THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

PROGRESS IN AFGHANISTAN: WILL THE U.S. STRATEGY SUCCEED?

Washington, D.C.
Tuesday, August 24, 2010

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to the Brookings Institution and the Foreign Policy Program at Brookings.

Thank you for joining us in the dark days of August. We also are joined by an overflow audience in the next room -- so I'll say hello to you on closed-circuit television. Thank you for coming, too.

We assembled today again to discuss the subject of Afghanistan, what we've labeled internally as "The Great Afghanistan Debate, Part 3." And the question that we are going to discuss today is will U.S. strategy succeed?

I'm Marin Indyk, the director of the Foreign Policy Program at Brookings. We have a very distinguished and experienced panel to discuss this question and related questions.

I'll introduce them all, and then ask each one of them a very open-ended question to get us going. And we'll have a conversation up here between the four panelists before we come to you, the audience, for questions.

We're delighted to be joined this morning by Vali Nasr, on my right, who is Senior Advisor to Ambassador Richard Holbrooke who, in turn, is the President's Special Representative to Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Vali's night job is professor of international politics at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University. He is a specialist on South Asia and the Middle East, the author of several wonderful and fascinating books -- in particular, *The Rise of Islamic Capitalism* and *The Shia Revival* and *Democracy in Iran*. He's also written widely in the foreign policy journals and on the op-ed pages of

the major newspapers. And we're very glad to have the opportunity to hear him today.

We also are joined by a distinguished visitor to the Foreign Policy Program at Brookings, and that is General Jehangir Karamat, who's on my far left. He retried as Chairman of the Pakistani Joint Chiefs and Chief of Army Staff in October 1998. Since then, he's served as President Musharraf's Special Envoy to European Capitals in 2002, and served as Pakistan's Ambassador to the United States from 2004 to 2006.

General Karamat has since then been active in a whole range of Track II dialogues, especially between India and Pakistan, and Pakistan and the United States. He is a member of the board of governors of the Policy Research Institute in Islamabad, and a number of other think-tanks and research institutes there. And he heads the Lahore-based research consultancy Spearhead Research.

On my left, here, is Steve Coll. Steve is President of the New America Foundation, and a contributor to the *New Yorker* magazine. He previously spent 20 years as the foreign correspondent and then as senior editor at *The Washington Post*. He was the paper's managing editor from 1998 to 2004.

He is the author of six books, including most recently, *Ghost Wars: the Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden*, and *The Bin Ladens, an Arabian Family in the American Century*.

Steve's professional awards include two Pulitzers, the first for a series of articles on the SEC, his second for his book *Ghost Wars*, which also won the Council on Foreign Relations' Arthur Ross Award, the Overseas Press Club Award,

and the Lionel Gelber Prize for the best book published on international affairs. He has a whole list of other awards, as well.

He graduated from Occidental College in 1980 with a degree in English and history.

And finally, our very own Michael O'Hanlon, Director of Research in the Foreign Policy Program and Senior Fellow in the 21st Century Defense Initiative at Brookings.

Mike is a prolific writer, analyst and contributor to the public policy debate. He is a visiting lecturer at Princeton, an adjunct professor at Johns Hopkins -- and has written so many books that it would take probably all the time we have today for me to read out the list.

But his latest one, particularly pertinent to today's discussion, *Toughing it Out in Afghanistan*, and a recent book on *Budgeting for War*. He's now working on a book on nuclear weapons policy, and he is the principal researcher for our indexes, the Brookings indexes on Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan.

So, as you can see, we're honored to have a very distinguished panel.

I wanted to start by asking Vali if he would give us your sense of whether -- first of all, what the strategy is. Let's try to get that out in clear terms -- and how you view it in terms of whether you feel that it's sort of succeeding or not.

MR. NASR: Thank you. It's a pleasure being here.

Let's begin by sort of outlining the way in which we think about this as an Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy, as an AfPak strategy. I mean, the core notion is

that, you know, these two components have to work together, have to be -- we have to be effective in both places.

And the reason for that is that the issues that have brought the United States to that region of the world straddle the boundaries of these two countries, and you cannot have a solution in one without a solution in the other. And it's also very clear that if Afghanistan were to collapse into a situation that existed before 2001, it would imperil Pakistan, particularly given the issues that Pakistan is now facing. And conversely, if Pakistan were to face a serious threat internally, either because of natural disasters or, as was the case a year ago, because of an onslaught of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan in Swat and its northwest, it would make it almost impossible to succeed in Afghanistan.

So the U.S. strategy essentially is one that encompasses both countries -- although its elements are not the same in both. In Afghanistan, the United States has a military presence on the ground. The core idea behind this strategy is to leverage U.S.'s military presence to create time and space for standing up Afghan security forces and the state institutions so they could take over the security for most of the country, and would then provide the room for the United States to, if you would, reduce its combat footprint on the ground.

In Pakistan, our strategy has been multifaceted -- in fact, in some ways, much more complex -- of strengthening and deepening U.S.-Pakistan relations as a context, essentially, for doing everything we want to do and accomplish in South Asia to strengthen state institutions, economy. In Pakistan, to that end, actually the United States started a very serious strategic dialogue with Pakistan to assist the

country in its economic development, and also our current engagement with flood relief goes to that point, as well.

And then the other element is to also bring Afghanistan and Pakistan closer together diplomatically so that the policies and positions of the two countries would support what we are trying to accomplish in both places.

So having said that, this is a multifaceted strategy. It has many different tentacles. Some are specific to Afghanistan, some are specific to Pakistan. And some are, if you would, region-wide or apply to both of them.

And there is a different tempo and different metrics associated with these different elements. So in Afghanistan, we are still just about seeing the full implementation of the additional troops that were committed to Afghanistan. We had a change of command on the ground when General Petraeus took over, but many elements of the strategy are only, if you would -- are beginning to have an impact. And there we have a concerted civilian and military push to get the different pieces together.

In Pakistan, in some ways, we've had more success, if you would, visibly, largely because this is a government-to-government engagement. Our impact in assisting Pakistan deal with some of its civilian economic issues has been more visible. Here, it's not a matter of management of U.S. military and civilians on the ground, it's essentially the goal has been to change the direction and shape and nature of the U.S.-Pakistan relation.

And in the past year, that has become quite palpable. Obviously, we're dealing with the, if you would, impact of a long neglect of that relationship over a long period of time -- essentially since the leaving of Afghanistan in 1989.

And so I would say, you know, overall, we are doing well. The strategy is still moving forward. And in the area where I concentrate most, on Pakistan, we are seeing much more, if you would, impact of our effort to essentially change that relationship.

MR. INDYK: Say a word, if you will, Vali, about the impact of the floods, this terrible humanitarian disaster that is now afflicting Pakistan on your overall strategy.

MR. NASR: Well, you know, I'm -- just looking at the numbers, this is a sort of a horrendous event. The size of the territory under water in Pakistan is larger than Italy. And as Secretary of State said at the United Nations, more people are affected than the population of New York State.

And the country not only has millions of people that have been displaced -- about 20 million people have been displaced -- an enormous amount of pressure is brought to bear on other parts of the country, as refugees move from one place to the next, and have to be taken care of. It has put a lot of pressure on governance in Pakistan -- and I don't mean on a national level, literally on-the-ground governance -- because of the way in which the floods were.

And reconstruction is going to be difficult going forward, you know, as what Pakistan needs in order to deal with immediate impact of the floods, which is the fact that it's lost a good share of its export crops, the fact that it's lost a good share of it's food, which does make an enormous impact on poverty issues and import-exports in the country. And also, just the sheer damage to infrastructure. Over several hundred bridges have been washed away. Water canals have been damaged, or been deliberately broken in order to manage the water.

All of these are issues that Pakistan faces. And obviously, we are very concerned about that this does not have a long-run impact on institutions, governance and stability in Pakistan.

But, you know, the way in which the United States has reacted in some ways goes to the importance of the strategy that it put in place -- namely, the U.S. was able to react very quickly, largely because of the inter-agency teams that it has put together, especially in the SRAP -- the Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan -- which has made for much more rapid turnaround to addressing these kinds of issues. And much of this was maybe cobbled together to address the refugee issues after the Swat operations last year. That enabled very rapid reaction and collaboration between the State Department, DoD, for instance, to get a helicopter aircraft carrier to Pakistan to provide immediate relief.

And also we were very cognizant that ultimately, you know, to convince Pakistan and Pakistanis that there is a strategic partnership or a relationship between these two countries would best be exemplified by the way in which the United States was, I think, first and most effective among all of the other members of the international community, including Pakistan's other close friends, in addressing the country's needs in a critical phase. So I think in terms of moving the ball forward, impacting Pakistan-U.S. relations in a positive manner, the flood has been an opportunity that the United States has risen to appropriately.

But that doesn't mean that the challenges are not daunting, and that it requires, you know, working with Pakistan very closely in minimizing the impact of the floods.

MR. INDYK: Thank you.

General Karamat, thank you for joining us this morning.

I wonder if you could give us a Pakistani perspective on these two issues -- but in the context of two points. One is the striking figure in this recent Pew Research poll, which you may have seen- it's referred to in *The Washington Post* this morning -- that 6 in 10 Pakistanis view the United States as the enemy. And yet about the same number want to see an improvement in U.S.-Pakistani relations.

And the second factor that I'd like you to help to explain to us is I think a kind of confusion on the part of Americans who watch this unfolding, that Pakistan seems to be playing both sides, in terms of working with the United States, but also maintaining an ambiguous relationship with the Taliban -- which is supposedly our joint enemy.

GEN. KARAMAT: Thank you, Martin. It's a pleasure to be here.

And, as Vali said, what happens or doesn't happen in Pakistan is hugely -- in Afghanistan, is hugely important for Pakistan. The two are linked in many ways. And currently, the insurgency in our western areas is linked to the violence in Afghanistan. So a stable Afghanistan, with U.S.-NATO success in Afghanistan, becomes extremely important for Pakistan.

And as we see the strategy which Vali outlined unfolding in Afghanistan, we see it moving on separate tracks -- we have a view on that because it's so important for us. And I think, without going into the evolution of that, the evolutionary process through which we have reached the present strategy, I really think there's no real alternative to what the U.S. is doing in Afghanistan. You are on a track of capacity-building which Pakistan supports.

It would like Afghanistan to have capacity to take care of itself so that other forces don't have to do that. We want an economy in Afghanistan which can create and work in that country. We want political governance to improve. And, of course, we want the Afghan security forces to have enough capability to take care of the situation in Afghanistan so that there is no spillover into Pakistan. So we are supportive of that.

The other track on which the policy is moving is reintegration, or reconciliation. We are supportive of that, and we are working with the U.S. to bring that about. Reconciliation is more of an Afghan initiative. Reintegration, I think, is what the U.S. is taking about. But somewhere, it comes together. And Pakistan has been -- and is -- supportive of that, and would want that to happen to end the violence which is impacting Pakistan hugely.

And the third track, the military track, on which the strategy is moving, that has also evolved -- and we've had success in Helmand, and we see the U.S.-NATO tailoring strategy for particular situations, Helmand -- Kandahar is different for what was done in Helmand, which is good. And Pakistan has been supporting that.

So, overall, I don't see a major -- or even a minor -- difference of opinion in Pakistan over the way things are going in Afghanistan. And Pakistan would very much like that it stabilizes as soon as possible, in its own interest.

Then, of course, is what Vali outlined, the U.S. strategy in Pakistan, which perhaps is less clear. But from our point of view, we are very clear that the U.S. is helping Pakistan stabilize, develop capacity -- political, economic, security -- to cope with the threats that it faces at the moment, internally and from the insurgency in the west.

Now, of course, the U.S. has been doing this over a period of time, and there are various figures which are there, in terms of billions of dollars that have come into Pakistan from the U.S. And right now the U.S. is heavily in support of the Pakistan government to take care of the floods.

And Martin posed the question that why this -- U.S. is unpopular in Pakistan.

I've seen those poll reports. And I guess it depends on who you are talking to, and how much they are aware of the intricacies of the U.S.-Pakistan relationship, the many ways in which the two countries are interacting, the many ways in which the U.S. is supporting Pakistan. I think not many people in Pakistan are aware that the doors of the financial institutions which are open to Pakistan -- whether it's the IMF or the World Bank or the ADB -- has a lot to do with the relationship with the U.S.

And to answer his question, I would say that, in my opinion, what happens between Pakistan and the U.S., the positive side doesn't come up in the media. The negative side comes up in the media, in discussion. And that takes over the whole discourse on U.S.-Pakistan relations.

And that is sort of driving this opinion that the U.S. is not popular in Pakistan. But I think in informed circles it's very much known what the U.S. is doing for Pakistan.

The other question which Martin posed is a more difficult one. There is talk of Pakistan having a sort of a double policy -- one supporting the U.S. in its interest, and the other of having its own interest.

Of course, Pakistan has its own interests and concerns. But I think when Pakistan gets accused of this we forget that there is a past, a present and a future. And we tend to, you know, muddle all the three together and come to a conclusion that Pakistan is doing this.

There is a past, when Pakistan, in its interest, had a strategy, and it has nothing to do with the present. The present has not even evolved from what it was doing at that time.

There was a period when Pakistan thought that, in its interest, it has to project across its borders to take care of the threat that it faced from those borders. That situation, I think, has changed. There's so many things that have happened since then that such a strategy is unthinkable.

And Pakistan, with so many intricate linkages with the United States, I don't think is in a position to follow any kind of -- play any kind of double game there.

I read these articles where "unnamed officials" are talking about pulling off some kind of stunt, and doing this, and doing that. But those are just -- there are no authoritative sources quoted. There's nothing on the table on which you are making this determination. Even the WikiLeaks talks of ISI being in contact with the Taliban. Who else is going to be in contact with the Taliban?

The ISI is being in contact with the Taliban ever since the Taliban was created. That doesn't mean ISI is supporting the Taliban against the U.S. It may be actually helping the U.S. and resolve some issues with the Taliban. And as we move into reconciliation, integration, or whatever you want to call it, this factor is going to become more and more important.

And the last point that I'd like to make is that whatever may have been Pakistan's ambitions in the past, those have been scaled down drastically. They have been scaled down in Afghanistan. They have been scaled down within the country.

And I think the factor which has become most important for Pakistan today is the economy of Pakistan. That is going to take center stage. And I think all policies are going to revolve around making that -- by recovering what we've lost, and making it sustainable.

MR. INDYK: Thank you. We'll come back to some of those issues.

But I want to get Steve to focus for a moment on Afghanistan and the strategy there. You, in a short but trenchant critique of the strategy, suggested that it was based on two false, or at least shaky assumptions -- one, that the Afghan government was capable of playing the role that we assign to it in our strategy and, two, that ultimately the Taliban would be prepared to break with Al Qaeda if there were to be some kind of political reconciliation after a blow being dealt to the Taliban on the battlefield.

So I wonder how you view U.S. strategy at the moment, and whether you're still concerned about those two assumptions.

MR. COLL: Yes, I'm not sure about the second of those two assumptions as a sort of a linchpin of my argument. But I would like to take the opportunity -- thanks for having me here today, and for giving me a chance to think with you about these subjects.

I think, in Afghanistan -- and I want to say something very briefly about the kind of Afghan setting and annotate a little bit of what Vali was saying.

With your permission, I'll jump across the border and annotate a little bit of what General Karamat was saying, as well.

I think my concern all along in evaluating the U.S. international strategy in Afghanistan has been the extent to which it is adequately cognizant of Afghan politics, as those politics are recognized by Afghans. I mean, to shorthand it, the strategy in Afghanistan is comparable to the one that is now being executed in Iraq to build up Afghan security forces that can take the lead in combat gradually over the next two or three years, to allow NATO forces to exit the costly direct-combat role they've been playing, and to perhaps remain in a supporting role to provide the Afghan security forces with a monopoly on technology and air power and other sources of effectiveness.

And we see in Iraq now a dilemma, which is that the United States has successfully built up indigenous Iraqi security forces that are increasingly capable -- though not capable enough to stand alone. But what government are they loyal to?

Now, in Iraq that question is still at issue this summer. The security forces, in effect, have been quite patient with Iraqi politicians as they've failed to create a government to which the security forces can be loyal.

My concern about Afghanistan is that there is not as much political resilience in Afghanistan for a mismatch between security forces and national unity politics. And my concern about the way American political strategy in Afghanistan has been executed until recently has been that it's been palace-focused, and it hasn't yet been able to bring in the regional stakeholders that are required to build national unity in Afghanistan.

So in the essay that you referred to in *The New Republic*, anyway, my principal goal was to try to outline the imperative of a strategy of national unity -- political unity -- in Afghanistan in order to create the resilience to build security forces and to consider the possibilities of reconciliation and strategic negotiations with the Taliban.

Because I do not believe the Afghan body politic can digest reconciliation, unless it approaches those negotiations in a position of true unity.

If the Taliban become a wedge, a factional or ethnic wedge in Afghan politics, then the risk of a return to 1990s dissolution and war is, I think, significant.

So that's my kind of political view in Afghanistan.

On Pakistan, I just wanted to go back to the question you asked about the ambiguity of the Pakistani security institutions and their attitude, and to say that I respect what General Karamat said about the difference between thinking about the past, the present and the future as the right framework to evaluate this. You can't wish away the past. And the past does include a Pakistani strategy of hedging against India through the promotion of militias that were either believed to be loyal to the Pakistani state, or manageable in some way. And that -- a complex built up in Pakistan and to some extent now has turned against the state, the state is paying a very high price in battling those elements of the complex that it earlier nurtured that have turned against it. At the same time what's so complex is that some of those elements -- the Afghan and Quetta Ashura elements -- are an inevitable part of a political settlement in Afghanistan.

And so it would be natural to ask whether or not the Pakistani state is really prepared to give up its relationship there, its access to those potential elements of a settlement.

And then, secondly, we have to take into account Lashkar-e-Taiba, particularly in light of this flooding. Lashkar-e-Taiba is an institution that grew up to pursue goals in Kashmir, primarily -- now more broadly in India. And its status is of particular importance because it's rooted in Punjab and has been gaining traction in southern Punjab, which has been badly affected by the floods.

So let me just finish with one kind of proposition.

A question for American policy -- and I think it's implied in what General Karamat said -- would be to ask whether, as partners with the state of Pakistan, with the Pakistani military -- as a provisioner of generous aid -- dollars and other sources of aid -- is the Pakistani state doing everything that it could be reasonably asked to do to contain and break down the historical legacy of its relations with these groups? Is it doing everything it could be reasonably asked to do?

And I would say two things about the answer to that question. One is that it's obvious that there's a disagreement about the answer to that question within the U.S. government. Some people think, "Absolutely yes. They're taking it on the chin. They are -- you know, "They don't do everything that one would wish, but they are doing everything that one could reasonably ask them to do."

And there are others who say, "No, I don't think so. I think they are continuing to hedge in ways that are costing American lives and undermining the American project in Afghanistan -- and also threatening regional stability."

That question is doubly difficult because, as General Karamat says, it's so opaque. There is no transparent information.

I would love to read Michael's indexes about it over time. But there's no way to measure it.

MR. INDYK: Thank you.

Mike, you have just come back from Afghanistan. You advised General McChrystal, and now are working with General Petraeus.

What's your take on how the strategy is working?

I should actually preface this by saying that you've just got a piece in the latest issue of *Foreign Affairs*, in which you basically argue that it can work as long as we stay the course.

I wonder if you could just address, specifically, some of Steve's concerns -- both about Afghanistan and about Pakistan.

MR. O'HANLON: Thanks, Martin. And thanks to all of you for being here. And also to my co-authors, starting with Hassina Sherjan, the Afghan woman who helped me write this book, and who's a remarkable story in courage and entrepreneurship, and activity -- politically, and economically and otherwise -- in her own country. And also people here -- Ian Livingston, Heather Macero and Jason Campbell, who have helped with the Afghanistan index.

I think what I would want to say is that 2010 has certainly -- even for those of us who would call ourselves guarded optimists -- gone more slowly, in terms of progress on the strategy than we would have hoped. And there was certainly a hope -- not an expectation, but a hope -- in certain parts of the NATO Command, that 2010 would show a clear shift in momentum across Afghanistan, or at least that the

aggregate set of trends would point in a positive direction. There are not too many people saying that.

General Petraeus did voice -- and I thought it was appropriate and necessary, and a little overdue in some ways -- he showed some optimism about certain parts of Afghanistan in his recent flurry of interviews about a week ago. And he talked about Helmand Province. We got ourselves into a little bit of a rhetorical, or maybe academic, knot in talking about Helmand Province this past year because we expected such great things in this one little town of Marjah. And the military command deserves from criticism for having inflated expectations, and treated Marjah as almost a litmus test of how the strategy was working. And then progress there was slower than we had hoped, and now the impression is that Helmand is not going that well.

Marjah is about 75,000 people. Helmand is about 1.2 million. And every other town I know of in the major part of the Central River Valley in Helmand is actually doing better than Marjah. There are a couple of exceptions in the more extreme parts of the province to the north and south that are not going as well. But generally speaking -- as I think Petraeus correctly underscored -- we're seeing some progress there.

Does it really address the question, however, the fundamental dilemma of whether we have a strategic partner in President Karzai, and whether we can view the current government as reflecting enough of a consensus among Afghans to be a basis for moving forward? I think Steve Coll, as usual, asks the right and the tough questions.

And I don't have quite as positive an overall bottom-line there. I remain hopeful. But I don't know.

I guess the best way I can explain my reason for hopefulness -- without really trying to disagree with Steve, because I share his concerns -- but instead of putting too much emphasis on Karzai or “the palace” -- and Steve has warned us not to -- let’s also think about the Afghan people.

The Afghan people are adamantly anti-Taliban. And the only support for the Taliban is among the Pashtun. And the only part of the Pashtun that support the Taliban tend to be a very tiny sliver who actually agree with them, or a larger fraction who are afraid of them.

And so the question becomes: how do we make those people less afraid? How do we change the perception of momentum?

But that really is, in many ways, a more limited problem than we’ve seen in other insurgencies around the world where there was a fundamental desire to overturn the existing political order. In Afghanistan we don’t see that.

We see people generally supportive of the notion of a central government -- generally supportive of President Karzai, despite all of his warts and what happened last year in the election campaign, and the accurate perception that many of his cronies are too corrupt. A general belief that NATO is there to help. And we don’t see the anti-Americanism in Afghanistan that we saw either in Iraq or still see in Pakistan. It’s a population that is more supportive of NATO’s presence there.

And again, Martin, it’s not really, unfortunately, to rebut Steve -- I wish I could. It’s more to take a different light on the problem, and say that we have partners and allies who are interested and very committed to working with us, and working with each other.

One more point about the Afghan army. The Afghan army, on balance, is also, I think, a very promising institution. People talk about fissures between the Tajik general staff and the Pashtun minister of defense, for example. And there are efforts to try to address that right now.

And it's true that Tajiks are somewhat over-represented. For those of you who are not Afghan specialists -- although I'm sure most people in this room understand the distinction -- the Tajiks are primarily in the northeast. They were the core of the Northern Alliance in the resistance era, against the Taliban, and they now still constitute about 40 percent of the officer corps in Afghanistan, even though they're only about 15 percent of the population.

But what you are seeing, generally, is the army is not showing sectarian or ethnic fissures. It's generally working together.

Now there are problems in the ability to recruit Pashtun from the south into the army. That's the fundamental ethnic or sectarian dilemma that I would point to right now.

But as an institution, in terms of its performance in the field, it is way ahead of where, let's say, the Iraqi army was in '04, '05. It is not contributing to a sectarian war. It is actually doing a much better job at trying to tamp down that tension.

And let me just give a couple of factoids -- then I'll stop, Martin, in this opening set of comments. But these are not definitive or conclusive proof that the Afghan army, or the country in general, is going in the right direction. But let me give you a couple of reasons to be, perhaps, a bit more hopeful than some people have been. I just think we need a balanced debate, not necessarily me as an optimist

rebutting somebody else as a pessimist, but just a more balanced set of understandings of what the facts are.

Right now we have 85 to 90 percent of all Afghan army units in the field who are partnered with a NATO counterpart. This never happened before General McChrystal. It's a great legacy of his remarkable command. And let me take a brief moment to say ho highly I think of him and of all he accomplished in Afghanistan.

And what we have in this partnering concept is, even after basic training, even after unit training, the Afghan army units then go out into the field and they are based next to a NATO counterpart unit of roughly comparable size. In some places the NATO unit may be a little larger, other places it may be a little smaller. But it's always within one echelon, one step up or down, of size relative to the Afghan unit that it's deployed with.

And they live together, they plan together, they patrol together, they fight together. When they're ambushed, the NATO soldiers call in air support and reinforcements, so the Afghan soldiers have a chance to survive these firefights in a way they never did before when they were largely on their own.

And maybe I'll just stop there, because it's a very vivid point that I don't think our lexicon about this war does justice to. We use this term "partnering." "Partnering" is way too, sort of, mealy-mouthed of a word for what's going on in the field. There is an intense apprenticeship of the Afghan security forces.

It has much further to go with the police than with the army, unfortunately. So there are a lot of caveats even to what I'm saying now by way of hopefulness. But I think people need to appreciate what's going on in the field.

MR. INDYK: Vali, do you want to come in here -- but if you could also speak to Steve's point about the need for broader reconciliation amongst the different political groupings and leaderships in Afghanistan?

MR. NASR: Well, I mean, the point is well taken. Whenever you want to have a viable civilian institution and government, they have to be inclusive and representative of the entirety of the population. And you never want to have civilian institutions, the way they develop, actually, be a cause of fracture.

And also I think we're cognizant that when you have fragile institutions that are just growing -- whether it's in Iraq or Afghanistan -- there's always a danger that particular wedge issues could threaten them. And that's something that we have to remain vigilant, as you suggest, as things move forward -- although I would say there are some fundamental differences in the kind of problems we faced in Iraq as opposed to Afghanistan, because Afghanistan has a political leadership that did not assume power, whether first time or last elections, to tremendously contentious problems. Whereas in Iraq, the problems actually producing the political leadership itself. You just can't elect a prime minister, period.

Now, you know, the picture is obviously changing. There is no formal reconciliation. President Karzai initiated a peace jirga. You know, that jirga will have to address the issues that Steve raised as an Afghan initiative -- how it does, what happens next, whether or not there is any kind of a success with integration, et cetera -- would all obviously be deciding factors.

Now, about the other side of the issue, about Pakistan.

I think, you know, whereas in Afghanistan we're trying to build government capacity and make it more capable, in Pakistan, probably in the long run,

our aim should be to prevent that from eroding. It's to prevent -- and particularly the danger of the floods in the long run. Although all of our engagement with the floods is right now for human reasons, but a long-run threat is that the flood's greatest impact is on local governance, is on, essentially, the kinds of things we're trying to build in Afghanistan, the floods have been washing away in Pakistan.

Now, you know, the criticisms that are made of strategy of Pakistan, et cetera, are all sort of fairly familiar in this city, in public media, in government. And, you know, we're dealing with a country of 175 million-plus people which, you know, we're dealing also with a legacy since 1989 of a 20-plus year period of relations with Pakistan that have gone in the wrong direction. You know, every Pakistan knows Senator Pressler. No American knows Senator Pressler. And the legacy of Senator Pressler sometimes looms fairly large on Pakistan's thinking of what we call a "trust gap" in the U.S.

We have to deal that in order to set this relationship right going forward. To impact the war in Afghanistan, to sustain Pakistan, we have to deal with that.

We are intensifying our engagement with a region of the world which was, by and large, on the periphery, if you would, of our policy in the Middle East and South Asia for a long period of time. We cannot cover the whole sort of, you know, space that is required in short order.

But if we were to say that, you know, our engagement with Pakistan over the past year has gone in significant measure in trying to convince Pakistanis that this is not a fly-by-night engagement; that, you know, we will address their issues, that we are their friend -- as the flood shows -- that we do care about them as

Americans, not as American government, but as a people who care about the suffering of other people we do, that we are willing to rise up to the occasion, and that we would like to have a sort of a road forward that would turn a relationship that was by and large a transactional relationships into a strategic relationship -- I would say we have made progress.

Now, you know, this is an ongoing effort. And also we have to know that the picture is changing very rapidly. I mean, the Pakistan of the past year -- at least since I've been working in SRAP -- has gone through enormous sort of spikes and -- you know, peaks and troughs. You know, a year ago there was talk in this town that its government may collapse before a Taliban onslaught into Bonair when they reached, I don't know, 70 kilometers from Islamabad. It has been engaged in an internal civil war that raises a lot of, you know, complicated issues that Steve pointed into. Its economic -- integrity of its economy was severely challenged by water and electricity shortages, and now the flood has completely turned its society and economy upside down.

And, you know, all of those are factors here. They're important factors in our relationship, and they are also important challenges to the Pakistani government. And I think, you know, they're looking forward, in terms of, you know, stability in the region and the like -- are also taking a measure of this.

So, you know, I don't see this as a sort of a black and white, as we had a policy and a situation and then, you know, the measure would be has it 100 percent changed? But, you know, we've embarked on a policy of serious engagement in a different way in Afghanistan and in Pakistan, and particularly given the issues that were raised on Pakistan.

In terms of advancing our goal of impacting Pakistan's view of Afghanistan, particularly of its relationship with us, we've moved forward. And, you know, we're still in maybe 15, 16 percent approval rating which is, you know, abysmal in a country that we would like to think of as a close ally. But I think on some days of the week that's double what it was -- which is a significant improvement.

MR. INDYK: You're just like me, Vali -- a glass-half-full kind of guy.

MR. NASR: Right.

MR. INDYK: In this case, 15 percent full.

GEN. KARAMAT: Martin, may I?

MR. INDYK: Yes, General -- and please come in on this.

But also, Steve has put the issue of Lashkar-e-Taiba on the table. And I'd like you to tell us how Pakistan views --

GEN. KARAMAT: Okay.

MR. INDYK: -- LET -- which I think, for Americans, is looming as a larger threat than we had imagined before.

GEN. KARAMAT: I don't speak for the government, of course, but I'm giving my opinion.

And Steve asked a very important question. And I think he's right -- there is a divide here which I sense on this question that is, is Pakistan doing everything that it could be asked to do? Or is it actually hedging?

And my short answer to that is that without unraveling the state, and without creating internal chaos within Pakistan, Pakistan is doing everything possible to support U.S. strategy in Afghanistan, and to work things out with India.

Now, why I'm saying this is that in each of the tracks that we identified on which U.S. strategy is moving in Afghanistan, there are massive uncertainties. Will the capacity be built up there which you want built up in the Afghan security forces, in the Afghan government in Afghanistan to manage itself? It's still on the table.

I mean, there is talk of attrition rates as high as 47 to 48 percent in the forces which have been built up in Afghanistan -- right now. So we want those forces to be built up, but right now, there's a question mark.

We all want this to move forward, but there is an uncertainty. There is uncertainty on many of the things Steve talked about -- the ability to bring about unity in the government and to balance it ethnically. And those are the uncertainties that we will have to live with, because we are Afghanistan's neighbors.

There's even uncertainty on the military strategy, whether it's going to result in a victory or not. It is moving well, as I said. But the casualty figures are high after the surge -- which was expected. Perhaps expectations were also raised with the surge which is leading to some disappointment. But the fact is that violence has spread into other areas of Afghanistan -- in the east, in the north, and so on. So there is an uncertainty there.

On the reintegration, reconciliation, yes, there is uncertainty. Will the Taliban come in, and will they be part of the government? Will they be accepted, or will it continue to be ethnically imbalanced and the Taliban will revert to what they were before?

So these are the uncertainties that Pakistan has to live with. And within these constraints of this, Pakistan is doing everything possible to support the U.S. strategy in Afghanistan.

The other point is that there was enormous public opposition to any commitment of the Pakistan military into its western border areas. Today, nobody is saying anything against the military operations which have been carried out in the western border areas -- starting from Swat, Bajaur, and all the other agencies in FATA.

Because we didn't rush things -- we waited for public opinion to change, and it changed once the Taliban were identified as anti-state, and as people who commit atrocities, and who are basically for political power, or for a space which they can govern within Pakistan. The moment this became clear, public opinion changed. And the public now is hugely supportive of the counterinsurgency campaign that the military is carrying out in the FATA and other areas. And it has been going on for years now.

MR. INDYK: Could I just interrupt you on this point? Because how will the floods affect the public, say, support operations in the west? But now they clearly would expect that the army is going to support different kinds of operations, to help flood victims and so on.

Is that going to divert attention? Is that going to delay the expected campaign in north Waziristan?

GEN. KARAMAT: Yes, of course it is, because the military is the lead agency tackling the floods. It's diverted 60,000 or 70,000 troops to disaster relief.

And most of the limited aviation assets which were being used in the west have been diverted to disaster relief.

So, while I can say that this entire flood situation is going to have, eventually, political, economic, security impacts which the economic impacts which is going to be the worst, and it's possibly going to take years for Pakistan to recover from that. Once the flood waters recede and the civilian agencies take over, the military will be free to get back to its duties.

So what I would say is that perhaps the gains that the military has made in the west are not going to be lost, because it's quite capable of holding in that area against any kind of threat. But some of the offensive operations which may have been planned are likely to be delayed.

And you've raised this question of Lashkar-e-Taiba, and it's again coming up in the context of floods that militant organizations are carrying out relief duties. Yes, they must be. They live in those areas, and they would very much like to get into the public and gain support and sympathy and make inroads. But their capacity is limited to dishing out odd things here and there.

This is a disaster on a national scale, where you need relief from helicopters, military troops, boats, hovercraft -- everything that we use. They have nothing like that. So it's going to be insignificant, in my opinion.

MR. INDYK: Steve, feel free to come in and comment -- but there's one question I wanted to shift to, if you'd like to answer that before we go to the audience, which is how does President Obama's timetable affect the calculations of the local actors? There's talk about starting to withdraw troops next summer, and to review the strategy this December.

How does that play into the calculations of the various parties we've been talking about?

MR. COLL: Well, it's been a very significant factor -- although I do think the assignment of General Petraeus has had a countervailing effect over the last couple of months.

In economics, in markets, you have the concept of "discounting for future events." And so we may, if we look at market prices today, we would assume that the wisdom of crowds will discount the possibility of future inflation or future recession.

The impact of the 2011 date was to cause actors on the ground to discount NATO's departure, to take it for granted, essentially, and to start hedging. And I think General Karamat referred to the uncertainties. Even before you introduced a particular timeline, in the midst of a whole series of uncertain projects, there would have been cause -- reasonable cause -- to hedge against uncertainty -- that the date caused that hedging to increase in pace and intensity.

Now, I think that -- and that's not limited to the government of Pakistan. That's everybody, including a lot of actors inside Afghanistan, other regional governments and so forth.

I do think that the President and General Petraeus have done as much as they possibly could to walk-back the effect that they created by naming that date. And I do think that to some extent now there is more stability about the timeline -- the perception of the timeline -- than there was six months ago.

I was in Afghanistan in April, and there was a great deal of uncertainty about where things were going and at what pace. And I do think things

have settled down this summer. A lot now will depend -- so there's a kind of an understanding we're talking about a transition that will last from 2011 toward 2015, someplace in that timeline, and that actually General Petraeus's influence in advising about the pace of that transition is politically untouchable in the United States, in most circumstances. And barring some catastrophic set of events in Afghanistan, or the sudden collapse of American strategy there, the timeline is now more or less understood -- and there's still some hedging going on.

MR. INDYK: Right -- but it's less than before.

MR. COLL: Less than before.

MR. INDYK: Mike?

MR. O'HANLON: If I could just add to that, I agree with Steve that the Administration is doing a little better job now of trying to explain its strategy. But I think it would help to have an explicit statement by the President of what his thinking is.

And I'm not suggesting that he take away any and all ambiguity on his policy. I think he deliberately wants some flexibility about what to do next summer. And, specifically, what I interpret his thinking to be -- from all the different comments we've seen from the Administration, and especially from him -- is that he doe intend, if things are going well, to have a gradual conditions-based handover to the Afghans over a period of years. But he reserves the right to reassess, should the strategy not be succeeding, and perhaps go to a more minimalist Plan B, more along the lines of the counterterrorism-specific approach, with fewer U.S. forces and a less ambitious goal for Afghanistan that we know some people in his administration were advising him to adopt last fall when they opposed McChrystal's idea of a larger troop increase.

I think the President, therefore, should basically say the following: "I intend and I hope for a gradual, conditions-based plan." He never says that. Gates says that. Mullen says that. Clinton says that. Petraeus says that.

The President doesn't like to say that. About the most robust thing he's said was, when the Russian President was visiting in June and he said, "We're not going to turn off the lights next July."

Well, I would prefer a little stronger statement from the Commander-in-Chief. And I think he can preserve his leverage on various parties and a little bit of cover with the Democratic Congress by being a little more direct, and simply saying, "It will take three to four years to phase out. The good news is we're cutting 30,000 U.S. troops a year starting late next year," if that is indeed the reality -- "And, frankly, if it doesn't work out, we're probably going to leave even faster. And I reserve the right as President to make that call."

Now, I think that kind of a statement would be actually more productive for most of the audiences listening to him than the extreme discretion, bordering on policy of deliberate confusion that I think he has sometimes adopted. Again, I understand the strategic logic behind his thinking; I just don't think his approach has maximized his own benefits to the current policy.

MR. INDYK: Thank you.

Let's go to the audience for questions.

Two things to bear in mind -- you need to identify yourself, and you need to have a question mark at the end of your sentence.

Right down in the back there, from Philadelphia.

MS. RUBIN: Trudy Rubin, *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

I'd like to ask Vali and General Karamat a Pakistan question.

The civilian government has been unable to build in the areas that the Pakistan military cleared, even before the flood. And what I'm wondering now is, since there are so many new areas which will desperately need building, who is going to do that building?

And if the military is called on, then does that mean basically that the fight against insurgency basically comes to a halt? And even, is the military capable of that? Or is the civilian government capable of coordinating with international agencies, which doesn't appear to be the case?

And just one further question along that line. Internal stability -- the number of inter-sectarian killings is rising sharply. There's civil war going on in Karachi between factions. There's -- Ahmadis are being blown up, Shiites are being blown up.

Is the social fabric, which was already under great stress, going to be stressed even much more dramatically by this flood, and government ineptitude? And if so, then what?

MR. INDYK: Vali?

MR. NASR: Well, let me first of all say that the issue of the government response to the flood in Pakistan is not quite as it's appeared on the outside.

First of all, you know, the number of deaths are not as high as they were because the evacuation plans -- particularly as you move towards Sindh and southern Punjab -- were carried out quite effectively. The city of Sukkur, which most people thought would be overrun, with tremendous amount of damage that has not

happened because of effective building of embankments, and also releasing the water out.

I mean, the issue -- it's not that the government has completely failed and disappeared here.

Secondly, the focus has been largely on national government in Pakistan, whereas the most important element in management of both the unfolding of the disaster and its early response. And then as we go forward, it is local government. And there, unless the waters have literally forced the local government to pack up its bag and with its family move to a refugee camp, they have basically worked well.

Now, you know, the northwest is a very different place than Punjab and Sindh. The governments ruling on these places are very different. The local governments are quite different. Their capacities and capabilities are quite different -- just as, you know, the way in which the flood is being managed in Sindh is quite different than it was in the northwest frontier.

So I'm not convinced that, you know, we could just take it for granted that the government will be completely absent or incapable here, and the military has to do everything. And also in the northwest, the main area that this issue of reconstruction came up was in the area of Swat. And that had to do also with the way in which the Taliban ran Swat before they were dislodged, and the damage that they did to the government in that region, literally eviscerating local government.

And then, you know, Swat remained a war zone, whereas southern Punjab and Sindh are not war zones. There are many other elements that can, you know, be brought to bear.

But, you know, whatever other political issues that might be afoot in Pakistan -- I mean, this disaster, in and of itself, is probably the most significant pressure on Pakistan's society and economy at this point in time at a humanitarian level.

So, you know, how this is addressed, how the international community addresses the immediate need is probably far more indicative of, you know, how quickly Pakistan can regroup than, you know, the social, political crises that were out there.

And also I must add that, you know, there is a great deal of indication that actually the country has come together around this issue. I mean, we don't see the floods as breaking up into political factionism, et cetera. Sure, there are continued attacks. There was a bombing of a mosque in the northwest area, in FATA region, yesterday, with, you know, 30-some people killed. There will be continued acts of violence. You know, the extremists are operating on a different agenda.

But at local government and national government level, PPP, PML-N, MQM, they all have come together. They're all facing the same problem, the same call from the people, the same set of challenges. And for now, actually, the flood has had a unifying impact.

MR. INDYK: Do you want to add to that? Or should we go to another question?

GEN. KARAMAT: I think Vali is doing a great job.

MR. NASR: Thank you.

GEN. KARAMAT: My experience is that in these disasters, that governments regardless of what they're doing always get criticized -- whether it's

Katrina or tsunami, whatever, it's the government which faces the brunt of that criticism for not responding quickly, for not doing enough. So that has happened.

And comparing the western border with the interior, there is a difference -- as Vali pointed out -- that the civil agencies had difficulty operating in the western border area because it's an going situation. It's a security hazard.

So the military became the lead agency, not only for clearing the area, holding it, but was actually in the process of rehabilitating that area and moving back the people when these floods hit. So that is different.

In the rest of the country, it's going to be easier once the waters recede -- which we are told is likely to happen in two weeks or so. And very quickly people start moving back, then it will be more of economic assistance, which the government's already announced, and taking care of epidemics and things like that, which they are getting enormous international support. And I think they'll be able to handle that.

Yes -- internal security, which you talked about, is a huge problem. Karachi, if you remember, in the '90s went through a similar phase and then it stabilized. It's going through a bad phase, politically motivated ethnic and sectarian violence. We've had -- we do have these assassinations taking place. In Balujistan, targeted a low-level dissident movement there, not significant, but still causing enormous damage, in terms of image and loss of life. And the government is trying to get over that situation.

MR. INDYK: Let's take one from the back. The gentleman in the blue-striped shirt.

MR. WOLFSON: Thank you, Martin. My name is Tom Wolfson, and I'm a retired foreign service officer. I'm not an expert, but I have served in Islamabad and spent some time in Afghanistan, more recently.

I have two questions -- one for Steve Coll, and one for General Karamat.

First, for Steve, in terms of local Afghan governance, and what we've perhaps sloppily labeled the "building of civil society," a lot of former warlords have come back and established themselves, and are running basically the same kinds of patronage networks they did before. In many cases, have brought a measure of stability to areas and effective administration, and are now getting support for that.

And, of course, it's a tradeoff. Is this in the long-term interest of trying to build what's good for Afghan society, or are their present contributions such that they really can't be dispensed with?

And I'm wondering what your views are on how bad the Faustian bargain that is?

For General Karamat, I was wondering -- for many years, what Pakistan has done related to Afghanistan -- or hasn't done -- has been seen through the complicated prism of the strategic political relationship with India.

And although I don't want to suggest that the Indian problem -- or the problem of Indo-Pak relations -- has gone away or changed significantly, I was wondering, now that you're no longer in office as Chief of Army Staff, how candid you would care to be on how the thinking within the Pakistan army might have changed in terms of being mesmerized by the Indian threat.

Thank you.

MR. INDYK: Steve?

MR. COLL: Well, the observations I certainly endorse, in the sense that there's been an obvious tradeoff in American engagements in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban in December, between the pursuit of security and the pursuit of plausible, stabilizing politics, and the expedient pursuit of security -- particularly in the period between 2002 and 2007 or '08 generally prevailed.

The United States was engaged in another war during most of those years, did not resource the Afghan conflict anywhere near adequately. And one of the ways that it got away with the threadbare approach to the country was to develop expedient relationships with former warlords, and essentially to turn politics over to them in some areas.

It is a Faustian bargain. It's very difficult to unravel a bargain like that instantly, in the context of even an ambitious counterinsurgency campaign.

I would only just say -- to go back to my drum-beating about the importance of Afghan politics, per se, is that a successful, inclusive approach to Afghan politics during the transition period ahead -- one that has a prayer of success -- requires vision of national unity, but also a response to the dilemma that you've described. That is, more inclusive local politics.

It is stunning, when you travel around Afghanistan, to appreciate how top-down local administration remains. And governors come and go, exiles who've won favor with the palace or with the Americans, and who are shuffled around from province to province.

The operation in Kandahar was suspended, in part, because, I think when the United States in the late period of General McChrystal's command got to

the edge of the campaign they intended, they realized that they didn't have a plausibly inclusive and successful local political strategy to complement their military plans. And I actually admire the decision not to go forward, in the recognition of that. cause there is not -- you can't just make local shuras up as you go along, which was more or less the plan in that case.

So I think the parliamentary elections are probably the next concrete way in which this bargain is going to be measured by the Afghan people. And I'll just leave it there.

MR. INDYK: General?

GEN. KARAMAT: Yes, Kashmir figures in Pakistan's strategic thought very prominently. I won't say that we don't consider India a threat anymore. That situation is still there.

But the obsession with India as a threat, in terms of a premeditated, deliberate attack on Pakistan, I think has receded into the background. Because the economic factor for India and for Pakistan has become extremely important. And I think are lobbies, both in India and Pakistan, which are working on a peace track.

So I would put it like this -- that Pakistan for several years now has been taking a good, hard, inward look at itself. It's facing internal instability, economic decline. And under those circumstances, while the threats are there, its policy is to work on threat reduction through diplomacy, dialogue, talks -- all non-military means -- so that it can focus its energy on its internal stability.

MR. INDYK: Mike, I just wanted to put another issue on the table here.

On the front page of the *New York Times* today is another story about corruption in the palace. And you have some strong views on this issue, and what we're doing wrong, and what we should do right about it.

So do you want to just address that?

MR. O'HANLON: Thanks, Martin. And also, if I could just, in passing, mention that on the issue of the Indian threat, Steve Cohen is finishing his book on the Indian army and in two weeks we'll have an event here. And I'd certainly invite -- I'm sure both of us invite all of you to be here for that on September 7th.

But on the corruption issue, this is such a complex matter. And we've seen our Afghan friends push back recently. Whenever we criticize them too much for corruption, they point out that we're part of the problem. And, frankly, everybody who's criticizing the other is correct about how this has worked.

I don't think there are too many Americans -- there are some, but not too many Americans who are deliberately, personally corrupt. But the system that we have built is not very effective.

And in my trip in May in Afghanistan, I was disturbed, I have to say, by how many top NATO, ISAP, American officials were not yet even on the same page with each other about what the strategy should really be for confronting this.

The specific issue that I felt that I had some -- that I gained some understanding of -- and this is only one element of the broader Afghan corruption problem, but it's the way in which our military deployment in the south depends on certain Afghan contractors, certain Afghan strongmen, disproportionately.

Ahmed Wali Karzai, of course, is the most famous. There are couple of others. And what we've done is, in the interest of trying to meet the deployment

schedules set out by the President we have rushed. And one of the ways you rush is by working with people you already know. And that means that you pump more money into the same hands who are already benefitting from the system, and therefore to the exclusion of many other Afghan tribes and leaders who are not of the Karzai or Shirzai families, specifically around Kandahar.

I think we need to therefore re-frame the issue a little bit. We're not going to eliminate corruption in Afghanistan, but we do need to view our presence as providing a certain form of patronage which needs to be better distributed. It needs to be more equitable.

And if some of that is "corruption," then we have to distinguish between different types of corruption -- some types which are regrettable but tolerable, other types of which actually fuel the insurgency. And it's the latter that troubled me. And specifically, if you put all your money into a couple of people's hands, then you make others upset. And their tribes are more likely to support the insurgency.

I don't think there's been enough appreciation of what to do about this. The simplest answer is, of course, to broaden the base of those who benefit from our build-up. That's easier said than done, but it wasn't even being commonly recognized as a core element of what our strategy should be going forward, among all the different people I spoke to in May.

I think there has been progress since then. But I think we're behind the curve on this one.

MR. INDYK: Okay.

Let's take another question. The lady here in the purple.

MS. MARLOW: I'm Lara Marlow from the *Irish Times*.

And I'd like to ask Mr. Coll and Mr. O'Hanlon -- when President Obama last December 1st announced that he was sending another 30,000 troops -- meaning he had tripled the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan -- and at the very same time said that the draw-down would begin in July 2011, was he actually thinking -- was he actually providing himself with an alibi in advance, saying, "I -- " -- so that he could say to the generals, to the military top brass, "I gave you what you asked for. I gave you the surge. It hasn't worked. Now we're getting out." Is that a possible reading of what has happened?

And, secondly, you talked about the different perceptions in the Pentagon and the White House of the war in Afghanistan. Is there a certain tension there between, for example, Vice President Biden's strategy of using drones and using far fewer soldiers?

And also, are we headed for a sort of confrontation? General Petraeus in recent interviews has said that he would be willing -- I believe that he would be willing not to start reducing troops at all and that, you know, he's emphasized over and over "conditions-based." Whereas one has the impression that the President is much more keen on actually pulling the troops down.

Thank you.

MR. COLL: Michael, you go first.

MR. O'HANLON: Good questions.

I would start by saying that the President may have been trying to avoid the likelihood of another Vietnam by saying "I'm going to try to limit my exposure here." And that's part of the logic for July 2011.

But I think, frankly, he knows better than to think that he can simultaneously triple combat forces and limit his exposure. He's very exposed. And I congratulate him for his resolute decision-making on this issue. I think he's made excellent decisions all along. That's my own personal take.

But regardless, he is exposed. And so I don't think that can be his primary motivation. His primary motivation was to speak to the immediate needs of a Democratic Congress and a broader public that are tired of this war, and needed to understand that this was not going to last forever.

Again, I think he needs to continue on by trying to clarify what his strategy implies. And the July 2011, by itself, is, in my opinion, causing more harm than good -- even politically at home right now.

But nonetheless, I think that was a bigger part of his motivation -- plus trying to put a little bit of a spur into the side of Afghan politicians to understand they've got to start delivering on reform in the near term. I think those were more important reasons than the issue of having an alibi.

On the question on the unity or lack thereof of the Administration right now, I actually read them as doing a little -- I understand your question, but I actually read them as doing a little better job than you would suggest.

Vice President Biden gave a speech yesterday in which whatever doubts he may have once had, he certainly put them aside -- at least publicly -- for the purposes of the speech, which was a fairly strong and firm defense of Administration policy in saying "We've got the right General. We've got the right strategy. We're going to stick with this."

And General Petraeus, I think, recognizes -- as he's said -- that all he can do is give military advice. And I think he was asked in one of his recent interviews, "What if your military advice is not heeded?" And he said, "I salute smartly and keep going."

And I'm sure that's what he meant. I'm

sure he will do whatever, you know, he's asked to do -- under the reasonable kinds of parameters that I think are actively in play here.

So I see the Administration as being well unified. The main problem is the President himself needs to be a little more clear about what that July 2011 date means. And I would advocate that he do so.

MR. COLL: Just very briefly -- on the question of what the President had in mind at the time that he named the July 2011 date, I'm waiting for Woodward's next book, which I think is due shortly, to elucidate exactly what was said by whom, to whom, when.

But I think that I would basically -- I mean, I agree with everything Michael said. I would add that I have the impression -- although I'm waiting for Woodward's reporting to see whether it's borne out -- that there was a little bit of a civilian-military element to this, between the White House and the Pentagon, that a factor, at least in the minds of some of the civilians in the White House was to signal to the U.S. military that there was a firm belief on the civilian side that they did not have an open-ended timeline.

And that Secretary Gates saluted the decision and defended it in public for another reason -- which was concrete and important -- which was also to

signal the Karzai government that they did not have an open-ended timeline and they needed to organize themselves to participate in the buildup of Afghan security forces much more effectively they had done to date.

My impression is that Secretary Gates accepted the President's decision with enthusiasm because of that signaling to the Afghans, even though he presumably recognized that it would have this other effect of causing actors to hedge and to be uncertain.

MR. INDYK: Okay. Let's just take one last question. Here. Please.

MR. KASAMUN: I'm Mohamed Kasamun, retired from the World Bank.

A couple of suggestions. When you have sessions like this about Afghanistan, how about having an Afghan on the table, on the seat --

MR. INDYK: On the table?

MR. KASAMUN: Yes. That's what we're talking about. And maybe if you look really hard, an Afghan lady -- any lady might do it.

Going back to your position about the ethnic groups in Afghanistan, I'm not sure, if you talk about Afghanistan and then not have a qualification, Pashtun, Hazara, Tajik. In the current *Economist*, it says only 3 percent of the army are Pashtun -- it's a very interesting article.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible)?

MR. INDYK: What is the question? We're short on time.

MR. KASAMUN: My question is you have to disaggregate the ethnic (inaudible) that is Afghanistan.

There are certain people, like the Hazaras, who are out for revenge. I saw that before. I'm (inaudible), I know what they think.

And now they're giving guns. They'll behave just like the Pashtuns, and they want revenge. You will not get an Afghan army or an Afghan police at all. Ever.

What's your reaction?

MR. O'HANLON: Could I say one quick word, and then let Vali handle the point?

MR. INDYK: Let Vali have the last word.

MR. O'HANLON: Yes. Well, I just want to very quickly say, in terms of our approach, Brookings, I believe, is the only place that's published a book by an Afghan woman and an American scholar. We've also done events with my colleague Hassina Sherjan. And we're delighted, again, to have the panel that we have today, that I think represents a diversity of views.

So I'll just make that simple comment and leave the substantive matter to my colleague.

MR. NASR: Well, broadly speaking, I disagree. I do not believe that the ethnic issue is as you put it.

I think even though Afghanistan has had civil war, and has had a great deal of difficulty, element of revenge is not on the table. This is not a sort of a replay of Iraq.

And also, Afghanistan does not have separatist movements. I mean, this is not a country where ethnic groups are trying to leave the country. In fact, the overall dynamic is to protect Afghanistan's political integrity, territorial integrity,

maintain its position in the region -- and then within that contra-balance, in terms of distribution of power.

And, you know, we have to leave it to Afghans as to whether the Pashtuns think they are under-represented or over-represented, or whether the Hazaras think they are under-represented or over-represented. And that is part of the whole Afghan dynamic.

But I do not believe that actually it's not possible to build an Afghan army or an Afghan police. Police, first of all, is a local force. So police in the north is going to be -- where Tajik area, police is going to be Tajik. In the south, it's going to be Pashtun, and the Pashtuns of Kunduz will be policing Kunduz, and the Pashtuns of Kandahar will be in the police in Kandahar. So that's a matter of essentially organizing them.

And actually, as the Afghan army goes, it's done fairly well. It's not at a -- you know, it's not sort of equivalent to the Pakistani army, or even an (inaudible) army, in terms of its capabilities, but we've made -- actually, with the army we've made great strides in establishing the army.

The question in Afghanistan is not at all whether an army is possible. The question is, and what the question has been, whether the pace or scale that we have put ourselves, how can we achieve that. Which is a very different challenge that we face.

MR. INDYK: Well, on that point we need to conclude, it being past 11:30.

But I want to thank all the panelists very much for their contributions today, and ask you to join me in expressing our appreciation.

Thank you.

(Applause)

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CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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Expires: November 30, 2012