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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. WITTES: Hi and welcome to the second in our Campaign 2012 issues events. I'm Benjamin Wittes, a senior fellow in Governance Studies here at Brookings. And our subject today is -- it's actually the first of our foreign policy papers in what will be, for those of you who were not here last month when we initiated the series, we're having 12 people from around, or in this case pairs of people, from around the institution writing on what we have determined to be 12 of the critical issues that the next administration will face. And we've had for each of these papers two other people within the institution write responses flushing out other aspects of the issue or constellations of issues that those relate to.

And so today, as I say, the first of our foreign policy related discussions, as you know, relates to the Afghanistan and Pakistan region and policy thereto. And we've asked Bruce Riedel and Mike O'Hanlon, both senior fellows in Foreign Policy Studies, to write the main paper. And this will -- I'm not going to describe it because they will do that themselves. And we've asked Vanda Felbab-Brown and Elizabeth Ferris to write response papers, one focusing on improving governance, and the other focused on humanitarian -- addressing humanitarian issues. To moderate the event today, Chuck Hoskinson from the POLITICO has joined us. And I will turn it over to him at this point. And welcome to you all.

MR. HOSKINSON: Thank you, Ben. Good morning. Afghanistan has proved to be one of the more difficult issues in this election campaign that really isn't getting much attention. The Democrats bet -- even before the 2008 campaign, the Democrats bet a lot on focusing on success there as the real war, compared to Iraq, because, of course, that was where Osama bin Laden sought shelter and from which the 9-11 attacks were planned.

Michael, could you explain to us some of the challenges that they face in terms of getting some measure of success in Afghanistan?

MR. O'HANLON: Yeah, it's been tough. You know, I think it's probably going somewhat better than the common American perception, but certainly not nearly as well as had been hoped with the amount of effort and resources that had been devoted to the problem.

And, you know, I think you can probably create a pretty compelling list of problems, but they would certainly begin with a far more resilient insurgency than we thought might be the case. The Afghans have been famous over the years for, you know, being smart enough to go with the wind a little. And the hope was when we tripled forces, that the insurgents, in many cases, if not Mullah Omar and his cronies, at least some of the $5 a day insurgents, the part-time, the "accidental guerrillas" as David Kilcullen calls them, that they would sort of fade into the woodwork and at least wait us out. But they kept fighting and they did not

show any great signs of weakening, that was a big problem.

Secondly, of course, Pakistan had a big role in tolerating that or even aiding and abetting that by allowing many of the insurgent groups to have sanctuary inside Pakistani territory.

And, of course, a third big problem is that the Afghan government has had great issues of legitimacy and capability. And we all know one of the classic dictums of counterinsurgency is, you need a strong indigenous partner to work with or you can't be effective even if you have the greatest militaries on earth working the problem. So that's just the beginning of the list.

I'll mention one more. And for the most part, again, I think there's been some limited progress. I don't want to call this a failure. And I think most of the problems have been due to the region. But I think the Obama Administration has had a hard time and the President himself has had a hard time deciding just how much he believes in his own strategy. And there's been mixed messaging and mixed teamwork in terms of whether we're really in this, you know, all in, to use to famous Petraeus phrase, or whether we're sort of trying for a while, but promising a withdrawal date the same moment we announce a build-up and so on and so forth, and having people on the team in the State Department and the embassy in Kabul and elsewhere who were not necessarily seen as always full supporters of the strategy, and most of all perhaps Vice

President Biden, who is thought to be critical of it from the start.

So there's been a sense that Obama himself wasn't fully committed. Pakistanis and Afghans figured that out. That led to some hedging behavior on their part as they weren't fully convinced we were going to get the job done, and that was part of the problem, but not the fundamental problem.

MR. HOSKINSON: Well, as you mentioned, mixed messages have contributed to a role that Pakistan plays in the conflict, that U.S. military leaders have said is one of the critical factors impeding our ability to succeed.

Now, Bruce, in the paper you all suggest that the administration shift to a policy or the next president shift to a policy of nuance containment of Pakistan in order to strengthen progressive forces there. Is that doable, do you think?

MR. RIEDEL: Well, I think we have to. We have to make some reset or some shift. When President Obama came into office three years ago, he embarked on a policy of strategic engagement with Pakistan. At that point, we had a new Pakistani civilian government, just been elected. It seems like worth a try. But from the beginning, I think it was always a long, long shot. And time has shown that it was, in fact, a long shot. And events have made it more and more difficult.

The U.S.-Pakistan relationship now is broken. We haven't

seen relations as bad as this since 9-11, and maybe not even since back in the late 1990s. Pakistanis have come to the conclusion that the United States is an arrogant power that humiliates regularly, that sees Pakistan as little more than a killing ground for drones and commandos. Americans have come to the conclusion that Pakistan is duplicitous, playing both sides of the fence, supports the Afghan Taliban, provides it with critical sanctuary, and may have been involved and complicit and hiding Osama bin Laden.

The problem is that both sides are right. Their characterization of the other side is largely on the mark. Given that, trust between the two countries has reached an all-time low. We think that we need to reset from strategic engagement to a policy of engagement, but with some elements of containment at the same time. Very hard to do, a very complex policy to initiate, made even harder right now because the Pakistani government is in free fall. The prime minister has just been indicted. It looks like this government may not last much longer. You know, in one sense for the administration that's okay, because it can say we'll wait for the Pakistanis to come back to us, but that's not a strategy. We have to have a strategy, and Mike and I think it needs to be a strategy that continues to have a fair amount of engagement, but also puts a few more elements of containment in it to deal with the most egregious behavior of the Pakistani army, like support for the Afghan Taliban, like

support for terrorism.

MR. HOSKINSON: Well, militarily, I mean Afghanistan is one of the most difficult logistical problems in modern warfare. It's a landlocked country about the size of Texas, it's got some of the most difficult terrain and climate in the world, it's surrounded by some countries which are hostile to the United States and not effective for supply lines. As you said, the Pakistani relationship is so far in the dumps that they have closed our supply lines and they have not reopened.

Meanwhile, in the political environment, the administration is under a lot of pressure to withdraw more troops faster, and there's an expectation that President Obama may announce that at the NATO Summit in May. How can the United States leverage its declining number of troops militarily to help achieve its goals in Afghanistan, given Pakistan's -- assuming, of course, that Pakistan doesn't continue to cooperate as much as it has?

MR. O'HANLON: Shall I start with that?

MR. HOSKINSON: Yes, please.

MR. O'HANLON: You know, a lot of good points. A couple of quick data points, though, which may help inform the discussion. One is that we're actually moving in two-thirds of all of our supplies through the North right now. In other words, even before Pakistan shut down the supply routes, we were bringing two-thirds of all things in through the

north, which highlights our dependence on people like Vladimir Putin, which is not altogether reassuring itself. But nonetheless, it does underscore that the math of the logistics are not totally undoable even if those Pakistani supply lines remain problematic into the future.

Now, there's some things that the Northern Distribution Network, as it's called through the North, doesn't allow us to do, specifically moving in vehicles that are for combat. It's harder to do through the north, and we may have to fly, you know, every single combat vehicle out if we're going to not have access to the Pakistani supply corridors over time. I expect they will reopen, but it's worth understanding that we can actually limp along through the logistics effort even without Pakistan, which is a fascinating point and a credit to a lot of the logisticians and diplomats and military leaders who have quietly been expanding those northern options over the last few years.

Secondly, while I don't necessarily take this to the bank, it is interesting that the President's budget released this week would provide $88 billion for contingency operations in Fiscal Year 2013, which is almost exclusively for Afghanistan and very limited amounts for other places. And as the Panetta testimony said yesterday in Congress, that presupposes 68,000 U.S. troops remaining in Afghanistan through Fiscal Year 2013. Now, do I really think that's going to happen? Not necessarily. But it is interesting that the initial indicator is the

administration has no immediate plans for a draw down.

I do believe they will announce at the May NATO Summit something along the lines of a change in mission, where we try to emphasize the Afghan role more and try to suggest that we are moving into more of a support mode, although that needs to be understood in a qualified way. Maybe it means we're doing 40 percent of the fighting instead of 60 percent. It shouldn't be thought of as we're just providing classroom training. We're going to be out in the battlefields for a couple more years, I think, if the current strategy remains relatively intact.

Having said all of that, we do have fewer forces, and we will have fewer forces than the commanders on the ground wanted. President Obama's June speech last year accelerated the drawdown, as you know. We'll be down to 68,000 U.S. troops by the end of September. And that does make it impossible to do in the East what we've done in the South. The density of forces in the East is about one-fourth of what it had become in Helmand and Kandahar provinces. And on top of that, the Pakistan angle, the Haqqani Network in the eastern provincial areas of Afghanistan, is more problematic than it turned out the Taliban insurgents were in Kandahar and Helmand in the last couple of years.

So we're going to have to view this as a whole different kind of operation in military terms. There's a lot of other aspects to your question, but I won't go on on the political side just yet. I know my fellow

panelists will want to comment on that, too. But in military terms, we're going to have to rely a bit more on the Afghans than we would have previously wanted. And we're going to have to leave them with a bit more of a war still to fight and win on their own or with us in a very limited support capability 2014 and beyond.

To summarize, I think our initial goal had been to really try to defeat the insurgency or dramatically weaken it throughout much of the country, if not all the country, before we really left. That's no longer a realistic goal. In the East, there are going to be pockets of insurgency that remain pretty strong even after 2013 and 2014. And we're going to have to hope the Afghan state is strong enough to contain that problem on its own with limited outside help.

MR. HOSKINSON: Bruce, did you want to --

MR. RIEDEL: I want to make one comment about the logistics, which Mike has accurately described. The Pakistani calculus, when they cut off the border last November, was that that would force the United States to come to terms with Pakistan. They didn't calculate how much effort and success we'd had in diversifying our supply lines.

And I think if you read the body language of Pakistan today very carefully, they're looking for a way to reopen the border, because the people who have actually suffered are mostly Pakistanis: the truck drivers, the Karachi Port facility. They haven't been getting the revenue

from transporting all the stuff in and they are starting to hurt, and there's complaints going on from that. And since the Army gets the biggest cut of the taxes on all that revenue, it's actually found that its move, which they thought was a brilliant way of forcing us to accommodate whatever it wanted, has actually backfired and hurt them more than it's hurt us.

The point I want to emphasize, though, is the point that Mike ended with. We are not going to be able to leave an Afghanistan that is Valhalla, whatever Bob Gates meant by Valhalla. We are going to be able to leave, at best, an Afghanistan that is capable of coping with the Taliban insurgency with significant outside assistance, but not combat troops. That's the doable goal that we can probably accomplish with what we control in this environment. We don't control what Pakistan's policy is, we don't control what the Taliban's willingness to negotiate is. What we can control is how much we can build up the Afghan forces and make them into a military force sufficiently capable of dealing with the Taliban without American and other NATO combat forces on the ground.

Is that a doable policy? It's always been a gamble from the beginning, and we really won't know the answer until after most of those American and other combat forces come out. Is it a better outcome than letting Afghanistan simply deteriorate into full scale civil war again? Absolutely.

MR. HOSKINSON: Let's bring Vanda into the discussion now and talk about the Afghan government governance is the other issue that military leaders say is one of their biggest obstacles to success. What are some of the obstacles that are faced in that area?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, there are two big challenges. One is that today, essentially, the U.S. relationship with President Karzai is broken. The Obama administration sought to move President Karzai to better behavior with respect to governance. Nonetheless, really didn't succeed in that, and meanwhile, managed to antagonize President Karzai to the extent that he profoundly doesn't trust us. He doesn't trust us that we will not try to cut a deal with the Taliban and leave him outside. That's why he's making all his independent overtures to Taliban. He doesn't trust us that we will stay post 2014.

He's courting a whole variety of alternative friends to us and he is behaving in ways that can be described as erratic, even possibly question his mental health, but certainly a deep indication of the level of mistrust and profoundly different outlook on the situation in Afghanistan that we have, and one of the big things that of course will push this problematic relationship further ahead is the upcoming the 2014 elections in Afghanistan, but President Karzai is not supposed to run for a second term.

He has said that he will not run, but there are very many question marks, he has plenty of time to change his mind. If the security situation is really bad, he can say the security does not allow to hold elections, so, I'm not changing the constitution, I'm staying or if he puts in a very close ally, one of his brothers is being called as the likely successor, the perception will be that the mafia role in Kabul continues, and this is my second big point, that not only is our relationship with Kabul over the Arg Palace is fractured, but so is the relationship between the Afghan people and the Arg Palace on multiple levels, both broadly, societal view of the palace of the role is essentially one of a mafia role. On top of that, it's a mafia role that's becoming increasingly exclusionary, but the patronage networks are narrower and narrower with more people being cut out of being able to access any sort of rents, while those who are part of the narrower network, of the narrower clique are reaping tremendous rents and expropriating them out of the country, a lot of the rents ironically and sadly also come from foreign aid.

But President Karzai's relationship is also fractured with the elite. The level of ethnic tensions that we are seeing today in Afghanistan is at the decade's peak. The reasons why the previous elections, at least not the immediate one, but the first one was not discussed as very corrupt or very unclean, was partially because there was an added consensus that Karzai should be elected and that's long gone. So, there is deep

inner elite fractioning, there is deep divide between the Arch Palace and the population and there is a deep divide between the Arch Palace and Washington, all of which makes developing a strategy of improving governance or negotiating with the Taliban extremely difficult, but without improvements in governance, it's very unlikely that whatever can be achieved in the battlefield can hold.

MR. HOSKINSON: Well, let me ask you: How deep is the Afghan political elite? There's probably been a considerable brain drain over the past 40 years of political turmoil there that has left a lot of potential leaders either dead or in exile. What options are there if Karzai steps down as he is required to do, what options are there for another leadership that wouldn't involve perhaps a Taliban takeover?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, we can sort of never know, and one of the periodic discussions about sticking with the leader and sticking with the leader beyond democratic processes, that things could always be worse, and certainly, that is the case. There are a lot of potential powerbrokers who would be contestants from certain current governors to people even closer to him that are arguably perhaps more problematic than President Karzai and that have far greater human rights violations on their hands. There are other contestants who perhaps are far more capable leaders and have far greater technocratic credentials but necessarily don't have the tribal bench to carry also the tribal politics.

Nonetheless, without opening up the process, without having some sort of genuine contestation, whatever the outcome is, it's likely to be so problematic that it will not result in any rule. So, nonetheless, a genuine contestation might not bring us better leadership, but it gives a chance. Just continuing with some sort of explained continuation, whether it's President Karzai or his brother, Quayum, or someone very close to the family and the Durrani, Kandahar is a prescription for more mafia rule.

Now, one can rule as a mafia rule, but it requires a lot of nailed fists to do it, and the government is not in the position to have that nailed fist and one of the big questions about the military strategy is that the ANA will splinter ethnically. There are really disturbing signs and I think a key part of U.S. military effort needs to be not just training the capacity of the military, but working on easing some of these ethnic relations that now permeate the ANA, as well.

MR. HOSKINSON: Now, Elizabeth, you wrote about the social development of Afghanistan and humanitarian issues. What are some of the concerns there as the political and military conflict continues?

MS. FERRIS: Well, when you look at the situation through a humanitarian lens, what's the impact on people on the ground? I mean, the signs are pretty grim in terms of increasing civilian casualties, although there are some methodical differences in the way those figures are collected. Increasingly displacement in Afghanistan, when people feel

insecure, often, they leave their place of habitual residence. Declining numbers of refugees returning.

And you talked about the exiles. Since 2002, some 6 million Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan. That's increased the country's population by 20 percent. That was a tremendous number of people, but when they can't go back to their communities, maybe they returned to Kabul, and we've seen a swelling of the population of the capital since then. They've become internally displaced persons, it leads to less stability, and it's quite troubling when you think of what Ruth said about the need for the Afghan government to confront the insurgency and restore security in the country. If the signs aren't good with all this international assistance, what does the future look like when the troops are withdrawn and the Afghan government is faced with its fundamentally responsibility of protecting and assisting its own people? So, I think the signs are actually quite troubling when you look at the humanitarian dimension of what's happening in Afghanistan.

MR. O'HANLON: Can I just add one point, and Beth may want to comment on this, too. Painting a broader picture, I certainly agree with the points you've made. But I think that there's also a more positive side to this story. Now, the bad news is the positive side is fragile for the reason that you're getting at. If the war is going to get worse or if the post Karzai transition is going to make things worse, then any progress that

we've seen in the quality of life for some Afghans is going to be at risk, but it is worth remembering, first of all, the civilian fatalities from the war, while they've grown each year, are quite modest by the standards of international conflict.

Secondly, and I don't believe these statistics, but the latest estimate of Afghan life expectancy showed an increase of 18 years relative to a decade ago. Now, I don't believe it's 18 years. It says it went from 44 to 62. But let's say it went from 44 to 52. That's still pretty impressive.

Third, there are now 7 million kids in school, including 2.5 million girls. There were zero or 500,000 under the Taliban.

And then, fourth, most people have admittedly limited access to rudimentary health care, which helps explain the growing life expectancy.

So, I think all that needs to be factored in. It doesn't make much difference if it's on such a weak foundation and such a brittle foundation, but it still gives a little more basis for hopefulness, I think. I don't know if you want to comment or if you agree with that perspective.

MS. FERRIS: Well, I think there are some positive signs, but in terms of access by international actors to provide humanitarian assistance, it's becoming more difficult. Afghanistan is one of the most difficult countries in the world. I mean, just to be able to deliver assistance

in certain parts of the country is now impossible. You talk with people from the UN, for example, and they say well, last year, we were able to travel throughout the province, and six months ago, we were confined to this city, and now it's more limited. And this also impacts on the ability to collect basic data in terms of the numbers, and there are lots of questions about numbers and figures in Afghanistan.

MR. HOSKINSON: Well, one of the reasons why the Taliban rose in Afghanistan in the absence of a stable government was because they provided social services to people and also that's similar in Pakistan, where Islamist groups are providing things like education and health care that the government doesn't provide in the tribal areas or the government doesn't provide well in the tribal areas. And this is for anyone: How does that play into the political and military environment?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, actually, the Taliban really did not provide social services. In fact, they allowed massive deterioration among the civil service and any sort of social networks, socio economic network that existed, but what they did and what was critical, they provided security. Now, that might sound like a weird statement to make because, obviously, they were extraordinarily brutal and they imposed a great deal of brutality on women, on minorities, and even on Pashtun males. But, nonetheless, within this concentration of brutality, they

provided predictable brutality and security from warlords, from the mass unpredictability and crime of the 1990s.

So, when you talk with Afghans and you ask them about the Taliban era, inevitably, they tell you during the Taliban, things were bad, however, you could go from Kandahar to Charikar or Kandahar to Kabul with 5 million rupees and at the time, it was Pakistani rupees, not Afghani's, and you would not be robbed. Now, we go around the corner and we are likely going to be robbed by someone or we will have to pay a lot of the money that we have, which often is very little, to the Afghan police or too many of the militias that are emerging.

So, although there was a great deal of brutality and insecurity generated by the Taliban, there was also a great deal of security and predictability and there was brutal order, but order that existed, and for many Afghans, this order is gone. Yes, you have far more access to schools for children who didn't have schools; you have better access to health care, people who, many of the expatriates in Kabul are living in far better conditions. Those that were well-positioned could access unimaginable rents and become really rich, but many ordinary Afghans find themselves in an environment where they are extremely economically vulnerable and profoundly vulnerable security-wise.

And one last comment I would make is that a lot of the initial Obama strategy, General McCrystal's strategy, was about population-

centric insurgency, not about defeating, crushing, decapitating the insurgents, or not solely, but with the purpose of increasing the physical security of the Afghan population, and that arguably has been achieved in some part of Kandahar and in some parts of Helmand, but it has not been achieved on a sort of wider scale and those parts where – Gang Shahr, Musa Qal'eh, even places like Lashkar Gah, Musa Qal'eh less so, where people feel there is a little bit more personal security freedom. We don't know how robust that is and whether it can hold. We don't know if the Taliban is truly crushed and whether it will be defeated and we don't know whether other actors, including the militias that are emerging, the powerbrokers that are resurrecting will generate again the insecurity that will bring us into the early 1990s.

MR. HOSKINSON: Bruce, you wanted to address that?

MR. RIEDEL: Yes, I wanted to pick up on several of the points Vanda made. It's important in thinking about this conflict to, of course, look at the challenges we face. But I think it's myopic to just look at it from our standpoint. I think it's useful to look at it a little bit from the enemy's standpoint, as well. And it's not such a pretty picture on their side either.

Let's start with the enemy that got us there, Al Qaeda. The last three years have not been particularly good for Al Qaeda, certainly not for its leadership. Osama bin Laden's now rotting at the bottom of the

Arabian Sea. Ayman al-Zawahiri, I think, is pretty worried that the seals are going to come after him sooner or later, and my bet is if we find Mr. Zawahiri, and I think sooner or later, we will, this president is going to pull the trigger and send the SEALs in again. Now, that'll have knock-on effect on our relationship with Pakistan, but it will get us closer to the goal the president identified from the beginning of why we're there: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda, and I think as he goes into this election, the president's going to go in with a pretty strong track record of saying yes, you are safer today than you were three years ago because I finally put the resources and attention into going after Al Qaeda with drones, with seals, with veteran intelligence and focusing on where the real threat is.

Look at it from the standpoint of the Taliban. The Taliban are not 10 feet tall. As Vanda laid out, their main argument with Afghans is they provide a harsh level of security. They're not popular, they're hated by the majority of Afghans who are non-Pashtun because they recognize that the Taliban is not a nationalist, anti-colonialist, anti-imperialist insurgency, it's not an Islamist insurgency, it's a Pashtun insurgency that wants to reestablish Pashtun rule over Afghanistan. Now, since Pashtuns are 45 percent of the population, they have a lot of support in the Pashtun areas. They don't have any support from Uzbeks and Tajiks, and certainly not from Shias whom the Pashtuns regard as sub-human, even animal, in the pecking order of who's important in Afghanistan.

The Taliban's alliance with Pakistan is also a source of friction. NATO just published a report based on 4,000 captured insurgents being interrogated over the course of last year. The report was leaked to the press. If you read it, it's a fascinating document because it's clear that the Taliban hate the Pakistanis and the Pakistanis despise the Taliban. If our alliance with the Karzai government is a bit dysfunctional, the alliance on the other side makes us look like harmony because these two sides actually hate each other.

Just this week, the Taliban announced that their former defense minister had died in a Pakistani jail two years ago and it demanded that the Pakistani government explain what they'd done to this guy and how they had tortured him to death. This is not a harmonious relationship on the other side.

So, it's important to bear in mind all the challenges we face, but don't assume that the other side is 10 feet tall or that we're dealing with the Soviet Union or Nazi Germany in this case. The challenge that we confront in Afghanistan is very, very hard, very, very difficult, but the other side has even more profound difficulties than we have in trying to confront its challenges.

MR. HOSKINSON: Before we open it up to the audience, I'd like to bring this back to the question of Afghanistan as a political issue in the 2012 election. It would seem that probably for the administration,

given the successes it's had in making al Qaeda a lot less of a threat, especially out of Afghanistan and Pakistan, that the best option would be to perhaps switch -- play into the public polls and switch to an advisory role now instead of waiting, perhaps, until next year. Why would that not be a good option?

MR. O'HANLON: Well, why don't I start? Bruce and Vanda and Beth may want to comment, too, but I think first of all, I don't want to sound naïve, but I think this President meant it when he said South Asia was pretty important to him. And even though al Qaeda is a lot weaker, I don't think that he wants to either change his strategic world view so much or change, you know, his political calculus so much that he's going to totally abandon the mission and declare mission accomplished. That would make him look a little feckless and irresolute, and I think he's going to make sure that whatever he does, even though it does change, is based on consultation.

One thing he's proven is he likes to consult with his military leaders and he's not afraid to spend a lot of time with them and then at the end of the day make the decision himself. You know, he's got a good sense of security of his own role in this process. He is the Commander in Chief, and he just spent a number of sessions with the military leadership over this new defense strategy and budget. And at the end of the day, they took his guidance, which is you're going to cut $490 billion over the

next 10 years and, you know, maybe more down the road.

But on Afghanistan I think he's made it pretty clear that he knows how to listen and he takes advice seriously, but he still makes the decisions and they aren't always what the military wants. But I think he's going to feel, therefore, some level of responsibility to find a strategy that is continuous with his previous thinking. Not to the extent of, you know, just exactly what he had previously forecast, but he's going to keep some of the same principles in mind, I think, as he goes forward. That's important to him in terms of his strategic world view, but it's also important to him in terms of the role he's projected as Commander in Chief.

Americans think he's a pretty good Commander in Chief. Like Bruce just said, he killed Osama bin Laden, he's been resolute in dealing with other countries around the world. He's not the naïve, weak apologist that some of his more partisan critics want to allege. The independent voters in this country aren't going to buy that argument and Obama doesn't want them to buy that argument. So, he's going to do whatever he does with Afghanistan carefully.

Now, I do think he may change the mission in a formal sense, in a semantic sense, and he may even accelerate the drawdown a little compared to what's previously expected. But it would be out of character for him and, I think, bad politics for a guy who has kept the country safe for three years so far to all of a sudden throw caution to the

wind and just go into a sort of, you know, withdrawal and isolationism mode.

MR. HOSKINSON: Go ahead, Elizabeth.

MS. FERRIS: I was just going to ask my colleagues here how you think the consultation with international partners will work. How do you think U.S. decisions affect the contributions of other contributing countries in Afghanistan?

MR. RIEDEL: Here again I think you can look at the glass half full or half empty. I tend to see it as half full.

We have put together a coalition in Afghanistan of nearly four dozen countries with boots on the ground. That's remarkable, that's an enormous coalition, and it's held together now for a decade. I think if you'd asked a panel at Brookings in 2002 can the international coalition hang together for 10 years in Afghanistan, people would have said you're dreaming. But it has held together. It's held together because we have engaged in a very intense consultation process, and here again it's worth looking at it from the other side's standpoint.

The NATO alliance and the non-NATO partners in the NATO alliance, the ISAF alliance, met in Bonn last December to talk about their way forward. Who didn't show up? Pakistan. We weren't isolated. Pakistan was isolated from the international community. And here again the Pakistanis are now, you can see, trying to figure out how do we get

back into the process?

I want to make one more comment on the political side. Domestic politics is not why I'm hired at Brookings, but, you know, like everyone else I have an opinion. If you look at the Republican case against the President now, it's not coming at him from let's get out faster. Let's leave Ron Paul aside; I don't think he represents the mainstream. If you look at what Governor Romney has said -- and he's really started talking about this issue in the last month in a way he never had before -- he said the President has made a mistake in setting timelines and in not listening to the generals, implying that we should send more troops in, not less. And he said he's against any kind of political reconciliation process with the Taliban. In other words, he's coming at the President not from the left, but from the traditional Republican standpoint of we're the Mommy party or the Daddy party you can rely on to deal with national security because we're the tougher people and we're going to tough it out in Afghanistan.

I think, on the whole, the President's pretty well-positioned. He's more in the middle on this one. He's got a problem with his base, which doesn't like the Afghan war. They did three years ago, but they suddenly lost faith in it over the course of the last three years, but his base isn't going to go vote for Romney, promise to send -- to reject political reconciliation, to reject timelines. I think the President's posture on this,

from his political standpoint, is probably a pretty good place to be.

MR. HOSKINSON: Vanda? Oh, sorry.

MR. O'HANLON: One quick detail on Beth's point about the international coalition. Sorry, Vanda. Russia's role, I think, has been important and has grown, and I think we actually -- at a time when the U.S.-Russia relationship is challenged in some other ways, we need to not only acknowledge this progress but thank our Russian friends because they really have helped us with the logistics access in a way we didn't have before. And we really haven't yet managed -- not through any lack of trying -- we really haven't yet managed to help the Russians a lot in terms of reducing the drug production in Afghanistan, which, of course, fuels some of the drug consumption problem in their country. And yet, they're still helping us with access. So, that's a way in which the coalition's actually gotten stronger in the last few years.

MR. HOSKINSON: Go ahead.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, I can't resist commenting on the narcotics issue, and one is that whatever you do in Afghanistan will have absolutely no impact on consumption in Russia. Russia has deep, deep problems with the drug epidemic, but they can address it at home and no one else can address it for them abroad. Any increase in eradication will kill whatever progress on the counterinsurgency front we have made.

But what I wanted to say beyond that is that the current strategy doesn't guarantee success. There are enormous obstacles. There is a robust chance that post-2014 there will be civil war in Afghanistan. However, any effort to liquidate faster, any dropping of troops robustly beyond the 68,000 in 2013, any indication that we are going is a guarantee of failure.

It will just encourage hedging on everyone's part. It will prevent our having any ability to induce better governance. It will weaken the AMA too quickly. It will just give rise to the militias, and it will encourage everyone in the international coalition to run out as quickly as possible.

MR. HOSKINSON: Okay, let's open the floor for questions. There are microphones circulating around, I think.

If you would please state your name and keep your questions on topic I'd appreciate it. Thanks. Over there in the back. Back here? There we go.

MR. PIO: Thank you. I am Alessandro Pio from the Asian Development Bank Office in Washington. You have touched on the military, humanitarian, and political side, but I think one thing that was a bit absent from the discussion was the economic dimension.

As a development bank, we largely invest in infrastructure, in services that keep the long-term development of the country, and we have

done some of the regional infrastructure, like the railway from Mazar-i-Sharif to the border, which has been instrumental to the northern supply routes that were mentioned in the discussion.

So my question to the panel would be, security is a necessary condition, but not a sufficient condition. Security is needed for something else to happen and what eventually needs to happen is a continuation of the economic development. There is estimates that the growth rate in Afghanistan will drop by half as a result of the transition of the troops out. What should be the administration's strategy in terms of supporting an economic development?

There is some talk about the Silk Road vision, about integrating Afghanistan in the region around it. There is talk about mining being one of the long-term development potential, but that's going to take 10 years and I think the country cannot wait those 10 years. I think you need have investment in the rural areas, you have to have investment in infrastructure. Those two, perhaps, can help support the growth of the country.

This is the perspective from a development institution that looks way beyond 2014, but what is your advice on the economic side of the transition? Thank you.

MR. HOSKINSON: Vanda, do you want to take that?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: You know, it's an excellent

question. One way to look at 2014 is to see it as this massive triple earthquake about to hit Afghanistan: the withdrawal of troops and inevitable reduction in whatever level of security there will be beyond that point, a hugely contested political transition in Afghanistan, and a massive decline in economic aid, one factor which will be big drops of income for Afghans, even Afghans that have been able to get some access to resources during the current situation.

Now, there is no easy way to imagine what to do with the economy. Yes, the new Silk Road is an interesting idea. It's very much dependent on security conditions in Afghanistan and it's very much dependent on a host of external factors. It's really hard to see how Afghanistan will, by 2014, become this commercial hub resurrecting the Silk Road.

So, I cannot claim that I have an answer to what can happen in the economy, but I have one portion of advice, and it is to move away from what has been happening with aid over the past two, three years. So, during the Bush years you had very little economic aid comparatively coming into the country compared to its needs. Past 2009, there were suddenly huge influxes of aid, but a lot of the aid was used, in my view, wrongly. It was not geared toward long-term development, but it became so intermeshed with the immediacy of the counterinsurgency that instead of doing long-term development, the aid was defined as a stabilization

operation, spending money very quickly for the supposed purpose of buying off the Afghans, of switching the population to the government or ISAF. That by and large has not happened. And lots of the aid was directly wasted, a lot of the aid was counterproductive because it actually drew in criminal actors, some of which were allied with the government, to simply use the aid as a source of rent.

So at a minimum what we can do is to start investing only where we can monitor, start investing in secular areas or at least as much as we can in secular areas, careful monitor the aid, and switch the aid from being short-term political handouts to being sustainable long-term investments that address the fundamental drivers of the economic deficiencies in Afghanistan. But none of that is really an answer for the big drop of growth, for the big drop of jobs, and for the big drop of money in 2014.

MR. HOSKINSON: Mike?

MR. O'HANLON: Yeah, that was a great answer by Vanda and a very hard problem, and thank you for the question. I just have one thought, which is that as I look at the structural way in which the international community approaches Afghanistan -- and you can correct me if you think I'm being unfair in how I portray this -- but the U.N. has been largely involved in political, high-level matters of elections, and done a great job, but that's been its preoccupation. The banks have largely

viewed the problem as a technocratic development problem and have tried to help the Afghans build government capacity, again, a worthwhile venture, but we actually need to think about the politics of development and sort of, in a sense, integrate these approaches because the UN office has been thinking about elections, World Bank, ADB have been thinking about technocratic solutions. What we need to do is help develop a realistic anticorruption strategy, which no one's been able to do.

The United States' role in this is counterproductive because we send either active or retired generals to go beat up on Karzai and only a couple of them have had good relations with him and most of those wound up getting sent home early for one reason or another.

And so, we haven't been able to do it through ISAF or through the US Embassy. The World Bank has been doing technocratic work. The UN mission has been doing elections work. No one is actually helping Karzai figure out, okay, what's a realistic way to reduce the corruption.

Now, he may not want to. He may filibuster whoever tries, but an idea that's occurred to me is, are we using enough, some of our friends and experts, in some kind of a high level advisory panel from countries like Indonesia, Muslim countries that have had great success in home in improving their own governance and their own anticorruption efforts?

And I'm not persuaded there's been enough use of what you might call a Friends of Afghanistan model where you would have some former finance ministers, some former other technocrats from some of these governments who would actually try to bridge this gap between the high level politics and the technocratic, developmental assistance.

That's my only thought, I don't claim it's a silver bullet, but I think it's an unexplored option.

MR. HOSKINSON: Sir?

MR. GRAVES: Thank you. Christopher Graves with Ogilvy. I'd like to ask Michael and Bruce, did the fact that you never mentioned the more than 100 nukes in Pakistan mean that we should not worry about them in a country that's coming apart at the seams or just an omission due to time?

MR. RIEDEL: No, you should worry about them. There are probably more like 200 nukes in Pakistan. It's the fastest growing nuclear arsenal in the world. It's on a trajectory that will make it the fourth largest nuclear weapon state within the next couple of years and if it continues and the Chinese don't start building up theirs, it could actually be the third largest nuclear weapons arsenal in the world.

And it's a very good, important point in another way. Because this is a topic about Pakistan and Afghanistan, we've focused on the differences we have with Pakistan on terrorism issues and those

differences are profound and serious. But even if tomorrow all of those issues went away, al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban were no longer a divisive issue between the United States and Pakistan, other issues would be divisive between the United States and Pakistan, and at the top of that list would be the nuclear issue.

The President has committed the United States to a world without nuclear weapons. Well, Iran is a big part of the problem with that, of course, but Pakistan is in many ways a bigger part of the problem. Iran is a nuclear wannabe, Pakistan is a nuclear weapons state, which is now moving out of strategic city-busting nuclear development into tactical nuclear weapons.

That means more nuclear weapons distributed down at lower levels in the command cycle of the Pakistani military raising profound questions about the security of Pakistan's nuclear weapons.

There's another big issue that divides us, and that's India. Like every other country in the world, the United States looks at India as the future market that we most want to get into.

Now, you don't see a lot of American politicians talking about, let's get into the Pakistan market, but you do see Americans talking about, let's get into the Indian market. A year ago, President Obama went to India right after the elections. What was, he said, his goal? His goal was to get jobs for Americans.

To anyone who's followed U.S.-Indian relations for a couple of decades, it was stunning, an American President going to India to find jobs for Americans. That's kind of like total role reversal of this relationship, but it reflects new economic realities.

The Pakistani's Army's obsession with India stands in the way of any kind of peaceful resolution of the profound differences in South Asia between Pakistan and India. India is, in part, to blame for this as well, of course, but it's Pakistan that sends terrorists into Mumbai and places like that, not the other way around.

So, my point would be, yes, you should definitely be worried about it, and this is why our relationship with Pakistan is going to be so conflicted even if, in 2014, we are able to get out of Afghanistan. It's why we need a long-term strategy of dealing with Pakistan, which goes and tries to address all of these very difficult problems.

MR. HOSKINSON: Bruce, if I may follow up on that. Does U.S. involvement in Afghanistan help or hurt the countries dealing -- our dealings with Pakistan as a nuclear power? Is it an asset or a liability?

MR. RIEDEL: Here again, it depends on what part of Pakistan you mean. I think it's definitely a liability in dealing with the Pakistani military. The Pakistani military, long ago, decided that its proxy, the Taliban, were going to continue to be supported.

It may cut a little bit differently when you deal with Pakistan's

civilian political parties, who have an interest, like us, in getting the Pakistani military out of the political process and back into the barracks, but it's very hard for them given this intense anti-Americanism in the country today. Anyone who stands up and says, I think the United States is doing the right thing in Afghanistan, well, that's the ticket to losing the next election in Pakistan, and you see all Pakistani politicians now moving towards a more and more anti-American line.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: I had one comment on that. Pakistanis are very conflicted about how they see our role in Afghanistan. However, if Afghanistan disintegrates into civil war, it will be like an (inaudible) leading into Pakistan, and it will resurrect all the old Pakistani fears about encirclement, because inevitably the civil war will draw in various actors from outside including likely India that has been exercising a degree of restraint in Afghanistan.

And it will inevitably force Pakistanis to be playing in Afghanistan. Of course, it will be detrimental for Afghanistan, but it will also divert the attention and the resources of Pakistani leadership, both military and civilian, from Pakistan's internal problems, and they are massive from energy perspectives, economic perspectives, political perspectives. Pakistan is weaker today than has been ever since it's creation. It's a hollowed out shell that can easily come apart.

And the more they are focused on difficult environments

externally, the less capacity, willingness, and energy they will have to try to redress some of these deep, deep deficiencies they have internally.

MR. HOSKINSON: Sir, did you have a question?

MR. MCCORMICK: I'm John McCormick with the Energy Policy Center. A follow up question from the gentleman, Asia Development Bank. We see Afghanistan as a $3 trillion diamond in the rough -- iron, copper, resources that India, China are desperate for. Iran could be a pathway for China's access to copper, building ports for that shipment, Pakistan getting help from the Chinese to build ports.

It would seem to me that eventually the Afghans have got to wake up to the fact that they are going to be filthy rich if they would just work to cooperate. Now, is there a chance that some of these rogues will see that there's money on the table?

MR. RIEDEL: Some people already see it. Vanda mentioned it. India has one of the largest development projects in Afghanistan, and what they're doing is they have been building a road, which they've now completed and turned over to Afghan hands, that links the Afghan ring road to the Iranian highway system and links it to the port on the Arabian Sea.

This is a very good development project for Afghanistan because it allows a mechanism for exports that don't go through Pakistan. For the first time in modern Afghanistan's history it has an alternative to

Karachi for getting things to the sea.

Now the Indian government is preparing to build a railroad that will go with the highway, and the railroad will not only go from the ring road, it will go to the mines near Kabul to provide a mechanism to get those minerals to the Indian Ocean, and therefore to be exported to the world.

Now, all of that is good development work. It is good for Afghan independence, but it brings two problems with it. Problem number one is, it drives the Pakistanis absolutely berserk. Now, I'm confident that when the Indians develop this, they saw that as one of the other benefits of what they were doing. It would play into every Pakistani paranoia, and I think that that probably is a selling point in New Delhi in favor of the policy, but it doesn't help create the kind of regional harmony that we would like.

And then, secondly, it's a problem with us. We want to keep Iran isolated and sanctioned, but if we really want to have an effective Afghan strategy, we need to think about our Iran strategy in different ways than we have before. Iran is more likely to be a partner with the Karzai government than many other countries in the region.

It's a tough call. It's a trade off that the Administration is going to have to make, but I think it's one that really calls for a lot more conversation and debate in this country about the future of our policy towards Iran in relationship to the future of our policy towards Afghanistan.

MR. HOSKINSON: Vanda, do you want to jump in?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Like the Silk Road, access to the mineral resources depends on security. You can make investments in infrastructure as long as the environment is very insecure. The odds are, resources will not be extracted, and critically, will not be extracted in the manner that actually helps Afghanistan.

Your phrasing was, I think, very appropriate because you said, will the rogues realize that they need to cooperate, and it's not just the external actors, of course, it's the internal rogues. And much of the conversation, of course, is -- much of the contestation and the news bubbling in Afghanistan is over access to possible resources, repositioning one's forces so that you potentially are holding on a piece of territory if things disintegrate, so that you have it and your colleagues don't have it.

The third point I would make is, resources can be an enormous benefit, but they can also be a curse, the resource curse. It can be captured by a narrow elite that perhaps will strengthen the state so that one could imagine a very authoritarian state along the lines of states like, for example, Guinea-Bissau, when extremely narrow clique extracts, enough resources to be able to survive in power and oppress the population, has enough muscle power to oppress the population that continues to exist in poverty, but that's one future of Afghanistan with the resources.

It's a whole other story to design political justice, rule of law systems, that actually allow populations at large to benefit from resources, and what is particularly difficult about the mineral extraction is that it is actually not labor intensive. So, yes, it can be producing big revenues, but it might not be producing a large amount of jobs, which, even apart from accessing the revenues from the resources still has to be solved if there is economic and social stability to be had in Afghanistan.

MR. HOSKINSON: So, it's likely that you'll have -- you could have a situation more akin to Sierra Leone where --

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Absolutely.

MR. HOSKINSON: -- militias are using the mineral resources to enrich themselves, not the nation.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Absolutely, and unlike Sierra Leone, Liberia, where it was about diamonds where diamonds are easy to extract and transport, the Afghanistan situation is more problematic, we talk about essentially metals, so the transportation requirements are far more complex than with the case of diamonds, but, yes, you could have sort of a complex version of the Sierra Leone/Liberia cases.

MR. HOSKINSON: Sir, back -- yes, you.

MR. WERNER: Robert Werner from the consulting firm called Managing Uncertainty. Can you comment on the reported negotiations between our government and the Taliban?

MR. HOSKINSON: Anybody?

MR. O'HANLON: I'm sure we all have things to say. I'll make a brief comment, which is I'm hopeful that someday some pieces of the Taliban can decide to lay down their arms and that we can find terms that perhaps by allowing some level of rehabilitation, especially in the eastern parts of Afghanistan, and some ability for some former Taliban to essentially have access even to jobs and even some limited government positions in the eastern provinces. We may be able to pick off parts of the Taliban.

But Taliban central, I believe, is a long ways away from any willingness to do a serious negotiation on terms that we or the Afghan government and people would find acceptable. There's a lot more to say, I'll just lay that out as a starting point and remind you, as well, that President Karzai did have a chief negotiator for the Taliban who was assassinated by a group or a person we don't exactly know the identity of, but probably had some affiliation to the Taliban, just a few months ago. And that should be something you don't quickly forget when you're assessing the probabilities of this working.

MR. HOSKINSON: Bruce?

MR. RIEDEL: Political reconciliation between the Afghan factions is, of course, a way to get out of all of the nightmares we've been talking about. Like Mike, I don't think there's a high likelihood of this

happening. But I don't see much harm in exploring it very carefully, as long as we bear in mind a couple of rules of the road.

Rule of the road number one is, at the end of the day, this has to be an Afghan process, not an American process with the Taliban. It's got to be a process between Afghans. If the Taliban's not interested in talking to the Karzai government, then there is no political reconciliation.

Secondly, we have to be careful that it not become simply a negotiation about so-called "confidence building" steps, which means prisoner releases in which we give the Taliban prisoners back, and don't get anything really significant in return.

Thirdly, we have to bear in mind that there's a third party in this game, and that's Pakistan. Pakistan is not going to let the Taliban negotiate an outcome that Pakistan isn't comfortable with.

So if we bear in mind these rules of the road as we go forward, I think it makes sense to be cautious, to try to see if the political reconciliation process works -- but to not have big expectations that this is going to be the genii that pulls the rabbit out of the hat at the end of the day.

If it does, *alhamdulillah* -- that's great. It was a very useful way. But don't build a policy based on hope. You have to build a policy on what you can control, and this process we don't control. The Taliban will ultimately control it.

The last thing I would say about it is even if we go nowhere on it, it's better that the negative opponent of political reconciliation be the other side. Let it not be us. This Administration struggled in its first year about whether it wanted any reconciliation process. I always thought that was silly. Of course we want reconciliation. We're in favor of a peaceful solution. Let's see if the other side is willing to come and meet us and have conversation about it. If they're not, then everyone can recognize where the problem is.

MR. HOSKINSON: If I can follow up, did you want to address it, Elizabeth? Just kind of --

MS. FERRIS: I was just going to say that at a very different level, for NGOs and international organizations that are delivering assistance in areas controlled by the Taliban, those negotiations are already going on. I mean, just a couple of weeks ago we had an even here, and the representative from Médecins Sans Frontières -- Doctors without Borders -- said, "We can operate because the Taliban wants us there. They see the value that we are providing."

So that kind of day-to-day negotiation is already going on with the humanitarians.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: We cannot know right now what the outcome of the negotiations will be. Certainly, the Taliban's asking price will be high. Nonetheless, Bruce was very correct to point out that the Taliban has a great deal of difficulties it needs to be solving. It was certainly hurt in the south. It does not love the Pakistanis. They are as much a headache for them as they are any sort of benefactor. And they face other challenges in Afghanistan itself.

Nonetheless, that doesn't preclude that they might be using negotiations as a mechanism to run out the clock to 2014 and potentially beyond that.

However, if the Afghan government, or the United States, falls into the trap of trying to negotiate quickly, at all costs, to achieve some sort of cover to get out, it's very likely the negotiations will not hold, and that we are back to the post-Geneva 1988 outcome, with civil war in the making.

If negotiations are structured as an inclusive process that gives voice to many actors in Afghanistan -- not just the Western NGOs, and not just the human rights groups, and not just the Tajik, or the northern minorities that are extremely afraid of negotiations, and likely spoilers -- but it also gives a voice to Islamist movements in Afghanistan, a

marginalized tribe, there is a chance that you can achieve reconciliation within the society, and possibly even reconciliation with the government that improves government.

However, to have these negotiations to take place, as opposed to negotiations that are held close to the chest, between the power brokers, external and internal, and that ultimately will be -- divide territory and divide power among different factions is very small. There are many internal and external spoilers to the negotiations. And it's arguably far more difficult negotiations than a lot of other analogies we could bring.

MR. O'HANLON: Just a footnote, if I could.

MR. HOSKINSON: Sure. Go ahead.

MR. O'HANLON: And I agree with Bruce that there's not much harm in trying. -- if we manage the message correctly, as he said. But Vanda's underscored the challenge of doing that. And we usually don't manage the message correctly in this particular case, working with our Afghan partners.

And I know we've all talked to Tajik friends in the last year, who have been so nervous about these peace talks, about which they hear nothing, they just get rumors, they see it as some grand Pashtun plot

against them -- that they are increasingly inclined, some of them, to raise the specter of potential civil war as a response to a peace deal they don't like. Which is sort of -- you know, you can imagine a pace deal: Karzai gets a third term, and the Taliban get one-third of the ministerial positions.

And I'm not saying that would happen. I'm not saying anybody would agree to that. But groups that are outside the negotiation, that just hear rumors through the public discourse, and fear that, are getting more worried -- to the point that they are raising the specter of civil war as a response to a deal they don't like.

So that's a way in which you can do harm if you're not clear about how you're approaching these, and who's involved.

MR. HOSKINSON: Well, thank you. You all just answered my question without having to ask it.

Sir?

SPEAKER: Hi, there. David Bertee, from Medill News Service.

There have been conflicting reports over the last couple weeks -- especially given the whistleblower report, and the Pentagon's subsequent response about strategy.

So my question is, you know, given the fact that the American public knows relatively about Afghanistan, and that this war has, you know, poorly defined goals and, you know, no traditional battles, per se -- you know, how does the military then, in turn, politicians, how do they go about better communicating the successes the failures?

MR. HOSKINSON: Mike?

MR. O'HANLON: Happy to. (Laughter.) But, again, I'm sure we're all going to have thoughts on this.

I think the military does a pretty good job when it gets the podium. But if you look at the last two years, we've had a problem, in the sense that first we had, of course, the McChrystal-*Rolling Stone* imbroglio that made it harder for him to talk, obviously, about what was going on. Then General Petraeus went over, and there was a perception that the Obama Administration was not getting along with its generals, and also that Petraeus and Bush had talked too much, and that Petraeus had had too big of a role in the Bush Administration in Iraq, and so there was a sense we had to keep these generals in check, keep them quiet.

And then, when Petraeus did testify last March, which is the last time we've had a commander testify, it was four days after the Japanese tsunami, and most of the country's attention was on that.

And so I'm not suggesting these commanders have great, happy stories that are all of a sudden going to persuade us if we just listen to them. It's a much more mixed bag. But some of the things Petraeus said in that week of testimony -- which were true then, and I think are true now -- are that, for example, the Afghan army probably fights, per person, better than the Iraqi army. That may not a high standard. It may not be a good enough standard. But it counters some of the perceptions -- which are not entirely untrue -- that people like Bing West, in his book last year, or, now, Lieutenant Colonel Davis in the recent reporting from Afghanistan, suggest that, in fact, these Afghans don't really have any interest at all in fighting for their own country.

Again, West and Davis have done a useful job in reminding of the limitations of how far we've gotten the Afghan army. But the other side of the story is not coming out very well.

And so, to summarize -- because there's a lot more we could say, and I'll just make one main point -- which is thank goodness that it is about to be March again. I hope it will be time for commanders' testimony very soon. And I hope we'll all listen to them this time. Because General Allen is every bit as good of a battlefield commander, in my judgment, as McChrystal and Petraeus, and he's going to be able to give a bird's-eye

view of what's happening on the battlefield in a way that we haven't had enough of in the recent public debate.

MR. HOSKINSON: Vanda?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, the White House needs to step up in the plate and, I think, really think seriously about its communications strategy. A lot of our problems with Karzai, with allies, are the continually mixed messages. Are we in for counterinsurgency? Are we in for counterterrorism? Are we going to liquidate really early? What is the stake for the Afghans?

If we are indeed committed to sticking it out and giving it the best chance -- small as it is -- that we'll achieve some limited success, the White House needs to carry the message of what the stakes are, and that we are truly committed to making this happen.

In the absence of that, we'll be facing a public that is very antsy, if not necessarily pressing for departure. And we'll be sending messages to Afghans that encourage them to hedge, and not to trust that a better future can possibly be achieved.

MR. HOSKINSON: Well, a lot of people think that the successes against Al Qaeda have made Afghanistan less relevant. And how does the Administration deal with that?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, and I think that the Administration put itself in a bad corner with its early-on strategy of defining it solely as counterterrorism and anti-Al Qaeda, and not building up a bigger base of what is at stake in Afghanistan itself, impacts on the region, on Pakistan, the U.S. credibility, messages to other Salafic groups. There's a whole host of other interests -- some of them very strategic interests -- that the Administration was not stressing. It was all about counterterrorism and Al Qaeda.

And now it's hard to say -- well, as Bruce said, Al Qaeda is in very bad shape. Why are we staying? What is the stake?

MR. HOSKINSON: Mm-hmm.

Bruce?

MR. RIEDEL: I couldn't agree more with what Vanda said about messaging problems. I think it goes back to what Mike said early on.

This administration has done a poor job of communicating, and it sends mixed messages because it doesn't seem to really have a team that's working effectively together.

General Petraeus, I think, was supposed to solve that problem two years ago, when he was sent out, but now he's been moved

on. General Allen, I think, can solve that problem and, like Mike, I hope that he will demonstrate that to the Congress and the American public next month when he has a chance to testify.

But I also want to go back to the question of what does the Abbottabad raid say about our future Afghan policy? I think it says one thing loud and clear: We can't rely on Pakistan to deal with the problem of Al Qaeda and other extremist groups that target American interests.

Whether the Pakistani army and ISI was complicit in hiding Osama bin Laden, or clueless about the fact that he was sitting in their front yard, the bottom line is the same: We can't rely on them to protect ourselves. That means we will have to be able to do it for the foreseeable future, as long as this threat exists. And while I think Al Qaeda is under severe stress, I don't think the end is anywhere near in sight. And even if Al Qaeda is removed, there's a host of other Pakistan-based terrorist groups which will continue to be a threat to American interests.

What does that mean in practice? It means, in practice, we need a base. We can't operate against Al Qaeda from outer space. The drones don't operate from the Arabian Sea. And the SEALS, if they'd had to go on in from a carrier group, would have failed disastrously, just as we failed at Desert I in Iraq. We need a base nearby.

The geography is simple. There are two countries nearby: India -- and I don't think we're going to operate from there -- and Afghanistan. That means we're going to need, for the foreseeable future, some kind of relationship with the government of Afghanistan that allows us to operate from them. And no government in Afghanistan is going to say to the United States, "Yeah, you can fly drone operations from our country, and send in the SEALS to our next-door neighbor occasionally, and we don't really want anything from you at all." "You stir up a hornet's nest next door, and that's fine by us."

We're going to have to give them something in return.

Here, we get back to the messaging problem. I don't think this administration has done a very good job of communicating some of these realities to the American people, and saying, you know, post 2014, we're still going to have to have a relationship with any government in Afghanistan. We're going to need to have counterterrorism capabilities in Afghanistan to deal with these problems. And that means we have to have some kind of vision for Afghanistan post 2014 which is not just bringing home American combat troops.

That conversation hasn't taken place. I really should take place, and Campaign 2012 is exactly the place where this should take place.

And I would hope that the Republican challenger, whoever he is, will actually start to put some of these issues on the table and force that debate. Because the American people should have that debate in the process of deciding who's going to be the next president.

MR. HOSKINSON: We have time for one more question, and then we'll give the panelists opportunity for closing remarks.

In the back there, please?

SPEAKER: Hi. My name is Anchuman Apti. I work for Voice of America TV Ashna. That is Afghanistan service. Many of you have been on our site.

My question is, you all spoke about the message towards the American people. My question is, if each of you could briefly comment on how leaders from both sides of the political spectrum in the United States, what their message should be to the Afghan people so that post-2014, or whatever, you know, Afghanistan holds together as a society, banking on the United States' help -- whichever government may come into power?

MR. HOSKINSON: Bruce?

MR. RIEDEL: I'm happy to take a crack at that.

I'm usually a strong activity of the realpolitik foreign policy that's based on interests, not on emotions. And I think that should be our

guiding principle. But I think we also ought to think for a minute about what the Afghan people have done for the United States, not just in the last ten years, but in the last 30 years. We've asked the Afghan people to bleed for our interests, first in fighting the Soviet Union, then in fighting al-Qaeda and the Taliban. We've made a lot of promises to the Afghan people, starting with President Bush and continuing with President Obama. It would be cruel and immoral to just abandon those promises now. Mike mentioned before, 2.5 million Afghan girls going to school -- are we going to abandon those people? We know what the Taliban will do if they come back into office. No matter all the Taliban apologists we're hearing from these days, I think we know one thing's for sure. They're not going to keep those schools running for women. They're going to go back to treating women and minorities as they treated them when they were in power before. I think the United States needs to have a strong message to the Afghan people that we are not going to just abandon them as we have done before.

MR. HOSKINSON: Mike?

MR. O'HANLON: Could I add a word? Is this already concluding comments, or are we going to do that separately because I can make this both?

MR. HOSKINSON: If you want.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay, I'll forego my subsequent opportunity. I think that in general, Bruce is 100 percent right and very eloquent. And it's an element of passion and of sort of human connection in decency and moral commitment that we need to hear from American politicians, too. But, of course, the question then rises well, which Afghans are you going to help? What are your vehicles to help them if the Karzai government is one that you've decided is as corrupt and mafia-like as Vanda said earlier?

And by the way, I do also agree with another point Vanda made earlier, which is Karzai's not the worst of the lot. Karzai himself, I think, in some ways tries to do the right thing, but the whole system, which he's contributed to, is not working. So we have to figure out ways to help the Afghan people.

Now, we have friends from the Asian Development Bank, and Elizabeth and her colleagues working in humanitarian spheres who already do. But we also need a strategy for working with other Afghan political actors so that the election of 2014 is not just a crapshoot, us hoping that somebody emerges, but that we actually help strengthen the very Afghan political parties, parliamentary forces, local leaders that we have had a hand in suppressing. We approved a Constitution. We didn't impose it on Afghans, per se -- but we had a lot to do with advising the

way in which it was developed -- that basically gave Karzai all the power back in ’03-’04, and the reason was that at that point we had a light footprint strategy. We didn’t have enough capability on the ground and weren’t even going to help Karzai have enough capability to actually have normal governance throughout Afghanistan.

So we gave him all the hiring and firing power, all the budget power. He hires and fires at will; district governors in the 365 or 70 Afghan districts, as you know. There’s no check and balance on that process. There are no direct elections of governors; Karzai fires those people as well. He’s the only person who can essentially propose legislation that has any budgetary impact, and he convinced us eight or ten years ago not to encourage Afghan political parties to field candidates for office on the grounds that Afghans don’t like parties because it reminds them of Communism or it reminds them of warlords.

Well, there was some logic to that in ’03-’04, but it’s totally overtaken by events to the point now where the only Afghan institutions that are meaningful are personalities and patronage networks. And what we really have to do is help strengthen parliament and political parties. And my Afghan colleague, Hassina Sherjan, and I have written up some ideas, along with Gretchen Birkle from IRI, on how to do some of this. And it’s a lot of small ideas, but I just want to mention one or two. In fact,

let me just mention one: It's partly symbolic, but it's something that our members of Congress, our journalists, our think tankers, need to remember, which is when you go to Afghanistan to visit, you don't just want to visit President Karzai and one or two of his ministers. You should be trying to see other Afghan political actors to give them the moral support, to give them the ideas, to give them the standing and legitimacy that come with contacts with international actors from the United States and other countries.

So that's a small thing we can do. There are a number of other small things. I guess I'll lie and mention one more. The Afghan parliament right now doesn't have enough intellectual or sort of policy heft. It needs staff. It needs research organizations. We should help them develop something like the Congressional Research Service, the Afghan Parliamentary Research Service, that would help them think through alternative ways they could organize themselves politically, give some intellectual support in a nonpartisan way to ideas that they want to develop so that again, Karzai talking to the international community is not the only game in town.

MR. HOSKINSON: Does anybody else want to address that? If not, we'll go to close -- Vanda, go ahead.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: I'll join with Michael's remarks as well. Clearly, we need to communicate to the Afghan people that we are committed to giving it the best chance we can for the country to be stable and as well governed as possible. That means speaking about human security issues in Afghanistan and focusing on human security issues as well as focusing on expanding access to political competition and access to economic resources.

What it means is that we cannot hope that the military strategy alone or possibly the military strategy in some combination with negotiation is sufficient, and we can shrug off governance problems as we have been doing in Afghanistan as get-things-done pragmatism. We cannot leave it to the powerbrokers to solve it themselves because they are likely not going to be able to solve it, and the conditions of Afghans will not be good.

However, what is really challenging about doing this is that we need to find a way to expand and improve governance while at the same time resurrecting some working relationship with the Arg Palace before imposing the elections.

MR. HOSKINSON: Elizabeth, did you have any closing comments?

MS. FERRIS: Yes, first of all just to thank you for being a part of this process and on this panel. You know, often we in the humanitarian community mainly talk to other humanitarians, and so it's good to have an opportunity to talk with those more concerned with some of the security and defense issues because they're related. I mean, sometimes there's a mindset that humanitarian issues are kind of marginal in the great processes of war and peace. And yet looking at the intersection between humanitarian response and politics is really important.

And let me just mention something that wasn't mentioned in today's program and that is the impact of the floods in Pakistan. In 2010 a fifth of the country was under water; 20 million people affected. The housing wasn't rebuilt before they were hit again with floods. The criticism of the government's lack of preparedness, differences between military and civilian perceptions of competence were common. And I think that the impact of those floods is something that's going to be with us for some time and demonstrates again that intersection between humanitarian issues, natural disasters, and politics.

MR. RIEDEL: I just would like to conclude on Pakistan. We've painted a pretty dismal picture of Pakistan here today, and Pakistan has a lot of problems and Pakistan is very problematic to the United

States in many ways. But it's very important. This is the sixth largest country in the world today; it will soon be the fifth largest country in the world. It is the second largest Muslim country in terms of population. It will be the largest Muslim country in terms of population. I don't want to paint it as the strategic prize in South Asia. As a lot of people would say, it's the "booby prize" in South Asia. Neither is true. It's a very, very important country to the United States in a lot of ways. It has profound contradictions and complexities, but it is not a hopeless situation, and I'll give you some examples.

The former Pakistani Ambassador to the United States, Husain Haqqani, at the end of last year went home to confront his accusers. Many of us thought we would never see him again. He's back in the United States. The political process worked in Pakistan to let him come back here. His successor, Ambassador Sherry Rehman, who is giving a talk today for the first time since she came here, has been a very brave advocate of changing the blasphemy law in Pakistan and protection of minorities and protection of women's rights.

The current Pakistani government is corrupt. It has many failures. But it was probably going to be the first elected Pakistani government ever to serve out a term in office that it was elected for. That's a significant accomplishment for Pakistan. Pakistani generals we

have a lot of disagreements with. The Pakistani civilians are not Thomas Jefferson or John Adams. They are what they are. But there is a battle underway for the soul of this country, which is terribly important to the United States. Over the course of the last half century, we've done a lot of harm to Pakistan. We have supported every Pakistani military dictator with enthusiasm -- Democrats and Republicans. It's a remarkable bipartisan agreement. It's time to stop doing that. It's time to do no more harm to the Pakistani civil-military relationship and try to do what we can to help those in Pakistan who want to build a progressive, modern, Pakistan that no longer engages in support for terrorism and ceases trying to build a nuclear arsenal of the size of China and tries to become a more normal state.

That's the big issue in the long term in the Afghan-Pakistan arena and that's the one that we need to have our eyes focused on and think about how we influence that outcome in everything else we do in dealing with Afghanistan and Pakistan.

MR. HOSKINSON: Well, thank you. I want to thank the panelists for a great discussion. You've all been a great audience. Thank you very much.

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