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WHAT NEXT FOR AFGHANISTAN? A POST-ELECTION ANALYSIS

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INDYK: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Welcome to Brookings. I'm Martin Indyk, the director of the Foreign Policy Program at Brookings.

We have this afternoon another in our series on Afghanistan, the great Afghanistan debate as it were. And we have a panel of experts, all of whom have spent a good deal of time in Afghanistan, three of whom have just been there very recently, and, therefore, have some ground truth to share with you. Of course, we've just gone through elections in Afghanistan, and the latest reports over the weekend, the judgments about some 25 percent of ballots being considered fraudulent. We've also seen news lately of high-level engagement in political negotiations between the Taliban and the government in Kabul, facilitated by the ICEF forces. And a good deal of military activity designed to increase the pressure on the Taliban. So, we thought it was a good opportunity to come together with knowledgeable people to try to assess where things are and where things are going.

Speaking today on the panel, we're going to start with Tom Garrett, who is the vice president for Programs at the International Republican Institute, IRI. Prior to that, he has served as IRI's regional director for the Middle Eastern North Africa. Tom has observed elections around the world, but, in particular, he has observed the last four elections in Afghanistan, and he headed up the elections monitoring for IRI in this last go around.

He'll be followed by our very own Mike O'Hanlon, author of too many books to detail, but his almost most recent one was called *"Toughing It Out in Afghanistan*,*"* and he's revising that, and a new version will be out soon?

MR. O'HANLON: Soon.

MR. INDYK: And Mike has just been in Afghanistan, also observing

elections and spending some time on the ground with the commanders of the U.S. forces there.

After Mike, Vanda Felbab-Brown will speak. Vandar is a fellow in the 21st Century Defense Initiative in the Foreign Policy Program, and the author of a recent book called *"Shooting Up,"* which deals with narcotics and counter narcotics strategy. She is our resident expert on all things illicit. (Laughter) But that takes her to Afghanistan in particular, and she just had some fairly hair-raising experiences in Kandahar, where she was at the same time as Mike and Tom were there, and, so, she has some, I think, very interesting assessments to give us on the situation.

And, finally, Gerard Russell. I'm not sure that any of you will be familiar with Gerard, but he's particularly a welcome addition to our panel today because Gerard served in the British Embassy, and head of the British Embassy's Political Team in Kabul, and then as the senior staffer at the U.N. mission in Kabul, in which he was particularly focused on the effort to promote reconciliation talks. He is very much an expert and very experienced in what has happened there, and, so, we're very fortunate to have you here, Gerard, to give us an assessment of how things are going on the political level. He left the United Nations and the British Government late last year, and Gerard is now a Carr Center research fellow at Harvard Kennedy School of Government.

So, what we're going to do is have a bit of a conversation here, and then we'll take all of your questions or some of your questions.

So, Tom, first of all, give us a sense of what happened with the elections and what it means as we go forward.

MR. GARRETT: Okay. Thank you very much, Martin, and thank you to Brookings for having this panel.

As you've mentioned, I've had the opportunity to participate in the last

four Afghan elections. My organization, the International Republican Institute, fielded a large international observation mission to the 2004 presidential election, 2005 parliamentary election, and then to last year's presidential provincial elections.

For this year, we did something a little bit different. We took an international assessment team of 5 experts, all of who had been in Afghan elections in the past. We took them to the country, but we augmented them, I think, very importantly with 160 of our Afghan partners. And this type of a mission, this assessment mission for the election allowed us to have a reach in 12 provinces across the country; we were in each of ICEF's regional commands.

In comparing the different elections through the years, I've just thought of a couple of things that were very apparent to me. One was in 2004, when I was there for the presidential election. One of the memories I cherish was being able to walk from my guest house, those few blocks to the IRI office every day, just doing that alone, walking along encountering people on the streets. It was very different in the year since that time.

Now, IRI programming is very much impacted in the country by security considerations, and, so, that's not news, I'm sure, to anyone in the room, that security has deteriorated in the country, but what I would like to talk a little bit about to you today in light of this last election is the idea that while security is deteriorated, if you can separate that out for a moment, something I know it's very hard to do, but if you separate that out, I believe Afghanistan is actually in a very good stage of democratic development as compared to some of the other countries that are not conflict or post-conflict countries that IRI has worked it around and the world that I've been in in the last 16 years.

While security was definitely more stable in the 2005 parliamentary election than it was in 2010, I also recall how few posters and placards there were for women candidates in Kabul that year. The few public images of women that you saw

were usually defaced, and you definitely did not see women candidates or really too many candidates at all out campaigning among the public. Whereas, in 2010, you saw the faces of women candidates on billboards, you saw hundreds and thousands of placards and posters featuring women from various positions and various backgrounds, and none of them were defaced, except really with one notable exception. There was a female candidate in Kabul who was affiliated with the warlords, and her posters were almost routinely splattered with red paint, which I thought was a very interesting commentary. But you did see in 2010 women campaigning in public, albeit with a male family member, but you did see women and you saw their voters out and about, other candidates out and about seeking the votes of people directly.

Another difference that you saw in this election as compared to previous elections was the strong presence of young people working the polling stations. Definitely the preceding elections featured what one sees in most countries, and that is older people or professional people affiliated with the school that the polling station was located in, but you saw young people very much committed to and working in the elections this time, which I thought was a very positive change from the past.

Probably the most noticeable difference that you would see in these elections as compared to any of the others was the huge number of candidate agents that were in the polling stations. And these were individuals who were there representing particular candidates, and they were there to be a check and a balance on retail fraud that might occur in that polling station.

The reason this was important was, unlike in 2005 in the last parliamentary election, the ballots were actually counted this time in the polling stations, and the results were declared, and although those are not final results, that was still an initial check on the process. So, I think the idea that you had literally hundreds of

candidate agents at most of these large polling centers that had numerous polling stations, I think that probably is something that needs to be further researched as we get the final results and we look at this over the next few months, and I believe that may have been a positive influence on at least some of the elections.

Another difference, I think, in 2005 that we didn't really see so much in previous elections was a diversity of candidates running. You didn't see just a single representative of the majority in the country, but you saw young people as candidates, you saw women, you saw ethnic groups, you saw really the wide range of Afghan people seeking office this time in very public ways. So, the optics were very different.

We, at IRI, trained about 400 candidates and their campaign managers over the last year, and one of the focuses of our training was the idea of direct voter contact. And that's what most of them pursued, and, so, again, you saw campaigning out and about among the people, at least in the urban areas.

The candidates that we trained that came to us and said I want to be a candidate were very motivated people. They came to us knowing that they were probably going to be outspent, they came to us knowing that, for instance, if they were women, they would potentially be threatened, but they still came, and the most consistent motivation they stated as we opened up the candidate training that took place over a few days was I want to be a voice for my people in my village, in my province, in my town.

The second most consistent motivation of the candidates that we trained over the last year was frustration. They'd say that after the 2005 elections, their member of parliament left the province and never returned. And, so, you had these two motivations getting a lot of people out there, making them want to participate.

In the months leading up to the September election this year, IRI was often asked: Should the elections be postponed? What do you think? Should they be

pushed back because of security reasons? And we conduct public opinion research in the country and have for several years, and our nationwide polls show that Afghan people were very keen to participate in this election. I know the numbers were down, which I think in some ways reflected both security concerns, but, also, sort of a natural progression in democratic development. The first elections are always very high, and then you start to see that drop off that we know is found in modern democratic systems. But the polling that we did, even after last year's August 2009 presidential election is all of the flaws started becoming apparent. A majority of Afghan people at that time in our nationwide poll said we want to participate, we want to vote, we want elections in 2010.

IRI has created a couple of different networks across the country. One is a network of women called the Movement of Afghan Sisters. Another one is a group of young people, a nationwide coalition of young people from every different ethnic group and every sector of society. They are not the Kabul elite, they are something different. They are people out in the regions, they're in the provinces, in the small cities, and to a person they were saying to us, these elections need to take place. This is something our country needs. None of them wanted the elections canceled or postponed, even though several of them did say to us they thought there was probably foreign money in the elections, they thought there were security concerns that might take place on election day, and they all believe there might be some fraud. But I think one of the important things that our Afghan partner stated to us over and over was that they believe the Afghan Election Commission and, to a lesser extent, the Afghan Electoral Complaints Commission were both committed this year to the idea of trying to seek out and tackle malfeasance if it occurred in the election. And I think that's something very important because, as you know, these elections, unlike some of the previous, were Afghan-run. These were not run by the international community. So, I thought it was a vote of

confidence by Afghan voters that their system with its flaws would still be something that they wanted to participate in.

Just two weeks ago as the recounts are taking place, the Election Commission contacted IRI's youth partners in Khost Province, which is one of the places where there's been a high degree of fraud alleged. And they actually sought out this youth partner of IRI's, as well as other domestic groups, to come in and monitor the recounts. So, you find an election commission that was actually very proactive in trying to reach out for the first time in Afghan elections, to the Afghan domestic monitoring groups.

You may have seen, certainly, it was in today's papers, that yesterday, the preliminary results were supposed to be released by the Independent Electoral Commission, and they did not. They are supposed to be released in two days. That will probably knock the October 30 final deadline back a little bit, but, at the moment, it appears that this is still an attempt just to get everything --

I know in the *New York Times* today, there was some concerned voice by some people that this might be an attempt to bring pressure to bear upon the Election Commission, and, certainly, I think that's an underreported story is the pressure that could be brought on independent Election Commission officers at the provincial level, as well as at the national level, but we should be seeing results soon, and this will more or less complete the role of the Independent Electoral Commission and leave the final steps of adjudication of the complaints in the hands of the Electoral Complaint Commission.

One thing I do want to say about the idea of all of the allegations of fraud, certainly, fraud did take place. We can see more than 500 polling centers have had their results invalidated by the Election Commission. But I can also tell you that in our work at IRI, in democratic transition countries around the world, you often find people

who are seeking office, idealists, people with visions and dreams, as I think a lot of these folks said I want to represent my people, they often so believe in the rightness of what they stand for that they assume they're going to win because who wouldn't vote for such good people? And it's a very difficult task at IRI to try to train these people to be confident candidates, yet, at the same time, try to manage realistic expectations. And I think for a lot of the people that we trained, as some of them did go on to lose, most of them, some of them did go on to win, I think the ones that lost have decided that it was probably due to fraud rather than say I was rejected for what I stood for.

There was a female member of Parliament, an incumbent who sought reelection from Western Afghanistan, Azita Rafat, and she has spoken to IRI recently to say that actually the adjudication process for her, who is the likely winner, has actually been much more difficult than campaigning was because she said to defend herself daily against dozens and dozens of what are frankly dismissible complaints, that she has to go through this process, of course, and there's really no way around this right now in the adjudication process.

Just looking ahead very briefly, major political milestones have now been met in the country. We've had these elections, we've gone through the two cycles, and I think now, for us at IRI, one of the focuses we believe is probably most important is the idea of looking at governance and looking at civil society.

IRI has USAID-funded programs on subnational governance, as well as support to civil society, and that's what we'll been pursuing soon. We also have National Endowment for Democracy-funded program to train women members of parliament that will be going in for the first time.

Governance is, I think, probably the key issue. We have seen a parliament that, since 2005, was fractured, and really did not have the resources

dedicated to it that it needs. Our Country Director, Gretchen Birkle, today, met with Ashraf Gani, who you may recall from last year's presidential elections, and he said to her he expected to see, again, a divided parliament, a legislature that did not have any clear, cohesive focus. But he also said that he would encourage international community to really focus on support more so than it had in the past to the parliament because, in the moment, with the absence of commitment of those resources, one is left with a strong president and little else in the country. And I think that is not probably serving the people of Afghanistan well.

Lastly, on civil society, let me just say one of the things that was very clear to me in the election and speaking to civil society representatives is they felt a little bit let down. Not a little bit, but a lot, by the international community in this election. Their feeling was that the international community criticized last year's elections, but then pulled back this time. The head of FEFA, the domestic monitoring organization of Afghanistan, stated if the international community was so concerned about the conduct of this election, why did so few representatives of the international community actually filled international observer missions? So, it's a question that one heard from human right activists and that one heard from youth activists, women activists, so, I would say we need to redouble our commitment to civil society, and make certain that they understand in the future if they're going to engage in Afghan politics, that the west will stand behind them and encourage them in that.

So, with that, let me just stop then, and turn it back over to Martin.

MR. INDYK: Thank you, Tom. I appreciate that. We'll get back to the governance issues. Vandar has some things to say about that.

Mike, you were also there with IRI and election monitor, but did a lot of other scouting around. So, what's your sense of the situation? Particularly, give us a

sense of the military campaign and how it's going.

MR. O'HANLON: Thanks, Martin, and for the opportunity to speak with all of you today.

I was also fortunate to be with IRI and with Tom, so, I don't need to second his observations. I had very similar observations really on balance rather hopeful, but you're certainly going to hear from Vanda, I'm sure, and you've heard from others all the problems of these elections, too, and, so, I would simply say in the Kabul area, which, as we hear today, is getting a lot of the reports of allegations of inappropriate behavior, nonetheless, there was a sense of energy and of people caring about the outcome of these elections, which I think is the single most important thing I can say, that politics are alive in Afghanistan, whether they lead the country in a good place or a bad place, I don't know yet. But there is a sense that people wanted to win, people wanted their candidates to win. If nothing else, they see them as ways to access the resources of the state, which is good, old-fashioned incentive for participation that we know well from our democracy, as well. And maybe it's even more boldfaced and clear there, but there was a sense that people cared and that despite the lower turnout that we saw in much of the country, a lot of long lines, and a lot of enthusiastic voters, at least in the places I went. But, again, every election, every province, every part of Afghanistan was different, every observation team saw different things, and, of course, the overall turnout was not spectacular. So, I don't want to push the point too far. There certainly was hopefulness in the air, but, clearly, a lot of things can go awry, and there's a long ways to go.

On the military scene, more generally, I'll just say a couple of quick things. One is that in my conversations at ICEF and elsewhere, I got a very, very fundamentally mixed bag. So, if you're looking for a clear assessment from me that it's

going well or it's not going well, I'm afraid I'm going to have to disappoint you and just do a 50-50 kind of presentation. There are three big problems at least that we all are well aware of, and one of them is clearly the sanctuary problem in Pakistan. Another is what I would describe as the corruption problem in the Karzai inner circle; not necessarily the whole government, at least some parts of the government are showing more hopefulness and progress, but the Karzai inner circle, as we all know, remains problematic.

And, third, and most within our control to do something about, but I don't think we've really gotten our arms around this very well even now, is the way in which our presence and our logistic system pumps up the problem by favoring certain players and not others, and thereby empowering those who would recruit for the insurgency because they have embittered tribes and groups that they can turn to who are not sharing in the spoils of building the new Afghanistan. And I think those three, big problems remain palpable, and I wish I could report to you in late 2010 more progress on those fronts than I can. I thought, frankly, things would be better in regard to at least one or two of those three, big problems than they are. That's the downside.

But let me not stay on the downside. There's also an upside. When you look around Afghanistan, one thing you are struck by, at least I was, and others may disagree, I know we have people in the room who have a lot of experience in Afghanistan and may want to contribute comments later, as well, but Kabul feels to me more or less like a regular city in the developing world. It doesn't have the jersey walls and the blast barriers of Baghdad; it doesn't have people cowering in their houses afraid to be out on the street. It's alive, it's exciting, it's a place where normal human activity continues, where the security situation has not witnessed a major car bomb now since late May, and one always says that with trepidation because you don't want to jinx the good momentum, and, of course, there are a lot of problems that are still there and a lot of

ethnic tensions and a lot of corruption issues, but, nonetheless, Kabul as a city is what General Petraeus is willing to describe as a relatively promising security environment. And I think that's an important point to bear in mind as we try to make sense of the whole country. Also, the north and west, and Vanda was in the north, and she'll have a lot more directly to say about it than I can, but the north and west, while they're deteriorating, remain on balance and not particularly violent. Now, they are threatened by the insurgency, but in terms of day-to-day life for most of their citizens, they're not that violent. If you're a politician, it's different. If you're a key leader, it's different. And, certainly, the situation is going in the wrong direction, but on balance, you have two-thirds to three-fourths of the country that is not bad from a security point of view, even though there are trends that we have to be concerned about.

The economic indicators and the quality of life in Afghanistan are still hopeful stories for the most part. The economy is much better. Now, you could come back at me and say yes, but it's propped up on the twin stimulants of foreign aid and opium, and I would have to acknowledge that a lot of the reason for 10 percent real GDP growth per year is due to these kinds of unnatural and unhealthy causes, and, yet, the economy is getting better. Provide some hope for the Afghan people. It's part of why they still clearly express a preference for the kind of an outcome; we're working with them to try to attain and not for going back to the days of the Taliban. And, certainly, quality of life by various indicators are metrics, health, education, cell phone usage, and so forth are also promising.

Just one or two more things and I'll stop.

I mentioned before the distinction between the Karzai inner circle and the government. I don't want to say the government in Afghanistan is great, but there are some very solid ministers in this government, and we don't talk about them nearly

enough.

And let me just focus today on the Ministry of Interior. For those of you who follow Afghanistan a little bit, but not too much, probably the last thing you remember about the Ministry of Interior is that our friend, Hanif Atmar, who was here at Brookings just over a year ago for a presentation, was somewhere between resigned and fired, forcibly asked to resign and fired by President Karzai over an incident in May in Kabul at a peace conference together with some tensions that had been brewing between the two over the months. And that may be your last recollection, and it's sort of a negative one, and one more reason why we shouldn't have too much faith in Karzai because he fires even the good people. Well, lo and behold, the guy who replaced Atmar appears to be just as good, Mohammadhi. Those of you who follow Afghanistan may know him also as B.K., or Bismillah Khan, was the head of the general staff previously, and, in that position, there were some tensions between him and the Minister of Defense, Mr. Wardak, but in this new arrangement, where they each are running their own ministry, it appears that Mohammadhi is building on some of the vision that Atmar had for the police, and, certainly, they needed a lot of vision and a lot of help, and Mohammadhi is doing some wonderful things or at least some promising things. He's fired close to 30 district chiefs and other commanders in the last month. He goes around town in taxis and sneaks up on police stations to see how his people are doing. And he also benefits now from a much more robust NATO and ICEF effort to train and partner with the Afghan Security Forces.

And that's my last point and I'll stop, which is that even though there are a lot of negative things, and the insurgency has not yet been checked and the trend lines in the violence in the country are still in the wrong direction, and I am thinking hard about what our backup plan for Afghanistan should be in case this current strategy does not

work, because I think we need a backup plan because I think the chances of the current strategy working are in the range of 50-50 or 60-40, having said all of that, the way in which we are now helping the Afghans improve their security forces is far better than we have been able to do before because the resources are finally there, and one of the things we're able to do, apart from having proper amounts of pay for the police officers, survivor benefits for their families if they lose their lives, trying to get their pay through electronic banking so they can access it without their commander or their district chief taking out a chunk for his own use, in addition to all these sort of straightforward, sound, sensible, matter of fact reforms, we also are doing the single most important thing that I believe we've done in the nine years in Afghanistan with the security forces, and that's the concept of partnering. And for those of you have followed this, you know, what I mean. It's once the forces are formed, they go out in the field and they're not left to themselves, they work with a NATO unit that's essentially a sister unit, either right with them or frequently collaborating with them, and they basically have a year or two more of apprenticeship, and, also, they team in the field so they have NATO forces with them to help them if they get ambushed, to call in for reserves, reinforcement, or airpower if they're in trouble, and we can also watch the performance of the individual Afghan commanders to see how good they are or how corrupt they might be, and if we see the latter, we report that information to their superiors in the Ministries of Defense and Interior, where these relatively strong, Afghan reformers are located.

And, so, I'm not trying to sell you a bill of goods. I don't know how this is going to turn out, and I remain very confused and concerned myself about the trajectory we're on, but there are some very positive things to hold onto, and why don't I just stop there with at least a small dose of hopefulness because I'm sure that won't+ be the only message you get from the five of us today.

MR. INDYK: We'll come back to you, Mike, for the backup plan in a moment.

But, Vandar, tell us about what life is like in Kandahar these days.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you, Martin, and thank all of you for coming.

I will reflect what I believe are the perceptions of many Afghan people. As Martin mentioned, I was in Afghanistan for three-and-a-half weeks. The first third, observing elections under the Offices of Democracy International, and I want to say that whatever my comments are, are in no way views of Democracy International, and are simply my private views, and several of my colleagues for that monitoring mission are here in the audience. And part of that was in Kandahar, and I spent another third of the time in Kabul, and then went to Baglung, which is a province in the north, increasingly destabilize.

And, in my view, quite symptomatic of the complexities we are seeing and are going to be seeing in the north. And I had the opportunity to talk with many Afghans, maybe 150-plus people from all walks of life, shopkeepers, people along the Salong Road, mullahs, royals, Afghan NGOs, international NGOs, as well as representatives of the various embassies in ICEF. And Martin started the conversation by saying we'll talk about the ground truth. Well, it's actually very hard to know what the ground truth is, and there are striking differences in perception between members of the international community, such as ICEF, and the various political offices and embassies, and the perceptions of the Afghans. So, I saw the point to progress in places like Marga, in places like Kandahar, where operations have recently taken place and the difficult (inaudible). They'll indicate that the Taliban is not engaging in conventional engagements of forces. They'll indicate that, yes, the elections in Kandahar had many

security incidences and the election turnout was very low, but, nonetheless, not many people got killed. There were no car bomb exploding, et cetera.

And when you talk with Afghans, they have strikingly different perceptions and indicators. People will say yes, there are not people getting killed, perhaps, at the same rate, but very many people are getting killed, and these are not necessarily being reported. They will say that the power of the Taliban is such that the strength of the (inaudible) is sufficient to deter people from behaving in a certain way. They point to Marjah and (inaudible). Marjah, unfortunately, in many ways, was (inaudible) but nonetheless, very much of the public attention both in the west and in Afghanistan has been focused on Marjah, and they see that the security has slipped, that the Afghan community cannot engage with the internationals without the threat of those Afghans being assassinated, be they government officials or be they ordinary people who are signing up to some of the economic programs that are being brought.

So, overall, most Afghans report that they feel far more insecure than they have ever felt, and they feel very disappointed in the expectations of where they thought they would be at this point. And I think it's quite fair to say that the international community is really struggling with the concept of holding key areas that are supposedly cleared.

There are great opportunities for the Taliban to (inaudible) and with efforts such as assassination campaign of government officials, of NGOs, really undermine the progress that has been achieved. And Afghans will very much focus on the slippage. And because they put up with, in terms of conflict, but want the benefits that they see is very elusive.

As I mentioned, the north is (inaudible) stabilized with very many different sources of violence. On the one hand, the Taliban mobilization of the Pashtun

community, some of the rebellions, by aspects of the -- it was members of the (inaudible) community, as well, but, also, a lot of ethnic conflict, tribe-on-tribe conflict, and we see that in other parts of Afghanistan, as well, even in the west to which is far more stable than other parts and that insurgency is the weakest, we see a far greater propensity than a year or two ago toward local disputes escalating into violence.

And I think that's symptomatic of the larger problems that few Afghans believe that a better future is coming. And, so, it might very well be that the ICEF reading is really the correct reading about how security trends are turning, but, ultimately, for success, the Afghans need to buy into that proposition, they need to believe. And, instead, they are quite hopeless, and they're focused on the July timeline, and the system then drives several negative aspects. It drives personal behavior that's immediate power and profit maximization, short-term power and profit maximization, and the lack of interest in investing in the future, be it long-term economic investment, the pressure toward liquefying money, a quick way to get money out of contracting, but, also, discourages long-term investment in taking on corruption, which is vastly pervasive.

And it is striking how little legitimacy the government has, and it's not just the national government in Kabul, but it's the government systematically. In fact, the popular thing to say is how very much one hates the government, and you hear that even from Afghan officials. You hear it from district chiefs, from provincial governors, their line; their political future is to distance themselves from the government, even though they are members of it.

And, in this context, you hear a lot of people being less focused on the election for the reason that Mike indicated, namely as a way to get access to state resources that then one can distribute to the constituency or their (inaudible) system, but you also hear many people saying that whether they participate in the elections will really

not change the system, and that the system is one lacking justice.

At the same time, I think that the international community has not resolved some of the very difficult dilemmas that have challenged the mission from the very beginning. Yes, there is more resources than has ever been, and, in my view, there is more resources at this point than there will ever be. We can talk about in the question and answer period what happens after July, but I think this is the maximum effort that we are going to be able to put.

But, that said, there is the lack of resources, and one of the effects of the lack of resources, including on the military side, is the resurrection of the militias, militias by every other name but militias, currently is called the Afghan local police. The program suffers from the same old efficiencies that the old programs have, and the benefits, the promises are as slim as the previous programs. And, in fact, the program is universally disliked by Afghans. There is only some sectors among Afghans who like it. The Tarji commanders, for example, like the militia, as long as they Tarjic (?) militias. They don't like the idea of Pashtun militias. But, overall, the program is not very popular, even though it's now a major component of the effort.

We have similarly not resolved how we deal with corruption. So, on the one hand, we are, I think, more aware than ever that corruption is deeply problematic. We are also more aware than ever that our behavior deeply contributes to corruption. Contracting and the use of problematic power brokers. Yet, we have not yet found mechanisms not to deal with these power brokers, and, in fact, as the security gains are difficult, we are once again focused on some of these power brokers, even though they might be new or new-ish characters like colonel or general, and others.

And one of our solutions has been to go local, to focus on local officials. Well, the problem that we face, however, is that, first of all, many decisions need to be

taken place at the national level, but, also, we often have very bad reading of the local officials. They often turn out as corrupt, problematic, self-interested as officials elsewhere, and, unfortunately, there is such level of distrust right now between Kabul and the international community that many of the officials that we embraced are seen as potential threats to the system, and, so, the pressure is to counteract them. So, it can almost be a case of death.

Unlike Mike, I still believe that we have a real problem on the police side, including cutting the FDD Program from eight weeks to six weeks in order to produce greater numbers. I think raises a great deal of concern. And the police are still focused on being the frontline against insurgency (inaudible) military forces, if you would like, but still deeply deficient in addressing one of the primary concerns of the Afghan people, and that's crime. We still have very limited capacity on that.

And, often, we get at this point to a situation where in the name of beating corruption, a lot of problematic behavior is taking place. So, for example, some of the firings in the Ministry of Interior are portrayed as an anti-corruption drive. In another way to look at it and another way that Afghans look at it is to say yes, look who's being perched, oh, it's the Pashtun, and look who's being appointed, it's the same old Tarji commanders who are friends of Mr. Bismillah Khan.

So, although I think there is a very strong clamoring in Afghanistan for a strong man to deliver the country out of the difficult situation it is on. And we still continue to perpetuate some of the corruption problems and some of the mentality of viewing the international community and the endeavor as a way to get access to rents by similar programs like the economic stabilization programs. These are meant to hire people so they make money, they have jobs, and don't join the insurgency.

But there is very little monitoring. People sometimes pretend to be the

mobilizing insurgents just to get access to these programs, to get access to the money. Often, the programs are very short-lived. A month, for example. And people get conditioned to get money, but after the money ends, after the program runs out, they are disappointed, and they want to generate conditions to be rehired. Often, these programs, in fact, undercut development programs, and they, once again, encourage the mentality that the international community or other sectors are a source of rents to be sought rather than conditioning deep investment.

In conclusion, let me say two things. I don't think the situation is going well, but it is an absolutely critical make or break year, and the consequences for not succeeding are enormously bad for the United States, for the international community, for Pakistan, and for the Afghan people.

Michael presented his backup plan. In my view, if you don't succeed with the resources, the effort, the support we have right now, it's very hard to imagine how we can do anything but minimize damage if it's smaller resources. Also, the alternative plans, politician (inaudible) perhaps role of Pakistan are, in my view, either unworkable or have very little support and viability on the ground or are very suboptimal outcomes. And Gerard will talk about negotiations.

Let me make the last few comments very quickly about what I think should be the focus in the year or the rest of the year that we have until July.

I would argue for even stronger concentration of resources than we have right now, even beyond the 80 districts. We need to do one area well, where security doesn't slip, where the holding phase doesn't become weakened so that the Afghans can see that there is some progress. We cannot afford again losing (inaudible). We cannot afford weakening in Marjah, so, we need to pull it out somewhere.

It's critical that we focus on the critical aspects of corruption. We cannot

eliminate all corruption in Afghanistan, but we have to indicate the power brokers that although we cannot completely do without them, there is certain behavior that is not tolerable. Systematic tribal discrimination cannot take place. People cannot decide that only members of certain tribe can go through his checkpoint. Similarly, corruption that promises after bribe is paid that some behavior takes place, but it doesn't take place. Corruption that ever escalates the tax, the informal tax that people are paying.

And, finally, corruption in key ministries such as Ministry of Interior and Ministry of Defense, the corruption on tribal bases, I think it's equally important that we turn off the spigot, we don't flood Afghanistan with any more money, we stop conditioning people that they can just ask for money and we stop (inaudible) because our programs are not (inaudible) they are encouraging a lot of the bad behavior. And we only commit money that there is equal commitment on the Afghan part, that there is close monitoring, and we can really determine that the money is being used in the way that we want the money to be used.

And, finally, it's important to realize the level of ethnic tensions that it's right now (inaudible) in Afghanistan. Most people believe that the moment U.S. leaves, there is civil war, and, so, it's very important to find ways to think about ways, what structural issues will reuse the ethnic tensions and will deescalate the brittleness that we currently see?

MR. INDYK: Well, okay, Gerard, maybe we can get some help from the political reconciliation effort. What are we to make of it? Can you give us a kind of guide to understanding? We see a lot of reports of these kinds of engagements going on, but I think it's very hard for the outside observer to really make sense of what the prospects are for some kind of political reconciliation.

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you, Ambassador, and should I take about 10

minutes? Is that about right?

I'm going to draw on, when I speak, experiences, of course, that I had in my previous work, the British Embassy and the United Nations. I should say what I'm going to say doesn't represent either of those two institutions, and now I'm based at the Kennedy School, where a colleague, Michael Semple, I, and others, have been thinking about reconciliation this year. So, it is very confusing. It's very confusing for those who were involved in it so far as I can tell.

There are a great number of different channels for dialogue with various different groups that are affiliated to the insurgency, and the phrase "reconciliation" is used in many different ways by almost each different participant. So, maybe to make it simple, I will just present two possible scenarios, either of which I think is possible down the line, one of which I think is much more probable in the short-term.

The first involves a few probably mid-level Taliban commanders, people who are in Pakistan, but not in the first rank, not in the most trusted circle, you might say. Switching sides, meaning that they came to Kabul, they take part in the political process up to a point. A number of Taliban leaders have already done this; they did it between 2001 and 2005. People like Mullah Omar Barad, who have, from behind the scenes, taken part in political life, having previously been quite senior in the Taliban. And there are several groups that are on a local level both criminal gangs and even ideologically-motivated groups which have, over the years, been disengaged from the insurgency.

And I recall one such case in Helmand Province. I probably can't say too much about it, but there have been successful cases, and those people have been kept through the use of salaries, very often positions, honors of a small kind, have been kept on the side of the government instead of inside of the insurgency. That doesn't mean that they wouldn't go back to the insurgency tomorrow if they felt that that was the

balance of interest. But it is important to note that cases have been successful.

So, let's imagine then that a few more of these are brought across and that maybe one of the groups like the Hizb-i-Islami, which has already mostly come over to the government, perhaps, some people say that Hakani Network. I must say I think that's much less likely, but some people are investing hope in that, and it has been talked of in the past, might conceivably move across to the Kabul Government. It already has in its midst, after all, Abdul Rasal Sayyaf, who has a history almost as militant and extreme as any of these groups. So, it's not impossible to see that that might happen, particularly because there's obviously been a great increase in U.S. targeting of the Taliban and insurgency leaders, and if that were focused on individuals and those individuals were offered a credible way out, it's conceivable that they would move.

Now, there's a lot of room for deceit along the way here. There are a lot of talks. It's not clear to me. I don't know who it was who came to Kabul. Some people feel that it's all a form of information of warfare, that there was no one very senior that came to Kabul for talks, equally, it's possible that there were. But, in many encounters that have happened, it might be that the government and the United States' side, as it were, of the talks think that it has the chance to split insurgency. It might be possibly that the insurgents are thinking that they have the chance to split the government and the United States. So, it isn't very clear until you see someone come forward and change sides, as it were. It isn't going to be very clear what kind of game is being played.

Another point to make about this scenario is that bringing, of course, even a few fairly senior people doesn't necessarily mean that the insurgency is going to be dramatically weakened. Antonio Giustozzi's book, *"Empires of Mud,"* I think is (inaudible) the new Taliban. In fact, he's got an essay there, a small survey of Taliban in Kandahar, half of whom said that it wasn't important whether Mullah Omar was in charge

of the Taliban or the president in Afghanistan. It's not important to them who the person is, which suggests, on the one hand, it's a very positive sign that suggest that President Karzai could win the allegiance of such people. They aren't necessarily attached to having Mullah Omar in the position of king or president, but it also implies that bringing across top leaders of the Taliban will not necessarily bring across (off mike).

Now, another scenario, a much more large scale, if you like, much more dramatic option would be to have some kind of grand bargain. Mullah Omar retires to Mecca. (Laughter) Iti Amin, I think, hung out in Jeddah for a long time. U.S. troops would probably keep background at best, have the ability to reach out to carry out counterterrorist operations in Southern Afghanistan, if needed, but the Taliban would have made an agreement that they would exclude Al-Qaeda from Afghanistan.

Now, the question, to some extent, is what they would ask in return. I recall reading Giadora Ensora who wrote a very good essay on the prospects of reconciliation, suggests that the deal would be entirely for them to get positions in Kabul. I, myself, think it's rather unlikely talking to people who are close to Rabbani, for example, who now heads the Peace Council in Kabul. More importantly, really represents Northern Alliance opinion. They're not happy with the idea of the Taliban having a credible ministry. It would be something like Islamic affairs, refugees. This isn't going to buy the Taliban off. They're going to want a level of local autonomy in the south of Afghanistan. And that poses some problems for the Afghan Government, because, of course, President Karzai's own power base, to some extent, lies in exactly the same area as the Taliban would wish to claim.

However, all of this, I mean, this second process, it doesn't look very likely at the moment, I have to say, for various reasons. First of all, the Taliban obviously don't feel that they are losing. Now, individual members may feel under a lot of pressure,

but what they're seeing is that if you look at the map of government influence around the country, the places where government officials can go, even on visits, it has been receding almost without exception year by year since 2004. We're seeing they know what public opinion is in America. They know that there's an increasing number of people turning against the continuation of the conflict. They see the allies of the United States saying that they would withdraw their troops. They see the announcements of transfer to Afghan control in areas which I think Mike is absolutely right to point to the Kabul example. I should say that Afghans took control of that around two years ago, in theory, at least, and there have been fewer incidents in terms of major car bombs and so forth since then. However, it doesn't necessarily mean that in places like Hasni for example, where many districts, the district government can only go there because he's got an agreement with the Taliban. It doesn't mean that those areas are going to be the same at all.

So, I don't see at the moment, and nor do those who I've talked to, any likelihood that the Taliban are going to jump for this deal right now.

What I want to highlight though is their view, the view of many who are looking at the situation, that one day it's not inconceivable. And, for example, if we look back to Jonathan Powell's book on Northern Ireland, *"Great Hatred, Little Room,"* he was involved in the negotiations with the IRA, which nobody thought would work, no one who had seen all the failures of the past thought that success would ever come.

One lesson I'd like to take from that is that there was for a very long time in place between the British Government and the IRA a secret link that was never announced to the world. It was just called the link. There was a contact, two people that talked to each other regularly, which built a level of trust over the course of decades, and were such an institution, were such a link to be created now, it might be able to bear fruit

in two, three, or four years time, but it would mean not that the United States would need to jump for a negotiated settlement with the Taliban leadership right now, and I say the United States because I think no matter what the Afghan Government agrees with the Taliban, it is the United States which is the key partner because this is about air strikes, it's about military operations.

Even if it's not likely now, some infrastructure does need to be put in place, some trust needs to be built, and relationships need to be created now, which may bear fruit in the future. So, that, Ambassador, would be my conclusion.

MR. INDYK: Thank you, Gerard.

Well, it started with the glass half full, and it ended up half empty. (Laughter) Let's go to questions. Please wait for the microphone, identify yourself, and please ask a question other make a statement, except let's see, Ambassador Ronald Newman, a colleague of mine from before. I'm giving him notice that he's going to be called upon in a moment.

Yes, let's take this woman here in the middle.

SPEAKER: My name is Ometa. I'm from Amnesty International.

My question is for Vandar and Gerard. Will you please comment the Central Asia involvement in the stabilization of Afghanistan, especially as to (inaudible) ever be realized?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Original focus beyond Central Asia has been an important part of the policy of the Obama Administration, and a good deal of activity, perhaps less that somebody wanted to see, has gone in. There are some new developments, including the announcement that the Iranian ambassador will participate in more direct discussions.

Apart from the formal framework that is, I think, just now being put in

place, and that we really don't see at any direct outputs or even outcomes from, there is intensification quite serious of informal engagement with the former supporters of Northern Alliance lining up once again to support the northerners and the complex relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan continue to go on. So, what you hear a lot in the north is that a lot of weapons are flowing from the Central Asian countries to Afghanistan, mainly to the north, to the northerners. We hear that people are digging up the weapons they have dug, but you also hear that a lot of new weapons are coming in. You hear intensification of engagements of other powers, such as Russia or rebuilding of some of the access points and to alliances that had had reaching out to some of the formal communist officials and commanders. So, there is (inaudible) of activity, some activity that there is an effort to institutionalize and a positive way to achieve the regional framework. A lot of activity that's taking place on the individual level that is, I think, undercutting a lot of the objectives that the international community has and perpetuating and intensifying the (inaudible).

MR. INDYK: Gerard, maybe you can, in answering this, talk about the role of Pakistan in the political reconciliation process.

MR. RUSSELL: Yes. Thank you, Ambassador.

It was occurring to me that this was a good time to do that. (Laughter) Actually, I think that the main practical part that Central Asia would play is in providing an alternative supply, import-export route for Afghanistan should it chose to do so. And I'm not sure, in fact, what position the road is in, which is going to eventually link Kabul with (inaudible) and provide a reasonably decent alternative to the reliance on Pakistan for supplies.

Clearly, there's going to have to be an international dimension to the reconciliation process. It's a very difficult and sensitive issue with the Afghans. I recall

being earlier in my time in Kabul being rather dismayed to see an opinion poll, which asked Afghans what they thought of certain foreign countries, and they listed them in order of unpopularity. And America, you'll be pleased to hear, did very well. It was the most popular country for Afghans at the time.

And, as we moved down the list, and I saw there 30 percent reasonably liked Iran, and right down at the bottom, 2 countries that the Afghans most disliked, Pakistan and Britain. (Laughter) Which, of course, was no great news for me. There's a reason, of course, for that, and there's a reason why Britain and Pakistan are linked in the minds of Afghans, which goes right back into the 19th Century history. But that makes it particularly tricky for me to talk about it. However, Pakistan has proven with this curious business with Mullah Baradar, if it proves one thing, it proves that Pakistan has a number of the top cards in its hand. That's not only the issue of sanctuaries, but also the fact that it's got its grip on the top leadership of the Taliban, and can, to some extent, play them as it chooses, and whether it's true or not that Pakistan arrested Mullah Baradar in order to send a message that he should stop talking to the Afghans without Pakistan's involvement, it certainly was interpretive in that way. And some, I talked to Ahmida Sheed a few days ago to try and get his view about this. I think that it's not just a defensive move on the part of Pakistan, it's not necessarily in reaction to the threat from India that they perceive in Afghanistan because of the reasonably close relationship the Afghan Government has with India, but it's also to do with the fact that elements of the ISI have got into the habit of thinking of Afghanistan as their preserve, and they're not going to give it up very easily.

Now, that means it's going to be a very difficult balancing trick to involve Pakistan in the negotiations, which is bound to happen, without allowing it to decide what happens, which is something the Afghans would reject and which, in any case, I think

would be radically destabilizing. However, I do think that the Pakistani establishment would not necessarily object to an essentially territorial division, and I know there are all sorts of problems with the idea of carving up Afghanistan into different sections. But I think an arrangement in which the Taliban have local control and authority in the long-term is pretty much inevitable because they already do in many parts of Southern Afghanistan, effectively, they displaced the government. It's possible that such a deal could be broken and gain agreement from Pakistan, but, also be acceptable to Afghans generally, given, let's say, the endearing presence of U.S. forces, I think it would be essential to broker such a deal.

MR. INDYK: Okay, thank you.

Other questions? Over here, please.

MR. FEREN: Hi, my name is Chris Feren, and I work for the Louis Berger Group, a USAID contractor.

And I'd be happy to hear the thoughts of any of the panel members, but I think my question might be more directed towards Mr. Garrett, and that is: There are inherent tensions with establishing or promoting a liberal, democratic society within the context of a Islamic republic that would be underpinned by Sharia law. And I wonder if you could speak to the tensions and how those are playing themselves out right now currently and what the implications are for the future?

MR. GARRETT: One of the things, as we look at our work in Afghanistan since its beginning in 2003, is there are those tensions, but there is also certain compatibilities to start from. One of those compatibilities, I think, is the idea of Afghan comfort with democratic thinking. If you look at the local Shura Councils and you look at the consensus building mechanism that exists, local elders and those informal leadership positions have been under attack since the Soviet days. And they actually are

not being very well-addressed through the inconsistent application of democratic norms today. Our polls show over and over that people trust local leaders and these informal community leaders, so, that is sort of, I think, the basis we would try to build something on is we started to do voter education programs in advance of the 2004 elections. We were able to implement these nationwide, I think one of the few groups who could, because we went through mullahs and we went through religious leaders and local leaders, and we had them work with us to explain to people what the process would be and what the relevance of that was going to be. So, I think in all of the countries IRI works in, democracy looks like a little bit different, and I think that's definitely the case here. We don't see that there's any incompatibility; we just see that there's going to need to be, I think, education and change, but this would be the building block I would start with.

MR. INDYK: Ron, do you want to make a comment? Ambassador Newman was ambassador to Afghanistan in the early years of the war.

AMBASSADOR NEWMAN: No, I didn't want to comment. It's a very fascinating panel, and these people have all been there more recently than I have, but there are two things I would like to ask you all to comment on. One is this degree of divergence you're describing which is not new, but seems even larger between ICEF perceptions of progress and Afghan perceptions, and I'm very curious from those of you who have just been out there, anything you can say further beyond the fact that it exists, why? Why aren't these perceptions somehow coming together, or if we are making progress because we're seeing ourselves moving on a plan while Afghans are seeing only where we are today, why can't we get that across or is there some other reason?

And on the question of negotiations, I'd just like to add to follow through a little bit, Afghan arrangements, agreements of the last 25 or 30 years have all been

transitory. And why would an agreement which gives the Taliban control of an area provide for some form of long-term or medium-term stability? I mean, what you were describing sounded like it would depend on the maintenance of U.S. forces in country for a long time to make sure that it stuck, and that seems a little bit improbable if things go quiet, we go home. So, when you describe an arrangement, I'd just like you to carry it forward a little bit on why such an arrangement would actually last.

Thank you.

MR. INDYK: Good. Thank you, Ron.

Mike, do you want to try to resolve the discrepancy?

MR. O'HANLON: On the first question, yes, and thank you, Ron.

I don't want to, first of all, suggest I'm speaking for ICEF in any way in my earlier comments or now. Nor do I, therefore, want to suggest that whatever hopefulness I tried to convey is somehow the main message out of ICEF. I got a full range of views in my most recent trip, and I had the great pleasure, of course, of being on the previous trip with you and hearing a range of views then, as well.

I don't think there was any net improvement in the ICEF assessment, without naming names, obviously. I think that there is a diversity even at the general officer level, assessments about how we're doing and on balance, there certainly is no overconfidence, and that's probably enough said to address the main point.

There is some hopefulness on certain specific areas of effort, and you've worked a lot on the police and written about the police. That's an area where I acknowledge Vanda's earlier point that there's a long way to go. But there is some sense the security forces are making headway. On the other hand, there's a sense that the insurgency is not really being defeated, and, of course, I can get more detail than that, but that's the main point.

MR. INDYK: Gerard?

MR. RUSSELL: Thank you.

MR. INDYK: International guarantees.

MR. RUSSELL: Yes. I agree that all the parties have a record of not keeping by any agreements that are made, and that applies to the Taliban, as well. However, I believe that the United States has a long-term interest in maintaining a presence in Afghanistan. It would be very hard to reinsert troops after we've joined them. There is a value to having a counterterrorist capacity, and that does require some presence of Special Forces, some intelligence. The embassy in Kabul would need a backup military force in case everything went wrong. So, I think to maintain even a minimal presence in Afghanistan would require, let's say, keeping at least one base. The (inaudible) base seems an appropriate one. It could be supplied from the north if everything went terribly wrong in the south.

In the presence of an external guarantor on the ground is what makes the difference because, otherwise, Ambassador, as you said, I have no doubt that it would not last. Equally, I don't think that an agreement made on the basis of posts given in Kabul would last either because, of course, we saw that fall apart in the 1990s. The one I suppose you might hope is that as people turn from a war economy to a peace economy over years, eventually, the habit of voting would perhaps increase. What I find very difficult to believe right now is that the Taliban would jump for a deal which would involve losing all of the revenue it gets from the continued conflict. So, I think it's a matter of putting something in place which can be held together for a bit in the hope that, in the long-term, people get into the habits that they had under the monarchy of accepting, to some extent, the status quo.

MR. INDYK: I'll just follow-up on this. There seem to be two

assumptions behind the notion of a political solution that provides the basis for an exit strategy. The first is that military pressure will drive the Taliban to the table to make a deal, and the second is that in making a deal, they will be prepared to split with Al-Qaeda and not allow them to come back.

Are both those assumptions reasonable assumptions?

MR. RUSSELL: I think the second one is reasonable under the right circumstances; however, it's not the case that I would encourage America to rely on then. I think that's why you would need a counterterrorist capacity; you would need the ability to send not just missiles in blindly, you'd need to have on the ground reach so that you could have some information about where to strike and how.

I don't believe that military pressure on its own is going to drive them to the table because it didn't work for the Soviets, and it won't work now. However, I think that it's a process which begins now. I think the emphasis now would be on splitting the Taliban. I don't think that will bring great revenue, great rewards, but, over time, with the decline in foreign forces, just as we saw in the time of the Naji Regime, rather infamously, but after the Soviet forces withdrew, there was a national reconciliation process for all that it flaws, it began when the foreign forces had gone. I think that with the decrease in foreign forces presence in Afghanistan, the prospects for reconciliation, oddly enough, may increase, particularly because as areas of land are left, are no longer the subject of fighting, the economy will change, the Taliban will begin to have something it loses instead of a perpetual search for pushing back against foreign forces.

So, I think the prospects in the longer-term, three to four to five years are much better than the present ones, and that it's for that prospect that we should be building now.

MR. INDYK: Do you want to say something else?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Yes, let me add a few things. There is a great diversity of view on what the relationship between Taliban, the Afghan Taliban, and what it means, the Afghan Taliban and Al-Qaeda, and, clearly, the Taliban is a very diverse organization with some people in simply for the money. Gerard talked about the war economy, other people in for opposing the foreign (inaudible) the fears, other people in for a variety of personal and local, tribal conflicts. Nonetheless, the leadership of the Taliban owes a great deal to the broad Salafi Movement to Al-Qaeda, and if they are in the position of having any influence with the through government or at the local level, they will be asked to pay back a lot of debts, and it will be very difficult for them to say no to some of these debts.

On top of that, a lot of commanders who are today operating in the field who are in Afghanistan, who are not necessarily the (inaudible) have been socialized to very different environments and by very different (inaudible) than the old Taliban. Also, the old Taliban were either village (inaudible) or tribal elders, and they in some ways were (inaudible) into Afghanistan, the political community and the bargaining that takes place within the political community. A lot of (inaudible) commanders are far more socialized to the global Salafi Movement that allegiances are far more radical, often break with even the norms that used to bind them within the community, and keeping those actors making those actors, those commanders to split from Al-Qaeda and other Salafi groups would be very difficult, and it would be balancing act for them what they have to lose. And our assumption is that what they will choose to preserve is territory. Well, they didn't do it in the 1990s, they didn't do it 2001. Now we have a group of people that are far more radical, far more focused on the Salafi agenda and the Salafi allegiance, and for them, that might be a greater priority to preserve rather than any sort of territorial power. So, I think it's a big tossup on how the Taliban would go, and a lot would depend on what

the balance of power is.

And just one sentence on the war economy, not only is it perpetuating the interest of the Taliban to keep fighting, it's perpetuating the interest of the security components to be fighting. It's perpetuating the interest of many criminal groups, of many members of the government, of many tribal elders. So, there are a lot of forces that are discouraging an equilibrium, at least in the equilibrium that we would like to see.

MR. INDYK: Mike, do you want to give us your backup plan? Information, I know.

MR. O'HANLON: Yes, it's not a radical departure from what we're trying to do, and the way I would describe very simply the current plan is Bob Woodward's depiction not withstanding, a fairly robust counterinsurgency, especially in the third to half of the country that we're concentrated on, with an intention of trying to largely stabilize those areas before we would move out of them. The plan B that's become popular in the American debate in the last few months by people like Bob Blackwell, Richard Hoss, the New America Foundation recent study that involved Paul Pillar and others, is largely counterterrorism-plus. What Vice President Biden was believed to be pushing last fall in the internal administration debate, and that largely says let's pull most of our forces back to Kabul, and points north and west. Maybe we still do some counterinsurgency up there. We primarily do counterterrorism in the south with drones and with commandos, and it's risky, obviously, to portray anybody else's plan, especially a number of them all together in one plan B, but just to orient you a little bit where I'm coming from.

Plan A minus, as I describe my backup plan is basically a modification of the existing strategy which says that even if we can't stabilize all of the south robustly or to the extent we would prefer, we should be willing to do three-fourths of that job and continue to train and partner with the Afghan security forces and then start downsizing

over a three to four-year period by let's say late 2011 or so. The basic argument here is, first of all, it allows President Obama to avoid a Vietnam-like quagmire because we are downsizing.

Secondly, if in fact the security environment continues to deteriorate inside Afghanistan, perhaps partly because of our very presence, which creates these dynamics that we cannot easily control, favoring certain actors and not others, giving, therefore, some basis for the insurgents to recruit that we try to move away from that kind of a large, foreign presence, and I think next year, we'll see whether or not the violence has started to come down. If the violence does start to come down next year, then I would not necessarily even support my own plan A -minus. I would stick with plan A.

But if, in fact, we're seeing the violence continue to go up and the Afghan security forces also get better, then logic would suggest that let's make the transition, perhaps, a little faster, and hope that the Afghan security forces will be able, over time, to stabilize some of the areas that we are not able to ourselves, or, at a minimum, that those areas will be small pockets that we can deal with in other ways, just like the Pakistanis deal with their FATA in other ways. It's not a radical departure from plan A, but it avoids the indefinite, sustaining of 100,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan, and it tries to build on the core strength of our strategy right now, which I think is the progress of the Afghan Army.

MR. INDYK: Okay. One last question, if there is one.

Yes, please? At the front.

MR. LEMMON: Michael Lemmon from the Near East South Asia Center.

Just to build on your last comment, if I understand correctly, neither plan A, plan B would preclude a political process, one that internally is Karzai representatives with various ranges at the Taliban internally.

And, secondly, an Afghan-led, regional approach that brings together

varying combinations, as is going on now, of Afghan representatives and various combinations of the neighbors in support of that internal, political process.

Is that correct?

MR. O'HANLON: Absolutely. Yes. I'll give a very short answer. This does not necessarily require a modification to any other aspect of the strategy. So, we still try to support President Karzai's diplomatic efforts, we still try to do economic development, administerial reform and other parts of the government beyond the security forces, and we still hope to stabilize as much of the south as we can on whatever time we have, but we don't necessarily assume that simple resolve and resoluteness and commitment at 100,000 U.S. troops for whatever duration might seem necessary is the key because, in fact, our presence may drive some of the insurgency, the Pakistan sanctuaries may drive some of it, corruption in the Karzai inner circle may drive some of it. We may not be able to solve these things fully, and there's even a small chance that our reducing our presence a little sooner may actually mitigate some of the unfortunate trends.

So, again, I'm not trying to oversell plan A-minus. I think it's risky, but I think it's much preferable to counterterrorism-plus or plan B because it doesn't conceive the whole south of the country, and it may prove preferable to plan A if plan A seems to be getting us nowhere in security terms. We may want to, at some point, limit our exposure and hope that the Afghans, as they get better, can do a little more effectively in the south what we're having a hard time doing ourselves. But, again, I very much prefer that the current strategy will work and prove this plan unnecessary.

MR. INDYK: Well, I hope I won't be misinterpreted in making a closing observation that the word "Al-Qaeda" only came up in one conversation, which I introduced. I don't know whether that's a commentary on what's happening in

Afghanistan or just the reality of the complexity of the conflict, but it happened to be the case.

In any case, it's been a very rich conversation. I hope you've learned as much as I have from all of these observations, and I want to thank the panelists for sharing their knowledge and experience with us. Thank you very much. (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.

/s/Carleton J. Anderson, III

Notary Public in and for the Commonwealth of Virginia

Commission No. 351998

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