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Introduction:

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Featured Speaker:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. TALBOTT: Good afternoon, everybody. We're very appreciative that Ambassador Holbrooke would take some time off from his duties on the other side of town and, indeed, on the other side of the world, to spend about an hour with us this afternoon talking about policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan. There are never boring moments in his life. There certainly haven't been any in the course of the period that he's had -- there you go. I figured that was a favor I was doing you. Right? You could use a little boredom occasionally.

Of course, this is a particularly busy work and a particularly difficult week. Ambassador Holbrooke has got a number of members of his terrific interagency team with him here and one of the very promising and productive aspects of the way he's going about his job is the way in which he's gotten the interagency process of the U.S. government to work together, and we're glad that you have some of your team here, and I know a number of members of your team lost some personal friends and close colleagues as a result of this terrible suicide bombing in Afghanistan. That's one of several notes in a minor key that we have to take account of.

I thought maybe, Richard, if it was okay we'd start what we hope will be an open and lively discussion here just by giving you a chance to tell the group what you think among all of the issues that are out

there are the most important ones and what are the two or three subjects on which you think that we and therefore you are going to be most concentrating on particularly during the period immediately ahead.

MR. HOLBROOKE: Thanks, Strobe. Thank you for inviting me. Full confession. The man to my right is one of my closest friends and most severe critics, so if you sense a rapport between us, we've been friends since 1978.

MR. TALBOTT: This is mutual, by the way. The same can be said in the other direction.

MR. HOLBROOKE: It's just a great pleasure to be interviewed by Strobe, but knowing Strobe, you all know that it will not diminish in one iota his intense interrogatory style.

I see in the audience so many friends of mine for so many years and I'm grateful to see you all. I always want to acknowledge Stan Resor who I first met in the Johnson administration when he was Secretary of the Army and who's a great figure in America's national security history. And I won't acknowledge anyone else in the room, but I just see tons of people I worked with.

My own team, I only brought a few people today, Strobe, but since you mentioned them I should mention on the wall there in the shirt without a jacket is Ronan Farrow who is our NGO outreach person. I want

to start with Ronan. I think we're the only office in the building with its own NGO person. There are literally well over a thousand NGOs working in Afghanistan and Pakistan not counting local NGOs. There was no roadmap. There was nothing to tell us what they did. Ronan is doing cross-hatch computerization and we are systematically reaching out to NGOs. For example, water is a huge issue in both countries. Ronan will be able to tell us, he can already, which NGOs in the United States work on water, which are working in Afghanistan and Pakistan and so on, so Ronan Farrow.

Next to him is Ashley Bonner who has been with me now for a decade and in her current capacity is specializing on the all-important issue of communications and counterpropaganda. This war is a war of information and it has always been most extraordinary to me that that area is where the world's leading communications nation, the United States, has been at least until recently out-communicated by mass murderers living in the most areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. We have to take the public information space back from the enemy in order to succeed, and Ashley has pioneered such creative ideas as using cell phone technology and such obvious ideas as countering their abuse of low-wattage mobile FM stations to disseminate the most terrible lies. Next to Ashley is Vali Nasser who I'm sure most of you know. He came to us from Monterey

and from the Council on Foreign Relations. He has just written another one of his wonderful books. Although many of you associate him with Iran, he is working on Pakistan for us and not on Iran, and since that always appears in the blogs inaccurately, I correct it. I think we're missing someone. Ken McClure is somewhere, Ken McClure who came to us from Afghanistan, a Dari speaker, a good FSO, and representing the future of the Foreign Service. We got a whole lot of other people in the back there including in the department from nine other agencies plus the State Department.

Strobe, what I'd like to say -- and I'll try to do this very quickly -- is that in dealing with the sophistication of this audience, the most common question I get when I walk down the street or run into people is the most valid: Why are we in Afghanistan? That's a fair question to ask in a situation as complicated and as difficult as this and this is not an easy situation.

A year ago Barack Obama inherited the situation and he faced several choices, and so we went through a complicated policy review which some of you in this room contributed to and one person in this room led, Bruce Riedel. He was the chair and I was the co-chair of the Strategic Review Committee. I thank Bruce again, here in the front row. I thank Bruce again for his response to President Obama's call which

came on the third day of the administration if I'm not mistaken, Bruce gave us 60 days, and I thank Strobe for lending him to us.

We concluded quite simply that America's basic national security interests were at stake in these two countries. This was not Vietnam where the Vietcong posed no direct threat to the American homeland. It was not Iraq where Saddam Hussein similarly did not pose a direct threat. This was an area from which attacks on our soil and other countries including Pakistan itself had been planned and the people out there had said very clearly they'd do it again as the near-miss on Christmas Day demonstrates so fully. The fact that this particular person was not trained in Pakistan does not change the fact that the inspiration for all of this comes from al-Qaeda, and al-Qaeda's leadership is based in the remotest areas on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. So we concluded without any dissent that this was a national security issue and we could not walk away from it.

The second question was, therefore: What do we do about it? The answer has been laid out in a series of speeches and public statements by President Obama. March 27 and December 1 of last year were his two major statements, but there have been many others. I've been out there saying it, the military has, Hillary Clinton, Bob Gates and Vice President Biden. The press reported internal discussions in which

people put forward a variety of view both in February and March and again in the extraordinarily intense policy review process which I participated in in August which came to a culmination in the December 1 speech.

Let me be very clear on this. Having served every Democratic president from Johnson on either in the White House or a senior State Department position, it is when you don't have discussions of a range of options in the room that you should ask questions, and it was to the enormous credit of this administration and to President Obama that every view that you all in this room are likely to hold was put forward inside the windowless room in the basement of the White House. So the president had the full range of views as he set forward first in March and February to send 21,000 including 4,000 training troops, and then in December when he announced 30,000 more troops.

That is only a small part of what we did. It is the part the press has focused on, but it's not the part I'm directly responsible for. I've made inputs into that discussion, but our job at the State Department is the civilian side of the war, from communications to agriculture, from rule of law to subnational governance, to education and health, that's what we do, plus the diplomatic side of this, and I want to underscore that. So we are there because our national interests are at stake. We know how difficult it is and our allies in the region know how difficult it is. I have

toured now every single country in the region and even outside the region that might be affected except your three favorite -stans, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan which I haven't gotten to yet but in the next month either my deputy or I will go there. Without exception, every country in the region agrees that what's happening in Afghanistan and in the border regions is of direct vital strategic interest to them as well, and I need to underscore that. From Beijing to Moscow, and from Riyadh and Abu Dhabi to our European allies, countries which have their own internal challenges including all of the states in the GCC, all agree that stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan is critical in a strategic sense. So we conclude as well that what happens there is not just vital to our own homeland security, it's also vital to an extraordinarily large range of countries which includes the two most populous countries in the world; it includes Russia; it includes the world's largest oil areas; it includes a whole range of other issues; and there are obviously implications for other problems we face to the east in Iran and in regard to the Arab-Israeli issues. So the 30,000 troops have started to deploy.

On the civilian side, we built up rapidly last year, and I want to underscore on behalf of the Department of State and the Secretary of State that when we came into office there were 300 civilians in Afghanistan, which is not a lot considering the importance of the country.

When I was Ambassador to Germany there were 2,500 people in the mission that I was responsible for. We had 300 civilians in Afghanistan. We tripled it last year and that growth will continue as the troops build up. We're working out the details now, we're working closely with Deputy Secretary of State Jack Lew, but there will be a big buildup. As we speak here, the new Aid Administrator, Rajiv Shan is being sworn in and he and I are already collaborating on these issues and he and I will have a press conference right after this at the State Department joined by Tom Vilsack, the Secretary of Agriculture. Why the Secretary of Agriculture? Because agriculture is our most important nonsecurity program. Tom Vilsack will be leaving shortly, the exact time withheld for security reasons, I hope he'll respect that, to further our very ambitious goals to help Afghanistan rebuild agriculture.

So we have a vast array of civilian programs. We have an expanding dialogue on international diplomacy. I got back late last night from London where we spent the whole day at 10 Downing Street, the State, NSC, the Pentagon interagency team working out the details of a forthcoming conference at the end of January on the international components.

I don't know, Strobe, if I've fully addressed your question, but since time is limited, I'd like to go where you and your audience would like

to take us. But I do want to stress that we really are committed to a successful outcome here because our national security is clearly at stake. Thank you.

MR. TALBOTT: Thank you, Richard. I think what I'll do is just put two questions to you and then open it up to the group. One has to do with the mid-2011 deadline, how we should understand that, what it means in practical terms. The second is about Pakistan. You alluded to it here and you've certainly stressed it in the past, the importance of the Pakistan piece of your assignment. Mike O'Hanlon and several of our colleagues had the latest of their indices in the *New York Times* over the weekend, the bottom line of which on Pakistan is that the situation is worse off there both in terms of the welfare of the Pakistani people and also in terms of our interests, and maybe you'd give us your own assessment on that.

MR. HOLBROOKE: In that December 1 speech, the president announced that we would add 30,000 troops, and he also said that he would begin a withdrawal of some of the combat troops in July 2011. Later on in the speech, in a phrase that did not get adequate attention, he used the words "a responsible transition of security responsibility to the Afghan police and army," and that is the key to the speech and that's the key to the policy. The domestic considerations are

no secret to any of you, but I'm not going to comment on those. I'm here to present our foreign police interests and not our domestic political issues, but you're all aware of the controversies that surround this policy. And by the way, there will be a review of this all of this in December of this year which he also mentioned in his speech. The president believes that we need to put more emphasis on Afghan self-reliance and that in 18 months we need to show tangible, visible progress toward a transition for Afghans taking over responsibilities for themselves across the country.

I left for Europe while the president was speaking on December 1 and landed in Brussels just after he'd spoken and the Europeans of course with the time difference had not heard the speech. The headlines misportrayed the speech right at the beginning and said withdrawal in 2011, and that misunderstanding may have been perpetuated here to some extent by people either in innocence of deliberately misconstruing the speech. Some public figures questioned the date, but they misrepresented it. The president made clear in the speech that we are not abandoning Afghanistan, that this is a strategy to work with the Afghans and create the time and space during which they can improve their own ability for governance. This was discussed at length with President Karzai and with his cabinet on numerous occasions, notably including the trip that Hillary Clinton and I made to Afghanistan on

October 18 and 19 in conjunction with President Karzai's inauguration. The Afghans understood this and they're very comfortable with it. So I need to underscore that that's what July 2011 means, not a withdrawal but the start of a responsible transition in which American combat troops will begin to draw down.

On the second question in regard to Pakistan, I'm not quite how you phrased it, Strobe. You meant a generic comment about Pakistan?

MR. TALBOTT: Mike O'Hanlon and his colleagues had put together a set of benchmarks that comprise an index on how things are going and trend that they feel that they have identified in Pakistan is ominous, negative by comparison with a year ago.

MR. HOLBROOKE: I read Mike's monthly -- it's quarterly isn't it? I read Mike's quarterly table with great interest and it influenced me a lot as we tried to develop our own benchmarks. But I think we have to be very careful about two things, maybe three things. One, let's not confuse input and output. That's a very common problem that I've seen in every war that I've been involved in. Let's not confuse the number of cell phones, to take one of Michael's criteria, with how the war is going. Let's not minimize the importance of it -- cell phone penetration is a hugely important issue and a very positive indicator for social and economic

development in Afghanistan and Pakistan -- but it doesn't tell you how the war is going. I lived through this in a distant war in another century and another part of the world and I am very hard over on the fact that we often confuse input and output, and I know you don't disagree with this.

Back to Strobe's question. How are we doing in Pakistan? It's a very complicated issue and I want to start by saying it's now how "we" are doing at all. This is their country, not our country, and the question is how is Pakistan doing. I have now been to Pakistan six times I think last year at least and I'm going back next week, and all I can say is that we knew from the beginning that what happened in Pakistan was critically important to the region and we approached Pakistan with great respect for its sovereignty and its territorial integrity and the enormous complexities of what it faces economically, socially, politically and strategically on both its major borders.

If you look at Pakistan during the last year you can contract two different models, but from our point of view, we saw the Pakistani military go into Swat, do great damage to the insurgents, collaborate and cooperate with the American military in some information-sharing activities which produced beneficial results, but I want to underscore no American troops in Pakistan. We do not do fighting in Pakistan. And then they went into South Waziristan. There was an enormous refugee problem, 2-1/2

million people. The United States led the international response with hundreds of millions of dollars. We were the first out of the box and we mobilized the rest of the world. The United States Congress passed some very important legislation that was a quantum jump in American economic assistance. There was then a controversy over some of the aspects of it, some of the reporting requirements in Pakistan, but I think that was explained very well by Secretary Clinton during her trip.

And the country went through some political dramas which were internal to Pakistan but which we watched with concern and sympathy. And at the end of the year, Pakistan is in the position it is today with the United States looking for any way we can support their government and their people. Hillary Clinton herself put very heavy emphasis during her trip on supporting Pakistan where its needs are greatest which are energy and water and other major economic issues. Karachi, the world's largest Muslim city with 18 million people had about 4 hours' electricity a day during the worst of the summer months and we want to do things to help address that problem. We've sent some of our very finest members of the administration out there, notably David Lipton to help work with the Pakistani government on this. And on water we're looking for ways to help. Water is not only a big problem, but as you well

know from your own work it's going to become a more and more serious problem.

Pakistan has a long and complicated history with the United States which people like Bruce Riedel have lived through and we will continue to work with Pakistan as a friend and an ally and with great understanding and support for the utter complexity of what they're going through. But I do not accept the core thesis of the question which is that the situation is worse today. I just don't accept that. The situation is what it is today and not worse. Pakistan is working its way through a series of issues which are for them to decide on their own.

MR. TALBOTT: Thank you. Martin? And wait for the mike and identify yourself for the very few who don't know who you are.

MR. INDYK: Martin Indyk from the Foreign Policy program at Brookings. Ambassador Holbrooke, India. Some would say that unless you bring India into the picture and find a way to resolve the Indian-Pakistani difference as deep as they are, it's going to be impossible to actually make progress with Pakistan or Afghanistan. I wonder how you would react to that.

MR. HOLBROOKE: First of all, Martin, I think everybody who knows the history of the subcontinent, and you certainly among them, knows that India and Pakistan have a unique interrelationship that goes

back to the independence of the two countries and we have to respect that. We can write books about it, but in the end it is a fact of history, and my job does not include India. I am the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan. There was a misunderstanding on this. I never sought to be the representative of envoy for India. India is a great country on its own. We have an excellent ambassador, Tim Roemer, and he represents us and we have a wide range of bilateral relationships which would not under any circumstances involve me. The Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia, Bob Blake, our former ambassador in Sri Lanka and our chargé for almost a year in New Delhi is the regional assistant secretary who does that. Having said that, I would add that I keep the Indians fully informed of my activities on a regular basis through the ambassador here in Washington. She and I see each other frequently. And through recurring trips to India, and everyone understands that India has a legitimate concern for what happens in the region. But I am not negotiating issues between India and Pakistan. That's not my job nor is it something that would be productive if I were to undertake it.

But I cannot stress highly enough that the Indian relationship is important to the U.S., the Pakistan relationship is important to the U.S., and in my view the argument that we favor one country over the other is a

legacy of the past. I do not believe it is justified by the policies we are taking right now.

MR. TALBOTT: The lady in the back?

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. I am Iftahar Singh from Voice of America and we broadcast through the -- Region Service. My question is two quick questions really. Yesterday the U.N. ambassador in Afghanistan said reconciliation efforts is one of the areas which needs attention. Is the United States through the government of Afghanistan involved in any talks or negotiations? The second question is the Pakistani military forces are very fundamental to the success in Afghanistan, but recently there have been media reports that Pakistani military is selectively targeting the militants on their own land but not the ones which are operating in Afghanistan, particularly the Hakani group, thank you very much.

MR. HOLBROOKE: On your first question concerning, did you say the remarks of the U.N. ambassador?

SPEAKER: Yes.

MR. HOLBROOKE: I think you're referring to Kai Eide probably, the senior U.N. representative. Is that correct?

SPEAKER: Yes, sir.

MR. HOLBROOKE: Actually, Kai was in this morning to see Secretary Clinton and me and we had a very good talk. You know that his tour is coming to an end and he came in for some formal talks and we discussed this issue. I don't know exactly what remarks you're referring to, but there isn't any question that our policy has to include an opportunity for those people fighting with the Taliban who are not members of al-Qaeda to rejoin the political process. Bruce and I spent a lot of time talking about this at the beginning of last year.

I would estimate that 60 or 70 or more percent of those people fighting with the Taliban are not ideologically supportive of al-Qaeda at all and are not necessarily supportive of the Taliban's supreme leadership, but they fight for various reasons. They're misled about the nature of our presence there through the propaganda that I mentioned earlier. They have sense of injustice or personal grievances. Or they fight because its part of the Afghan tradition that you fight outsiders and they may have the ISAF-NATO-U.S. presence conflated with earlier historical events some of which are not too far in the past.

So it is absolutely imperative that we deal with this issue. If we don't deal with it, success will elude us. Hillary Clinton addressed this in her speech at the Council on Foreign Relations in Washington last summer. I won't repeat what she said, but she was very clear on the open

door for Taliban who renounce al-Qaeda to rejoin. Many members of the political society in Kabul today are former Taliban. They're in the National Assembly. They're in the government. They are outspoken. One of them wrote a bestselling book about his experiences with the Taliban. So this is critically important. This program used to exist on paper and it was not very successful.

About 3 weeks ago the *Washington Post* wrote a superb front-page piece on five Taliban who decided to come in from the cold and got no support. Now they feel like they're trapped in a no man's land. We cannot allow this to happen. When Ashley and I visited Khost Province a year and a half ago as private citizens, we met with five young people who told us the same story, ex-Taliban. President Karzai in his inaugural speech on November 19 laid out a policy proposal and we are focused very much on this, and I think David Petraeus, Stan McChrystal and I would all say that this is one of the most important areas that needs to be addressed because nobody believes that the outcome of this war will end with a complete demolishment or killing everybody who fights with the Taliban. That's neither possible nor necessary. Nor is it in the nature of this sort of war. That's not how this kind of war ends. It won't end on the deck of a battleship and it won't end in a military base in Dayton, Ohio. This is a different kind of war and this issue -- I'm spending a lot of time on

this question because it's so high on our personal priority list -- is one of the big things that has to emerge. Why didn't it emerge last year? Because the election process was so complicated and so intense and involved the same participants that it we were not able to get this program resurrected and straightened out and funded right away. But we identified this in the report that Bruce and I and our colleagues did, and I thank you for raising that.

MR. TALBOTT: The election though of course was accompanied by massive fraud and produced a president and a presidency that are highly discredited and tarnished both domestically and around the world. How do you deal with that as yet another albatross around the neck of the policy?

MR. HOLBROOKE: This election was, in the words of President Obama, "messy." Well in advance of the election in every interview that I gave, I said this is going to be an imperfect election. Very few countries would have even attempted an election under these conditions in the middle of a war with the Taliban saying that they would cut off the finger of anyone who had purple ink on it, that being the mark of a person who had voted, so the fact that it was messy was not surprising. Having said that, Strobe, Hamid Karzai is the legitimately elected president of the country and we will deal with him and his government

which has plenty of good people in it. It's a government we can work with. I should be careful about that because not all of his cabinet members have been confirmed yet, but among the ones confirmed are some excellent ministers who we're very comfortable working with. We are well aware of the fact that this election wasn't perfect and we worked closely with NDI and IRI and the European Union observers and I hope future elections will be better, but this was the first really contested election in the country. There had been one 5 years ago but not like this and under the most difficult circumstances. Secretary Clinton said publicly during her trip that it was astonishing that they attempted it at all. But we will work with the Karzai government as the legitimate government and we look forward to continuing that and we look forward to improvements in the relationship.

MR. TALBOTT: Yes, sir.

SPEAKER: Thank you. Raghubir Goyal from India Global. Mister Ambassador, Happy New Year. I know you have a very difficult job and you cannot make everybody happy in this job you are doing. My question is that as far as the problem in Afghanistan is concerned, it has been going for over 20 years and we don't know how long it will continue. But there is a report by the General Secretary of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon that you cannot win this war unless you involve Afghanis or the Afghani people. What he is saying, I don't know whether you're listening

to him or not or the think tank people that the Afghan people are important to be involved in this war.

Another just to follow-up is as far as the future of Afghanistan is concerned also, I think neighbors are important like India. Like you said, your job is not to get involved in India, but India can play I think a major role in reconstruction or involving the people of Afghanistan. So where do we go from here as far as the future of Afghanistan?

MR. HOLBROOKE: I'm glad you mentioned the 30 years of war because I don't want to tell you something you all know, but it all needs to be underscored. Very few countries in the world have undergone such a trauma as Afghanistan has since December 1978 and this really is extraordinary. I can think of few countries that have been hit like this, maybe Cambodia, but this is extraordinary. The society was really damaged. I mentioned agriculture at the beginning. Afghanistan was a big agricultural exporting country with India as a prime market. A month ago the Afghans with great fanfare shipped by airplane 12 tons of apples -- they're famous for their apples -- to India as a way of resurrecting their once-vibrant export markets, and that's why we're putting so much attention on agriculture. So answer to your question my friend, we really are listening to the Afghans not just on agriculture, although that is our primary nonsecurity issue, but on everything.

One of the things we found when we took office a year ago was that only 10 percent of American aid to Afghanistan and Pakistan went through the governments. Ten percent. So we were undermining the very governments that it was our professed goal to strengthen. And most of the rest of the aid went through these contractors. Those of you who saw what Hillary Clinton said yesterday in a development speech -- I see Hattie nodding -- you saw the hard shot she took at contractors. One of my instructions from the President and the Secretary of State is to reduce the contractors, but AID ain't what it was when you were there. As she said yesterday, there are four engineers left in the water area. So we need to do two things simultaneously. We need to force more of our aid through the governments and we need to reduce the contractors. This is not easy for many reasons. One is oversight. The Congress wants to be sure the money isn't wasted or disappears into people's pockets. The second is the infrastructure of AID, and I mentioned Rajiv Shah earlier. Raj and I have talked about this. It's going to be one of his main missions. I have no doubt this is being discussed right now at the swearing in at the Ronald Reagan Building.

The number three problem is just moving this thing around with congressional oversight. But we understand what you're saying. I don't know the exact quotes you're referring to, but I understand them. On

the other issue you raised, the neighbors, I'm not sure exactly sure what you have in mind, but every one of the neighbors has a role to play here in the stabilization and demilitarization ultimately of Afghanistan, and when I say everyone, I mean every one of the neighbors. If you look at a map of Afghanistan, there are a lot of neighbors. Bordering neighbors. You mentioned India. India doesn't have a common border with Afghanistan, but I'm talking about just the countries that have direct borders next to them.

MR. TALBOTT: Trudy?

MS. RUBIN: Trudy Rubin with the *Philadelphia Inquirer*. Mister Ambassador, when the Swat fighting was going on, initially there was some talk of Chinook diplomacy coming in, Western diplomacy as with the earthquake in 2005 which was so successful in changing Pakistani ideas. The Pakistani Army rejected that. I was recently in Swat and although the Pakistani Army talks about building schools, a lot of collateral damage was done. The civilian government is doing nothing so far. The Army is hard pressed and doesn't know how to cooperate with the public. My question is how do we effectively use aid? The aid we put into Swat was mainly humanitarian where we took the lead. How do we take all of his new civilian aid and make it effective especially when there is such paranoia in Pakistan that the idea of new AID officials coming in to

oversee this new aid has been billed in the newspapers as an invasion of Blackwater?

MR. HOLBROOKE: Gee, thanks, Trudy, that was really helpful. Let's start with what you called the Chinook diplomacy and the 2005 earthquake. It is true that American poll numbers went up after the earthquake, but they went right back down again, so let's not gooey-eyed about what happened. What the Bush Administration did with the earthquake was a terrific thing in and of its own right and it's one of the things that they should be given vast credit for. When it came to Swat, we had a different situation. It wasn't a natural disaster, it was a military operation in a very sensitive area. We worked very closely with General Naeem and his colleagues. I met with him. I went out to the area myself several times. We have a refugee person on our staff who's working on these issues. We share your concern that not enough has been done on the reconstruction phase. I'll be returning to the issue next week. And we contributed as I said earlier the overwhelming largest single contributions to work on this.

You mentioned helicopters. The Pakistanis asked us for helicopters. They weren't Chinooks. They asked us for a different sort of helicopter that wasn't on our inventory. President Obama himself got involved in this. We joked that he had become the chief helicopter

procurement officer of the United States because he was so concerned about this. We located the types of helicopters that they wanted which was not easy. We had to find them in countries all over Central and Eastern Europe and we got them out there, and General Petraeus and Admiral Mullen and I were all personally involved in this.

We're not doing this simply to raise America's poll numbers. We're doing it because it's a necessity and this is what a great nation does for a country which is under so much pressure, and we will continue to help them in any way we can. As far as America's position in Pakistan goes, in terms of attitudes toward the U.S., I believe it's better today than it was a year ago and I believe a lot of the data and most of the data supports that. At the same time, it will take time to rebuild the relationship. The last decade was a complicated one for U.S.-Pakistan relations. As a matter of fact, every decade is complicated.

MR. TALBOTT: In the back.

MR. DREYFUS: Good afternoon, Ambassador. I'm Bob Dreyfus with *The Nation* magazine. You didn't answer the gentleman's question about Hakani, but isn't it true that the Pakistani military and ISI is still to this day giving significant support to the very enemies that we're fighting, the Taliban, Hakmatyar, Hakani, and that if we squeeze them too hard on this that they could cut off our ability to supply our forces

logistically so that we're kind of hostage to the Taliban's main supporter which we depend on in order to supply our forces in Afghanistan. Isn't that the central paradox you're facing?

MR. HOLBROOKE: I apologize for not responding to the question earlier. It was inadvertent. This is of course a much debated question, Bob, and all I can say is you're welcome to your interpretations of what happens, but I do not believe we are hostage as you put it. It is true that well over 50 percent of our supplies into Afghanistan come in over the Khyber Pass and that's a difficult piece of logistical resupply. It's the longest logistical resupply in the history of the United States military. I've sat down with the logisticians, the logistics officers in the field and talked to them about the immense difficulties of bringing things in, although we are diversifying. But I don't see the hostage issue.

As for the question of Hakani and Hakmatyar groups, we are deeply concerned about the activities of these groups. The Hakani group straddles the border and is responsible for some of the most serious events that take the lives and injure American and allied forces. There is no question about that. We have discussed this and looked for ways to deal with it and I see signs of movement forward, but I think with all respect to all of you that continued discussion of this issue in public works

against the goal which I know all of you share in this room which is a reduction in the risk to our American forces in Afghanistan.

MR. TALBOTT: And I might add our allies, speaking of which we have the Danish and the Georgian ambassadors here, and the Georgian ambassador has a question.

AMBASSADOR KUTELIA: Batu Kutelia, Ambassador of Georgia to the U.S. You mentioned the neighboring countries playing an important role. My question is about the processes that are developing in and around Iran are affecting or may be affecting --

MR. HOLBROOKE: How the processes what, sir?

AMBASSADOR KUTELIA: Developing in Iran and around Iran are affecting the Afghanistan domestic political situation.

MR. HOLBROOKE: First of all before I answer your question since you're from Georgia, I do want to acknowledge the battalion that's being trained now in Tbilisi. It is a matter of fact which I doubt many people in the room will realize that when that battalion arrives in Afghanistan in March, it will bring to 950 the number of Georgian troops in the country, which on a per capita basis will make Georgia the largest single troop contributor to Afghanistan until the U.S. reaches its peak of 100,000. and then Georgia and the U.S. will be the top two. I should acknowledge that and I should acknowledge President Saakashvili's

personal role in that, but all of the Georgian people, and I look forward to going out to Tbilisi to visit the troops before they leave. But we should all recognize those because Georgia's own history particularly in the last year and a half has been so extraordinary and they've made this commitment without any request for anything in return. There are no quid pro quos here. They wanted to help. They saw the regional connections.

Secondly, in regard to your question about Iran, when I said all the neighbors before, I obviously included all the neighbors. The Iranians have a role to play in the region and no one denies that, at least no one in this administration denies that, but it is embedded within our other disagreements with Iran which are very serious and involve issues that I don't work on directly. The Iranians were helpful in 2001 and 2002 as is well known -- and Jim Dobbins has written part of a book on this -- in creating the current government. The Iranians participate in regional fora. We do not object to that. When the Iranian foreign minister came to the Japanese pledging conference for Pakistan I mentioned earlier and Iran pledged $330 million to Pakistan at a Western Japanese conference, we didn't object to that, and we are very mindful of this.

The Iranians also have very serious concerns over drugs. They have one of the largest percentage addition rates in the adult population in the world and you all know where those drugs come from.

So all of these issues are on the table, but they are embedded within a larger relationship between Iran and the rest of the world which is of enormous consequence and so we deal with it within that framework.

The other neighbors I've already addressed in groups and I'm not going to take time to discuss them individually, but again I say that with the exception of three -stans, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan which we're about to visit, I've gone to every one and I've talked to all of their leaders in New York in the General Assembly and there is a strategic parallelism or symmetry in the fact that everybody is concerned about the risk of instability in the area, and when I say everybody, I mean all the neighbors.

MS. SARAO: I'm Elaine Sarao with Foreign Aid Through Education. I'm very glad to hear about agriculture being the keystone to development and economic security for Afghanistan. To that particular point as we're looking at more, hopefully, NGOs delivering programs and working with the Afghans and building within the Afghan community, I'd like to mention that there was an interesting *Washington Post* op-ed piece back in mid-November where Glen Hubbard, the Dean of Columbia's business school was reflecting on the funding for Pakistan and I assume it has the same thing to do also with Afghanistan in terms of models of delivery of programs to support successful economic development. He

harkened back to the successful model of the Marshall Plan, not suggesting to do a Marshall Plan per se, but, rather, to look at the model of how things could be altered and delivered for truly sustainable economic development. How are your plans moving and are they moving in that direction?

MR. HOLBROOKE: On my trips to Pakistan I always try to meet civic society and the criticism of the way we gave foreign assistance in Pakistan was really harsh and particularly in your field of education. They felt they hadn't been consulted both at the higher education and at the secondary education level. I talked to some extraordinarily brilliant Pakistani leaders both in the NGO world and in the ministries about this.

We sent Robin Raphel, who most of you must know, the former Assistant Secretary for South Asia, out there and she is now our chief of operations in Islamabad. I'm not going to say she's fixed this problem. I'm not going to say she will fix it completely. But I will say that the people working in these fields, and education is very high on our list in Pakistan, are much, much more comfortable now. We've spent a lot of money on education and as Hillary Clinton said yesterday in that public statement, when she went to Pakistan, she didn't actually name Pakistan but as I listened to her I thought she was referring to our trip, she said people say to me you say you give us all this money and we've never

seen any of it, and then she said that the Chinese and the Japanese projects are very visible. We are well aware of that criticism and we're changing it as rapidly as this attenuated budgetary process of the request and congressional approval and getting the money in place can bear because we're so aware of the issue you've raised.

MR. TALBOTT: We'll take one more from the floor. This lady over here next to the wall.

MS. SCHIRCH: My name is Lisa Schirch. I'm just back from Kabul where I'm part of the Canadian-led effort to support a public civil society peace process.

MR. HOLBROOKE: You're an NGO?

MS. SCHIRCH: The 3D Security Initiative based here in Washington.

MR. HOLBROOKE: The 3D Security Initiative?

MS. SCHIRCH: Development, Diplomacy, Defense.

MR. HOLBROOKE: Ronan, I hope you have that.

MS. SCHIRCH: I would love to talk to your NGO person afterwards.

MR. HOLBROOKE: We're going to test Ronan on this one.

MS. SCHIRCH: I met with a range of religious, ethnic, NGO and civil society leaders in Kabul and a lot of them mentioned that they

supported the troop surge, they liked the development surge, but they'd like to see a much more, rigorous diplomatic surge. What would the diplomacy surge look like in Afghanistan?

MR. HOLBROOKE: I'm not sure if you're talking about international diplomacy or local.

MS. SCHIRCH: Regional and within Afghanistan.

MR. HOLBROOKE: We're doing that. I'll be in the United Arab Emirates on Monday and Tuesday meeting with 28 of my counterparts as I said earlier. Last year I was in Russia, I was in China twice, I was in the Gulf three times, the Europeans all the time. This is is just trips of mine. We have ongoing detailed bilateral relationships with Turkey and the UAE. President Obama raised this with Hu Jintao on his trip. We have really taken from zero other than the inter-team of the Europeans plus Canada our efforts. We now meet regularly with the embassies here that are involved. One of my two deputies, Dan Feldman, runs that effort. I'm sure many of you in this room know Dan Feldman well. We've had long bilaterals with the Egyptians both in Cairo and here so there is an advanced effort.

You say diplomatic and I want to clarify the word here. There are two different things going on. There is coordination of assistance and there is diplomacy. The coordination of assistance is

where we started. Diplomacy requires establishing a common base point in terms of strategic objectives and then in terms of action and it's very complicated because while everybody wants strategic stability, every country has its own point of view vis-à-vis its neighbors. So what is good for country X may not be to a country next door. Two countries that both want stability in Afghanistan may have their own relationship problems and all of you can figure out examples of that. So we're very engaged on that. And I would say in regard to Canada particularly, what an extraordinary contribution Canada has made in Afghanistan. We work with them constantly and very closely and I look forward to going to Ottawa in the near future as well.

MR. TALBOTT: To wrap up, Richard, if it's okay, maybe we could circle back to a thought of yours at the beginning of the conversation. You offered Mike O'Hanlon and his colleagues some suggestions on how to revise their parameters, matrices, benchmarks for the Pakistan index. What would you recommend that they use as the indicators for progress or the opposite of progress with regard to the Afghanistan index which they'll be doing several times between now and when the president makes the tough decision in December?

MR. HOLBROOKE: You mean the criteria for progress?

MR. TALBOTT: Yes.

MR. HOLBROOKE: I made a terrible mistake when I had a similar event like this before the Center for American Progress last summer. I said in passing in the course of a longer answer that you'll know success when you see it, and one of the people in the room blogging out of the room said that I had just compared Afghanistan to pornography. So I called Hillary Clinton up and I said, Hillary, I made this terrible mistake and I told her and she laughed that beautiful laugh of hers which you know so well, and she said, never do irony in Washington.

MR. TALBOTT: Or nuance.

MR. HOLBROOKE: That's for you. You're nuanced, I'm ironic, but not here and not today.

There was this big benchmark study which I think Bruce made some inputs into and it was headed by the Director of National Intelligence, Admiral Blair, the NSC oversaw it and our office had a substantial input. We have laid out criteria on security, on governance, on subnational governance, on the nature of the Taliban threat province by province. We are required by law to report to the Congress on a periodic basis on this. This is all publicly available. There's no real classification on this.

This was not a criticism of Mike O'Hanlon's efforts. On the contrary. They influenced my thinking very greatly over the last 5 or 6

years since he started the effort on Iraq alone and then switched to Afghanistan, and now you've included Pakistan haven't you? You've started to include Pakistan. The criteria themselves are very detailed and there are gradations from green to red and everything in between. You're welcome to look at them. The American public will decide for itself how we're doing and express its views through the Congress and anyone who's had experience with this particular exercise knows that what the criteria show and what the public feels is going on are not always identical because of a key intermediary with which you have some passing familiarity, the press, and that's just the way it is. So when I hear Trudy's question, even though I can't accept all your premises, I take it very seriously because you're a terrific reporter. But we have a long set of benchmarks and you're welcome to access them. I think they're on the State Department website. If not, just check on Google and you'll be able to find something.

MR. TALBOTT: We hope, Richard, that we'll have you back at some point down the road and we can pick up on this conversation, and in thanking you and releasing you to get back to your important work, I would just pick up on something our friend from Canada said when she expressed the hope that there would be a vigorous diplomatic surge. I

would suggest that any enterprise that this guy is involved in so qualifies and we wish you all kinds of luck with it.

MR. HOLBROOKE: Thank you, Strobe.

MR. TALBOTT: Please join me in thanking Ambassador Holbrooke.

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/s/Carleton J. Anderson, III

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