them in categories: You had the very, very top of the Pentagon, so Secretary Gates, the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and me – initially, and that was sort of the first four and then ADM McRaven was actually number five (who becomes the Operational Commander) and then you have the cast of operators and planners. And then, the only other two DoD people, who end up getting involved from the senior point of view are my colleague the Under Secretary for Policy, Michelle Flournoy; reasonably later in the game like maybe a month or six weeks before (something like that) and then our General Council, kind of at the very end on one issue; but that's it at the senior level. And then, Adm Olson, toward the very, very end, the SOCOM Commander, Admiral McRaven's Boss, and then the rest are really planners or operators. And that, just to give you the context.

MB- We've talked about this before, because I brought it up at dinner with a few Army Generals that I know and said Gen Casey, give me some stuff on this and he said I didn't know (shit) and I said to Gen Corelli, common Pete tell me something and he said that's Title 10 (I believe he meant Title 50) and I didn't know anything about it.

MV- So that literally is the roadmap. So now here is what we're going to do for you, at least for now. With me, I will try to be as forthcoming as I can, but you are going to get a little bit of operational stuff but more really policy, like how did we make the decision, the risks, that kind of stuff. But then the other people that are really central to this obviously are Secretary Gates, Adm Mullen, Hoss Cartwright; in that regard, we are all kind of in the same boat if you will, but that's between you and them about them talking to you.

MB- Gates is on my short list; again...he's got a lot on his (inaudible)

MV- He did the 60 minutes thing, I know you said down the road after he is retired, and try to get him...

MB- Give the guy a break.

MV- Give the guy a break, but that's between you and him now that he is retired. What I can't promise you really is at the DoD senior level, whether I'll be it or if there will be a few others, but I wanted to give you the roadmap.

MB- Uh-huh.

MV- I've been told to do for you what Michael Morrell and others, so that's what I'm going to try to do for you tonight and others. Now on the operators side; Adm McRaven and Adm Olson do not want to

talk directly, because it's just a bad, their just concerned as commanders of the force and they're telling them all the time – don't you dare talk to anybody, that it's just a bad example if it gets out – even with all sorts of restrictions and everything.

MB- Uh-huh.

MB- I'll take (b)(3)-10 U.S.C. -130 (b),(b)(6) or someone like that.

MV- Well the basic idea is they'll make a guy available who was involved from the beginning as a planner; a SEAL Team 6 Operator and Commander.

MB- Are you talking about (b)(3)-10 U.S.C. 130(b),(b)(6)

MV- A guy name (b)(3)-10 U.S.C. 130(b),(b)(6) And so, he basically can probably give you everything you would want or would get from Adm Olson or Adm McRaven.

MB- That's dynamite - by the way.

KB- That's incredible.

MB- This is me happy.

MV- And so, he'll speak for operators and he'll speak for senior military commanders, because their all the same tribe and everything, and so you should get most of what you need from him. Now, again the reason Adm Olson and Adm McRaven didn't want to talk is this command conflict of interest. And then with (b)(3)-10 U.S.C. 130(b) the only thing we ask is that you not reveal his name in any way as a consultant, because again, it's the same thing, he shouldn't be talking out of school, this at least, this gives him one step removed and he knows what he can and can't say, but this way at least he can be as open as he can with you and it ought to meet your needs and give you lots of color.

KB- Fabulous

MB- That's dynamite.

MV- So we'll put you in touch with him or have him get in touch with you - at the end of this meeting. And whatever your schedule is we'll make that work, I just haven't had a chance to talk with him.

KB- Is he located in the Washington DC area?

MV- He's in the Washington DC area. He travels some, but when we get out of here I can try to arrange that. OK? So, that's it.

MB- Thank you very much!

KB- That's incredible

MB- You delivered.

MB- Do you have some time, I can throw a few questions at you?

MV- I do.

MB- We'll take 10-15 minutes?

MV- I could stay as much 45 minutes. I apologize for keeping you waiting.

MB- I don't want to suck up all your time, but I am greedy.

MV- But if you want to come back, but you're here, I know you traveled, so whatever, the time is yours.

MB- Just in a very general sense, there is obviously momentum coming from the agency, I'm talking about the month leading up to this raid, there is momentum coming from the agency that this seems like something that is going to be a worthwhile target to do something with, right? You have the President's stated intention to make catching OBL one of his priorities. If you look back at when you're first hearing about this and even going into Feb and Mar; and I'm asking you this because you navigated many, many Washington sort of complicated - joining of different forces. Did this feel like an inevitable outcome? I don't mean a helo borne or B2, but that something was going to be done, did it seem to you when you first heard about this that something was going to be done - was that inevitable sort of outcome or was there a moment or many moments where you felt like, God I could see this thing going either way, I could see the agency spending another six months on collection or this or another year?

MV- Sure.

MV- So when we really get the intelligence break that locates the person at this compound, which is in late August 2010, then, the first thing is that this is a huge intelligence break and biggest secret of the US government. First I'm going to try to put context into this and tell you how I come into this and how I felt about it, then, try to answer your question. You probably got this from CIA, but as all the people who worked this so hard for so many years, then they know, initially I think, wow, I'll give you my own perspective on this at this period, this is the biggest intelligence lead we've had in a decade, but at this

point it is still fundamentally an intelligence problem and an incredible secret. So through the end of 2010 basically, this is a period of okay, who do I have to tell at this point. So the President, Vice President, National Security Advisor (Brennan), McDonough, etc. but a handful of people in the White House, literally just five, six people and then, the four I talked about here in Defense, and Director Panetta is making all these decisions in consultation with the White House, you know the Secretary, the Chairman, Vice Chairman and me, and then the DNI and that's kind of it for a while. And so it's, okay this is unbelievable, it's a big secret – keep working; so that's generally people's reaction, so after the jaw dropping moment, and then a number of us have been intensively focused on this for a long time, but after we had gotten a glimpse of this guy a year earlier and then lost him. I remember specifically, vividly, at the time of that glimpse, “wholly crap we are on to something” and then “oh man we lost him.” Cause it was clear this guy might lead us to something big. But then - how we going to get him again? This mirage that popped up one time and was gone in two seconds, but now we had at least one location for a fleeting moment in time, so then 12 months later when now we got him a lot more finitely and we got him at a location or fix, then it's - my own reaction was right at the time was “ah hah” a year's work or we got lucky a year later and now we got the son-of-a-bitch and let's see where it goes and there was enough initially that there was something there, but it wasn't clear that it was actionable. So the idea, still an intelligence problem, so continue to work the intelligence problem. At least from my own perspective, yah you start to think about things, but the first thing you got to do is develop the intelligence and everybody else is pretty much in that mode. The other thing I would want to convey to you is it's extremely closely guarded, but also the pace at this point is kind of development - every month or couple of weeks or something – it's not the intense pace that comes later. So yes, there is the President's guidance, but that's still more in the back of the mind at this point, no one's decided to do anything of any kind except try to develop the intelligence picture better.

PS- Excuse me, but after the intelligence you received in Aug of last year, the group, and there was such a high degree of confidence in identification, was there a shift from this uncertainly, to more of a well now this is set, now it's a matter of the nuts and bolts of continuing to collect intelligence that would lead towards the possible action - outcome.

BM- The way you laid out the phases yesterday was really good.

MV- Again, what I would say is it's a big deal and it's an incredibly big secret, that's so closely held. I guess what I would say is that my interactions with all the people at CTC and everything was “okay,” What else have we learned? How are we moving this along? What else do we need to do - that refine the picture? But as we talk among the inner circle about what this means, it really isn't until early in the year where we start thinking - okay we need to develop options, and so then - Bob was reminding me about – the “First phase” is kind of intelligence development from the last four months of 2010. Now this is on my mind like nothing else, just speaking for me personally, but it's at a slower pace. Then, coming back from the holidays in January, I had a real sense of you know we are shifting into a new phase and we are going to develop options and so then that “Second phase” is kind of okay well now we

are pretty sure we got something here, but not sure anyone wants to do anything or that its good enough to do anything about, but let's start developing what we could do. So the way that proceeds is first a tiny little group, mostly CIA, and me, and then this one Navy Seal - at this point who is given to us by Adm McRaven, but the first step is really all just CIA. So, in January, they internally come up with five or so options, various ways we could do this, with the government's assistance, without, and various operational means, but in any event, they're very broad courses of action. You can kind of do it this way - with them - without them, but it literally is basic very broad descriptions - this sounds plausible, sort of a 50,000 foot level; and so then that takes another month of okay some of these look plausible, some maybe less so, we debate them, and think about how we want to refine them. But then we think, Panetta decides, I need to bring in Adm McRaven, and so that's roughly about mid-Feb.

MB- And that's specifically for the helo version of this?

MV- That's for his portions, but his portions are a lot of variants on a theme; so I don't want to go into real specific details, I'll leave that to the SEALs - but again you can do it with the PAKs, without, bigger force, smaller force, go in this way, go in that way, and so - but in any event a number of those would have involved him, not all the courses of action, but a number. And so the desire is to first bring him in just him and nobody else and then - okay now what we need from you is, here's how we are going to proceed, we need a planner, one guy to help us flush out a few of these with CIA, but if that then looks promising and we decide we are going down this path then we'll bring in more people to help flush it out even more. It's all kind of sketched out as I talked to him, kind of sketched out here is where we might need this thing, or this thing in the next month or two - just notionally.

MV- Then the next phase that I would describe; so that sort of takes us from Valentine's Day essentially to mid Mar; So then in mid-Mar is where you then swing into - now these phases become parallel at this point - but you go from Intelligence (keeping the big secret), to concept develop (broad course of action development) a little more refinement and then now in mid March you start a series of Presidential meetings and senior White House meetings - there's five meetings with the President between mid-Mar and the end of Apr and multiple meetings with Brennan, Morrell and me and others - Cartwright - and McRaven. And so that then becomes okay - Which options do we like better? Which paths do you start to go down? Are we going to do this sooner rather than later? Are we going to do this at all? Nobody is going to make that decision until they have to, but if we are going to do it, when do we want to be ready to do it - is it sooner rather than later, which options, is it ground or air, with the Paks, or without, so you don't rule things out, but you start to sorting more and figure okay these few I am going to develop probably heading down this path, and so there's a period of kind of initial Presidential guidance that results in, I want to do this sooner rather than later, probably unilateral, but I haven't decided to do it, but I want to keep my options open, so any plausible option I want to look at. So there is still more than one option. And so planning teams then are told to develop their things further, basically in March, the second half of March and those are presented at the White House and flushed out and refined and

refined and refined. One air option is rejected and replaced with another and then that one is carries through to the end but ultimately not decided on.

MB - At this point, again given your experience...

MV – And air meaning an airstrike...

MB – Right, I understand, meaning a B2 or more precise version. Are you, your 25,000 view, is it hey we're moving toward action here, that something is going to happen, I can't put money on is it a helo borne or the precision strike, or something, but we're moving toward something? That's what I'm trying to ...

MV – So again as you start then sort of ...

MB - Or could it have still been nothing?

MV - Well it still could have been nothing. But I guess, as I say, from the turn of the year on, where I started intensely engaging every week on concept development, because that was when the decision was made okay let's start thinking about how we're going do this. Then, from mid-Feb on, it became very, very intense; okay time to call in Adm McRaven, and we got to bring, and he doesn't know any of this stuff for six months, and so bring him up to speed, and here's what we want from you, and an intense series of White House meetings through March. So then, by mid-March when the meetings with the President start and sort of a six weeks period to get the decision and narrowing down the decision; it becomes increasingly intense and that there is now a pretty high probability we might do something, in other words we might not, we might delay, we might choose this or that – but this is now moved into lets develop really serious options.

MB – Uh-huh

MV - And so as I said, that winnowing peoples' opinions, change about what the majority favors, initial reaction is I like this and we end up doing something else, they initially weren't too wild about what we ended up doing.

MB – You're talking about the White House?

MV – No, not just the White House, but senior policy makers – senior policy makers. You know, opinions shifted as things got examined in much greater detail. You could be for something conceptually, because it sounded simple and elegant and it's going to do the job, but then when you examine and all the ramifications of it you say, that doesn't look good take that off the table.

MB – A B2 sounds good until you think of the collateral damage?

MV – Among other things, but lots of reasons that what looks good initially, may not so good after. What will happen when you can't prove that you got the guy, etc... so then a number of issues... what will happen to relationship afterwards. Again, we're trying to keep every viable option on the table. So as one air option goes away, another gets substituted in - and then that planning team is a totally separate group, a very tiny group, but they've got to be brought into this, a couple of people, and plan all this with a different instrument. But meanwhile, as we're narrowing down Adm McRaven's options; he is refining and refining his plan and then by the end of March early April, we narrow it down to essentially two options and with a target the end of April or that window that was actually done very, very late April to very early May. CIA had the great foresight of building a mock-up of the facility; we started that actually in January, before we had decided to do anything and even bring in Adm McRaven, and so it was ready when the time came that that was going to be a viable option. And then in early April, probably the second or third... I think we met with the President in mid March and then the end March and the other three meetings were in April, including right before, a couple the week before. So in any event, then it is basically, okay these two options, still not sure we are going to do this, but sooner rather than later, target the end of the month, we'll make the decision the end of the month, but proceed as if we're doing it – go get ready. So at that point then...

MB – What was the other option aside from the Helo borne assault that was on the table?

MV – An airstrike of one form, but not....

MB – But not the B2?

MV – Not the B2.

MV – So then, we swing into high gear of bringing in basically all the operators and planners who are actually going to do – for the air option it doesn't require a lot, requires a handful of people to plan – for the ground option, that we actually did, it required not only the people who executed the mission but all sorts of staff and so by the end of this thing we had gone from, not counting CIA, so if you exclude CIA I think there were like eight or nine people outside of CIA, who actually knew about this last Fall... not counting the Intelligence Community, because there's some at NSA, at NGA a couple, but not a lot... in order of CIA, NSA, NGA, but the policy makers I talked about it was very, very small and then there's a few that are added toward the end, I mentioned the DoD side but the Secretary of State is a couple of weeks before, the Attorney General, Homeland Security, the FBI, that's all the weekend of and so...

MB – And Secretary of State is brought in, is that partly because there is a concern about embassies and State should really have a heads-up that their embassy might get stormed on Monday?

MV – Yes, but also as a National Security policy maker, if you are going to do something like that she has a major vote in whether you do it or not, the President is going to turn to her immediately and say should we do this or not, but then there is all this stuff... but again the problem is then even at the end there is only a handful of people in these organizations that know about it, so you have to answer those kinds of questions from the very the top. You don't have all your bureaucracy to work with; you got a Secretary, and a Deputy, a person who worries about security and maybe an Ambassador, but that's it. So you've got to transmit this - okay be prepared to do this, plan, as well as for policy making, and again, I don't want to speak for her or anybody else but myself.

MV - But the SEALS and JSOC, Adm McRaven's organization, now have to start doing rehearsals and doing detailed planning and everything else, so that starts in April; 7-8 April and another big one the week after that, what we call full mission rehearsal where you're doing everything, flying, not just what you're going to do on the target, but how you get to the target, and the time it takes and everything, as realistic conditions as we can do. So Adm Mullen and I flew out West for that to watch that full profile and flew back, and....

MB – By the way, when you saw it, you thought this is going to work this is pretty cool?

MV – Yes. I mean it was a big change in just a week of practicing just seeing doing it on the mock-up facility versus the whole thing, an enormous, enormous change from the first time you try it to I've done it for a week straight and now, I'm putting all the pieces together...

KB - Oh, that's interesting

MV - Even for these experts, it's kind of - crawl, walk, run, - you're watching crawl the first time and then walk, and by the end they're running, it's almost what it's exactly going to look like two weeks later. Then after that is done, back to the policy making side that goes over six weeks. In probably late April, 18-21 April there's another meeting with the President and that's the decision, well still haven't decided to do this and I haven't decided which option I am going to do, but I could do one of these things in two weeks, and I want to be ready and so then there's the decision to posture the force, and so that has to take place kind of the week prior. And so people get deployed, now again, not a lot of people know about this at this point, so people are being told right as, hey guess what some guys are going to show up in your country and you as the four star commander probably ought to at least know about this, but that's probably all you need at this point. Then there's the final decision to go, which is made the Thursday/ Friday before that Sunday - Friday morning actually, but Thursday night was the last big meeting with the President and Secretary Gates and the Chairman. I guess in the period between the 15th of March or 15 to 20-something March, I can't remember, I guess around the second meeting, around the end of March, the 28th of March; between that period, there's going confidence in Adm McRaven's mission or option and then I would say that builds as they rehearse and we get results and the plan gets refine and you make changes to it; I'm still not comfortable at how you are going to this, if things go bad

- how are you going to get out? Okay, I got your guidance, now I got to plan to do that, now we got to come back and show you that, okay now I like that and so confidence rises, but even at that point as I said, thru sort of mid April to the end of April there are divided views among the deputies and the principals whether to do this, which way to do it, and again there's more people shifting toward Adm McRaven, but it is still divided camps maybe half on one side and half, it goes from more people, an overwhelming majority in favor of an option that ultimately never even made to the end to maybe half and half at some point, at the very end it becomes more I'd say 85 to 15 (or maybe a little more than that) in favor of Adm McRaven, but there are some people who recommend don't do it at all, or don't do anything, if you've got to do it choose the one that we don't end up doing, so that is why the common story that this is intelligence ten years in the making, a real remarkable story over the last year or last ten months in piecing it together and then Special Operations both planning and adaptive execution, because what they do on the target wasn't their primary plan and had to change in a couple of ways and hardly looked like it did, but also why Secretary Gates and others said a gutsy decision by the President. Again, he had very senior people telling him don't do this Mr. President. I mean he had a majority who said did (sic) it, but still an incredibly gutsy decision; and people passionately arguing for another course of ... you know senior advisors.

MB – My understanding is you liked the helo from the beginning or let me say that you were an early adapter on that; can you...?

MV – Well my view is keep all your options open, everything, so this is what I started with because there is pros and cons of everything and then continue to refine and analyze there's innumerable details you have got to work out, like okay, if I go with this Adm McRaven option - what do I do with the body? Who do I notify afterwards? That takes a lot of time, to work out all those details and then you start thinking this a good idea and then you think no it's not a good idea, I'm going to go this way and eventually ended up where we did, but it took awhile. So yes, I would say by the end of March I was clearly in Adm McRaven's camp; he said I was an early adopter and persuaded others, but, by the end there was a strong majority both in the deputies and the principals.

MB – And your reasoning for that is based on...?

MV- One, I felt more and more confident that we had a really good plan, that we could actually get in and we could...

MB - But you would say that the principal thing is that you got the body?

MV- Yes, that was the dispositive, all the critical things that could go wrong, and there is some operation risk, but the critical strategic and political things that could go wrong, really revolved around, they weren't operational questions, they were could I prove this and the end of the day; and if could I do that and then also too, once you had enough confidence that you could potentially get in and out

undetected, then there was the question - What if he's not there? Then obviously a ground raid looks a lot better than an air strike when you're not killing people you don't need to.

I go there he's not there and nobody dies theoretically and we'll wonder what the hell happened, but there was a reasonable probability that we could... and also too there might be reasons to keep it quiet; which is one of the reasons we did it through the CIA at the end of the day; we could have done it with the Secretary in charge rather than a dual relationship.

MB - Let's say the worse thing, so they go there...?

MV - So, this whole thing about (85) 95 percent down to forty, let me just talk about that for a second...

MB - You're talking about the range of views on the probability that he is actually there?

MV - Yes, yes, because I mean...

MB - You already told me you thought that....

MV - So basically, just as a safety check, the National CounterTerrorism Center, Mike Leiter, and company are brought in very late in the game, like two weeks before, and the poor guy was getting married the day before, ruined/cancelled his honeymoon and other stuff. But first he's told here is the big secret in the US government and the second thing is he volunteers to have a red team to just reassess the intelligence, because NCTC kind of completes in terrorism intelligence with CIA. And so, in any event, they bring in some analysts from CIA but also from DIA and others at NCTC and they do this red team and they try to come up with all alternative hypotheses and everything else, and one of those guys was "Mr Forty Percent," now that was still very strong, but he was kind of a naysayer, and then the others were 60-70, but also people like Morrell were 60; some of the others at CTC were in the 80 camp, I considered myself in the 80 camp, but as I was saying 80, 40, it's still the same evidence it's a circumstantial case and you know that's why it's a gutsy decision by the President.

MB - Let's say....

MV - Now I would say on the intel.

MB - Okay...

MV - The number of people, who they were, where they were, was all 100 percent spot on, 100 percent spot on. The identities of people and where they were, which house, which floor, etc. was all spot on. So that was pretty good. Now, there were a few other surprises, like all the crap he had that we took off the target and others and a few other things, but you couldn't know that in advance...

KB – Right.

MV – You couldn't know he was there and turned out to be probably stronger than...

MB – They understated...

MV- Yes.

MB – Now let me ask you a hypothetical? Let's say the worse case happens during the raid there is a firefight the SEALs get pinned down they shoot their way, in your mind in terms of worst casing this, what is the worst possible strategic... are we at war with Pak..., could that happen? What is the worst outcome here of the raid?

MV – Well...

MB – Obviously the guys die; but I mean it terms of the big strategic picture of the country?

MV – So one, I mean having lots of messy things go bad; so having helicopters crash - big fear...

MB – Well I mean, say a guy comes out from the neighborhood shoots an RPG, they shoot back, he turns out ...

MV – Yah, you get a Blackhawk down or something, where things just go terribly bad on the objective or on route to the objective, I mean it's less of a problem because at that point you don't know where you are going but you are still violating somebody's territory, but again, depends, as long as I can get the force out, and then I just got a wreckage – you know as Desi Arnaz, "I got some splaining to do," or Lucy does, or whatever it is; but it is less bad, than if I've just got a bunch of people dead and stuff on the objective; and so the worst case is where you actually have a big fight with the Pakistani Security Forces, so a critical consideration is, as I say – one, what if he is not there; can I get in and out, essentially surgically, without killing anybody or without them really knowing I was there; a good probability of that but not a hundred percent. And then second, if I got in there and things were a little messier than I thought, can I at least extract myself before they really go bad. So say I had again a downed helicopter, I got to think, could I get everybody out of there and just... rather than I holed up in the Alamo and then I've got to negotiate their way out or something, so that's where it really turned bad

MB - And did you game out what happens if there is a big fight with Pak Security Forces?

MV – Yes, but we tried to develop a plan as I say that would avoid that, which would get us out well before they could react under any

MB - And you had high confidence?

MV - We had high confidence we could do that.

MB - In being able to assess their ability, given what you knew about quickly they could...?

MV - Yes, we knew where everybody was and what their likely reaction times were and we had enough redundancy that we were confident that we could get out if we had to and a lot of protection, and turned out we didn't need any of that.

MB - Was there a turning... You mentioned the January period as sort of like one of these transitions between... As January being a sort of transition between phase one and phase two as you described them, is there... I know there was that November phone call where the intercept says I'm still working for the same brothers as before?

MV - Yah, it gives you higher confidence as you build the case, but again part of the period, the reason I divide it that way is you know, other than okay Mr. President we're going to tell you this big secret; and okay, well continue to develop it and keep me informed, okay keep you informed; it isn't until mid February when it's, or even really with the President mid... I mean he is kept advised by Donilon and Brennan and stuff, but really it isn't until mid March when okay, lets assess the strength of this case. So that's when you are really putting it together and you're refining that, you know, why do you have confidence in this, what are plausible alternative explanations, what more can you do to collect to narrow the uncertainty, which again, is it worth delaying, what am I going to get if I try this or this to... you know, so there are all these discussions going on about try to convince me that this is really what you think it is and not something else, and then secondarily, convince me of your plan, or which option is the right one. But, there's a period between mid March, and I would say, early April where you are still trying to make the case, so you can look back at evidence like hey we got this and we got this, but it took more than that it took, even if a piece of evidence is consequential its well how can I test this hypothesis that it's not some drug lord or whatever it is you know to what would I see if that were the case fitting of all the evidence.

KB - Hum, Right.

MB - Could be communicating with his supplier or something like that?

MV - Yah, right; or it's someone else, number two or something else. So there is a lot of that but at the end of the day once it gets very refined and there's not additional opportunities for collection without risk, then it's, okay what do you make of it. It is what it is; and then what do you make of the plan or plans, which one do you like. So that's where we ended up.

MB – Great, yes.

MV – You got fifteen more minutes if you want, but you ask I've been talking too much, so go ahead.

MB – No, no.

KB – You've been so incredible.

MB – You've been great.

MB – (to KB) did you?

KB – No you asked the one that I was curious about what happened...

MB – The Pak... Obviously part of the challenge for us is to capture how difficult this was because there is a version of it that in hindsight, it just looks like it fell into place, right so, that is why I just wanted to ask you hypothetically about what could have happened wrong, because it makes it more dramatic when it all goes right

MV – I guess I would say that even though there was a majority at the end that felt the same way I did, a strong majority, that we ought to do the raid for the variety of reasons; to get the body because it dealt with all the bad contingencies in the right way and we could do it. And I felt we ought to do it, many others did too, at the very end there was still a wonder, are we going to go with option A or option B, are we going to delay further and just collect more intelligence and you know in hindsight you could see the President was extremely determined to move this as... when it was ready to move it, as fast as humanly possible and not take any chances that it would leak out or anything, so from 15 Mar to May 1st, I mean that, in hindsight like April 1st; it was very clear what he was going to do, but it wasn't clear on April 28th.

MB – Right.

MV – So, the next morning when he decided, 100 percent Friday morning; we had our last big meeting with him Thursday night and then the inner White House circle Saturday morn... Friday morning, he issued the order and stuff like that, and I still didn't know which way he was going to go; I mean a high probability I thought he would go the way he did, but as you say things look clearer in hindsight then they actually were at the time.

MB – Uh-huh, Uh-huh. And was part of the reason that you didn't do the more surgical strike just not having as much confidence in that technology working or was it again going back to the verification issue?

MV – It's a mixture; so once you get away...once it becomes surgical then you're less worried about killing lots of people that you didn't mean to kill, but then there's the issue of number one, did I really get my guy and....

MB – As opposed to he's just in a tunnel somewhere...

MV – Yah, or just you missed. Like if we had to abort for some reason in route to the target, without a crashed helicopter, they never would have been the wiser. A very strong very high probability that we could have gone in three quarters of the way, turned around come back and tried again...

MB – A couple weeks later... a month later...

MV – A month later... and you needed everything, temperature and those sorts of things, but I mean you could have had a second chance. If you did the raid on the target it would of spooked them; even if he was there or others were there, whatever if we missed for some reason you probably don't get a second chance. But clearly if you strike and miss, you're done. Even if the security forces don't figure it out, the guys who are there clearly figure it out and so the same thing, if you kill the wrong person, any kind of miss you're finished. It's one shot. And then, as I said the trouble is okay, I did get him but I really didn't know it was him 100 percent, and now how can I prove it, afterwards, what do I say, what do I do, I mean how do I know that I really did get him, even if I have a high confidence I think I did.

MB – Uh-hum.

MV - And then, if you have the diplomatic problem of what the hell are you doing bombing my country; even if it's with small bombs and only a few people or something, if there is any women... the idea that you could get just him and not someone else dashing out, because there's kids and women periodically with him and stuff like that...

MB – Was the idea that you would literally just strike the third floor?

MV – No.

MB – So, it was take the whole building?

MV – No, not the whole building, but to try to get just him if possible. But it probably wasn't possible to get just him. So again, there is a series of things that make that risky both strategic and tactical. But again, there were some people who were for it, but let them speak for themselves.

KB – So extraordinary, just extraordinary.

MV – A very intense period.

MB – Yah; well thank you for taking the time.

MV – Well again, with some of this, provided you don't drop bombs, it's repeatable and so that's what attracted some people to it. So I could fly over....

MB – But why would you pull them back in the middle of the flight? What are you going to find out on midnight on Sunday?

MV – Because, the period that you might be there, the limited window, he may not be available and so in that sense you could try again, but on the other hand, once you drop that bomb you don't get to try it again. And then even if you hit him you don't know that you have strategic success and so that is ultimately the problem.

MV – So should I have (b)(3)-10 U.S.C.
130(b), (b)(6) reach out to you or?

MB – I'll call him, however you want to play it. I take your guidance...and very grateful.

MV – And what's your schedule look like?

KB – We leave early Wednesday morning and go back to Los Angeles but we could come back or ...

MV – Because I am going off to Afghanistan/Pakistan on Sunday.

MV – So we'll try to arrange it, if he's here, before Wednesday; and if not we'll at least establish a mechanism to where you guys can work it out.

MB – Okay; thank you, have a good weekend.

KB – So wonderful meeting you.