

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION
A DISCUSSION ON AFGHANISTAN WITH
AMBASSADOR RYAN CROCKER

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PARTICIPANTS:

Featured Speaker:

RYAN CROCKER
Former Ambassador, U.S. Foreign Service
U.S. Department of State

Discussant:

MICHAEL O'HANLON
Senior Fellow and Director of Research,
Foreign Policy
The Brookings Institution

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ANDERSON COURT REPORTING
706 Duke Street, Suite 100
Alexandria, VA 22314
Phone (703) 519-7180 Fax (703) 519-7190

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good afternoon, everyone. Thank you for coming out under these conditions and thank you especially to Ambassador Ryan Crocker for being with us today. I'm Mike O'Hanlon from Brookings and we're going to have a conversation today with one of the most distinguished ambassadors in the modern history of the United States who has done so much for his country throughout the broader Middle East in these turbulent years and continues to serve now with appointments at the Yale University and also still on leave from the Bush School at Texas A&M, where he's the dean and will be returning. But let me just say a couple of words to welcome Ryan Crocker and ask you then to join me in thanking him for his service and welcoming him to Brookings.

As you know, Ambassador Crocker served some 38 years in the American Foreign Service, including returning to duty when that was the request of his president and commander in chief a little over -- back about a year and a half ago. He has served in some of the most difficult and challenging and topical parts of the world. And as you know, they include Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, and Lebanon. And one thing I'd like to do in the course of today's conversation, just so you know how we'll handle this, we'll begin with recent developments in Afghanistan and Pakistan, talk a little about the broader Middle East, and then go to you for your questions. And so, as you can imagine, we have a very well-prepared and experienced person to help us understand these

difficult issues.

So it's a great honor to have you here, Ambassador Crocker. In addition to this amazing service, of course, you have been awarded with the Presidential Medal of Freedom and the highest awards in the land. Not only that, you've shown us all how to learn different cultures, how to gain an education abroad. He started in Morocco and Turkey and elsewhere as a child. For those wondering how you produce a Ryan Crocker, some early education and experience in travel doesn't hurt. Some great language skills don't hurt. And just an amazing tenacity and dedication to your country and to the peoples of the broader Middle East.

So please, all join me in thanking Ambassador Crocker.

(Applause)

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Thank you all.

MR. O'HANLON: And I know we'll get to this week's news very quickly, but let me begin with a little broader purview on where we stand in Afghanistan today. And I want to make it sort of a two-part question and then just invite you to share whatever thoughts you'd like.

One is where are we here in September 2012 compared with where we would have liked to be, where you might have expected that we would be, let's say when the new Obama strategy was first developed in 2009 or even when you began your service? So where are we relative to expectations? Because I think most people would feel that it's been a difficult and even

disappointing effort overall.

But secondly, regardless of that, where are we relative to where we need to be? Are we still headed for a potentially acceptable outcome even for those who don't think that it's going to be the success or outright victory that some might have, perhaps naively, believed from the start?

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Well, thank you, Michael, and thank you for having me here to Brookings. And thank you to all of you who actually came out in this. You might consider a professional counsel afterwards.

(Laughter) And I should just note that as Mike went through the travel log of my career in each one of those rather difficult places, you know, one Michael O'Hanlon would show up sooner or later, you know, generally braving shellfire to do it and will do it again.

You know, as we kind of gauge where we are in Afghanistan, we've got to do what we don't do terribly well, which is take some perspective on it. You know, I won't take you back to Amanullah Khan and the 1920s, but I will take you back to my own experience, which was arriving in Afghanistan about 10 days after President Karzai got there from Bonn, the day after New Year's 2002, and what it looked like then. And I've seen a lot of bad places, like Lebanon during the civil war, and this was worse. It was total, absolute, utter devastation. Driving in from Bagram, nothing but mud fields and destroyed houses. You dare not stray from what was left of the pavement of the road because of the minefields on both sides uncleared. The bridge was gone, so you had to ford,

which was a neat trick in a fully armored vehicle on muddy and highly inclined banks, to drive into a city that looked like Berlin in 1945. No electricity, no water, no security forces, a completely dead economy, no nothing.

So if the end of '01/beginning of '02 is your starting point, Afghanistan is looking beyond pretty good. If you were out there in May, you know, Kabul is a major South Asian metropolis: huge traffic snarls, commercial activity, sidewalks thronged, stores open, you know, 8+ million kids in school, life expectancy vastly increased, close to 350,000 security forces in training or deployed. You know, the progress is extraordinary. Challenges we're going to get into; they're immense. So unlike many of my colleagues, I mean, I had that '02 image and the distance that the Afghans have traversed with help from their friends is really cosmic.

You know, okay, let's shorten the timeframe, the distance, say, from the surge. You know, I for one -- you know, I've been through two surges. I went out to Iraq with Dave Petraeus in early 2007, just after President Bush ordered that surge. You know, I have to say looking back to December 2009, I'm not sure I expected the drama that we got in 2007. And there are several reasons for that: again, orders of magnitude; fixed timelines, which we avoided in '07; and the neighbors, particularly Pakistan. So, again, my expectations were under control.

Against that backdrop, you know, I think the surge has done very well indeed. You know, just in my time there, going into Lashkar Gah and Camp

Leatherneck right after my arrival July 11, and in helioing over the badlands up to Kajaki in Northern Helmand, and kind of everything between Leatherneck and Kajaki was controlled by the Taliban. Well, you can drive straight up 607. We're bringing convoys up now without incident to do the Kajaki Dam project. The surge was in the south and the surge clearly, clearly made a difference. I think it also provided some political space for the Afghan government, the Afghan people to consolidate some of their extraordinary gains, to think about long-term political processes. Where do they want to take the country, particularly after 2014? And of also major significance it produced a time for the development of Afghan National Security Forces.

And, again, you know, I'm giving you the positives right now. There are a load of negatives, including with the Afghan National Security Forces. But the fact is in basically a period of just a little over three years, because we only really got serious, as you know, about sustained, large-scale training '08/'09, well, what that has produced in a fairly short time is quite extraordinary. We have Afghan units leading in almost 50 percent of operations, and many of these they are unpartnered. When we had the Koran incident out at Bagram, we went through a period of a couple of weeks in which we simply -- "we," the International Security Assistance Force -- could not be in the field. We would just be gasoline on the fire. So Afghan forces had to deal with the protests on their own. They were not trained for it. They were not equipped for it, for riot control. They behaved very credibly and I think the surge bought the time for that

training program to produce those kinds of results.

Critical question, we're going to get more into obviously where we are, but where do we go from here? I think the trajectory is right. You know, the surge force is recovered to all intents and purposes. General Allen and the Joint Staff have recommended a pause now for assessment -- you know, where are we? Where are the Afghans? Where are our adversaries? What are the likely scenarios? -- before we make any further decisions on force levels. And that's also been the message with our allies. And I think, again, is very prudent advice.

But in terms of security forces, both Afghan and international, I think this is a manageable proposition. I was greatly encouraged, as the Afghans were, by Chicago with the out-year commitment by the international community to fund a substantial Afghan security force, you know, well past 2014. I think that is key and we can talk about, again, the relevance of the Soviet and post-Soviet experience to this.

So, you know, with a lot of unknowns, wild cards, and kickers, Pakistan safe havens, reconciliation, and so forth, I think we are looking on the security side of a sustainable and capable force over the long run.

Politically, 2014 elections, everybody's talking to everybody. Everybody is maneuvering. It kind of looks like American primaries. That's not a bad thing. Again, we can talk more about that as we bore down on specifics. I think President Karzai is committed to leaving office in 2014, which obviously -- and these are his own words, it's essential for the legitimacy of the democratic

process that in 2014 you have a president who is not named Karzai. He is thinking, again, very long term; he's thinking of legacy. And I think, again, that has him focusing on not just an outcome, but a process that institutionally strengthens Afghanistan, which you heard reflected in his statements, particularly in Tokyo. The Tokyo Economic Ministerial is, you know, hangs on to the Afghan documents for that. They will be judged by it, they will judge themselves by it, and I think, to a large extent, the future of Afghanistan will be affected by how well they do on their parts of the undertakings, and we can talk about those parts later.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. Let me, if I could, ask you to talk a little bit more about politics and specifically, while we all, of course, are focused on President Karzai and he's obviously the key player right now, the broader pool of Afghans, the broader political talent within the country, what you saw in dealing with the cabinet ministers, some of the governors, some of the younger generation, some of the Karzai brothers perhaps. How would you discuss the overall talent pool and the trend line here? And if you want to play the name game on the 2014 elections, feel free, but I'm guessing you may not so much. And so let me just put the question in those broader terms and ask you to tell -- because obviously the image of Afghanistan is largely dominated by what people think of President Karzai at a given moment, which is important, but I know it's not the whole story.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Yeah. Again, we're all conditioned

by our experiences and I've done my level best over my career not to get -- to be informed by them, but not trapped by them. The relevant experience in this case, or most relevant, is Iraq. But Afghanistan is not Iraq and it was very important for me to say, Crocker, Afghanistan is not Iraq, okay? But I can't help but make the comparisons.

In terms of human talent, you know, I was surprised to find at least as great and very possibly greater depth and breadth of talent in Afghanistan than I did in Iraq. Some extremely capable ministers, very capable deputies underneath them, you know, wrestling with some of the most volatile and changeable politics you can imagine, more so than Iraq. You've met many of them in finance, in mining, in health, in education. I mean, these are people who, you know, could run just about anybody's ministry.

At the political level, too, I was impressed by both changing attitudes among, shall we say, the jihadi generation. It's very interesting, for example, Afghanistan has two vice presidents who spent a lot of time trying to kill each other in the '90s, Fahim Khan and Karim Khalili, to watch them huddling together in front of the palace kind of figuring out how they were going to game a cabinet meeting together. And, you know, some of the more frank among this generation will say we destroyed this country. Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, a name that still chills blood -- that which is around that he left to be chilled, that wasn't spilled -- you know, as head of the International Relations Committee of the Wolesi Jirga has played a very positive role in shepherding international agreements,

including our own strategic partnership, through the corridors of the parliament.

Then there's that -- and I'm really glad you raised this, there's that new element. It's the 20-somethings, the early 30-somethings, it's the women, you know, the immediate post-university generation and their younger brothers and sisters, and their older brothers and sisters to an extent. In other words, those who came of age in perhaps a volatile and dangerous, but, nonetheless, free and open Afghanistan with access to the Internet, with access to a plethora of television, radio stations, newspapers, and so forth, boy, they ain't their daddies and mommies. And can be, as you've heard yourself, blistering on the subject of their daddies and mommies. They see a new Afghanistan. And I think one of our major obligations as an international community is to buy them the time to really make a difference in politics. I'm not sure how much difference you're going to see in 2012; that's awful close. But I think in 2017, they'll be there.

And again, watching for all of the trouble they encounter, and it is horrific, particularly in the rural areas -- and it is predominantly a rural population -- the achievements of Afghan women and their determination -- nobody is pushing me back in a burqa, not ever -- is fairly extraordinary. The women in parliament, you've met some of them. You know, boy, stay out of way of Shukria Barakzai, the former chairman of the Defense Committee.

This is a new Afghanistan in the making, fragile and reversible, but it's there. So it's that longer term future that gives me some real optimism.

MR. O'HANLON: I'm just going to ask two more questions and then we'll go to you. And I think maybe we'll pivot to the Middle East a little later in the conversation, but we'll stay on this and then invite you to stay on South Asia for a little bit, too, if you like.

Because you've been talking about this newer generation and some people in parliament, I want to ask you about the structure of the Afghan political system and especially the top-heavy nature of it. And of course, as you well know, as Ron Newman knows, who's here with us today, as others who have worked in Afghanistan over the years, in 2009, Abdullah made as a centerpiece of his campaign essentially weakening the presidency, and I think he wanted direct voting for governors. But you mentioned parliament as well. To what extent, regardless of who winds up being elected in 2014 in Afghanistan as president, to what extent are the country's institutions so top-heavy that we are playing with fire here and we're just in a very dangerous proposition? Do we need constitutional reform to have any real hope? I'm just curious how you think about that question.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Well, the way I feel about it is let the Afghans figure it out. Afghan politics, as those you who have been out there know, like, again, I think all societies in an early phase of development, is largely personality-driven. You know, there are governors and there are governors. You know, I think the president is pretty careful in what direction he gives to, say, the governor of Balkh, Muhammad Atta. You know, maybe a suggestion, but

probably not an order. And that's not constitutionally based, it's who's who.

I did not see, and, you know, Ron will have his views from a different epoch, I did not see anything in the Afghan institutional structure, a qua structure, that said to me, uh-oh, you know, this simply isn't going to work over the long run. I mean, they may have done a bit better than we did since when we finally got around to a Constitution and a Bill of Rights. 13 years after the Declaration of Independence, we papered over the tough ones, like, say, states' rights, slavery, and our country almost ceased to be 70 years later. I don't see those structural cracks or fissures. You know, they could develop depending on how politics are played, but I don't see anything inherent in the Afghan structure that would lead me to that fear.

You know, I've talked -- again, I guess it's an advantage. I know so many of these individuals going back to '01, '02, including Abdullah Abdullah, who was foreign minister at the time, the president, of course. And it's interesting and not completely foreign to the Iraq experience, where in both cases your chief executive says I don't have enough power. I mean, we've got to amend the Constitution because I simply -- I haven't got the levers to control this country, while the chief executive's opponent say got to amend the Constitution, he's got way too much power, he's going to be the new dictator. Well, yeah, I don't see dictators arising out of the present structures of either country.

And it's funny because both leaders would cite the agreements concluded with the U.S., the Strategic Framework Agreement in Iraq and the

Strategic Partnership Agreement in Afghanistan, as examples. Because both leaders said, "look at the power your president has. He signs these into law with one stroke of his pen. Sure, he has some consultations with Congress, but they don't get a vote, you know. He just -- it's an executive agreement, there it is, and it's legally binding. And look at what I got to do. I got to go up and arm wrestle with parliament for every single damn vote on an agreement that he can sign unilaterally. That's power. That's not what I got." And, you know, I could have played the Maliki speech for Karzai and it would have sounded very similar.

MR. O'HANLON: Let me now ask one broad question on Pakistan's role in Afghanistan, and then go to you. And the way I'd like to frame it, if you don't mind, Ambassador Crocker, is in terms of, again, a historical perspective, not going back necessarily to when you were ambassador in Islamabad, although please bring that period in as well.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Oh, we don't want ancient history, okay. (Laughter)

MR. O'HANLON: Well, you put in three years there, as I recall, and so you've got a lot of perspective. But going back to '08/'09, as I recall seeing the Obama strategy come together there was a lot of hope that we could persuade Pakistan finally that we really were in South Asia to stay, we were not going to leave the job undone in Afghanistan, we were marshalling the resources necessary to help build institutions that would be strong enough to prevent mayhem, chaos, an India-friendly Northern Alliance from being dominant, a

second flank they had to worry about. In other words, we sort of hoped that their motivations up until that point in tolerating these insurgent sanctuaries on their soil were largely defensive, at least in a broader strategic sense. And we hoped that we could reassure them and talk them into being our true ally in every sense of the word rather than sort of, you know, half and half by making clear that we were really going to take Afghanistan seriously for the first time.

And then also, of course, the Kerry-Lugar-Berman legislation, which had its ups and downs in Pakistan, but was intended to show a stronger commitment to Pakistan itself. It doesn't appear that it's played out that way to me. And what I'm wondering, of course, first, is how does it appear to you most importantly?

But secondly, to the extent that Pakistan may be a little more complicated than first appreciated, and I'm sure you understood how complicated they were from the start, but some of the rest of us may have hoped that this was, you know, a way to understand them when there was actually more going on. Maybe they want to dominate Afghanistan. Maybe they want to be hegemonic towards their smaller, weaker neighbor. Or maybe they just cannot find a way to trust us after all these decades of perceived betrayal.

And I think the diagnosis matters in terms of predicting their future behavior. Depending on what has guided them so far to be reluctant to clamp down on these sanctuaries, to what extent can we hope that they'll change in the future? And can we be even marginally successful without more Pakistani help?

That's the question.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Yes. (Laughter)

MR. O'HANLON: Good. But how would you explain what they've been up to?

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Well, look, you know, to say the blindingly obvious, the situation in Pakistan and Pakistani politics is unbelievably complicated. And you have just cautioned me not to get into history, but you don't -- I've mentioned this before, but, you know, quoting from Faulkner, in that region the past isn't history. It's not even past. And if you don't understand that and if you don't understand the past as it's perceived in the region, not just how we perceive it, to use a diplomatic term, you're screwed. (Laughter) You're never going to figure it out.

You know, Pakistan was not, as it came into being, was absolutely not Muhammad Ali Jinnah's vision. The loss of Kashmir, the loss of half of Punjab, the loss of several other Muslim-dominated principalities led him to say -- and I'm paraphrasing here -- at the time of independence, this pitiful, truncated state. And it is a state, two of whose four provinces didn't want to be part of Pakistan right from the beginning: Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the former Northwest Territories, and Balochistan. And to a large extent, they still don't. You know, there are four main languages spoken in Pakistan, many sub-languages. Its whole *raison d'être* was to be the homeland for the Muslims of South Asia, dubious to begin with given the number of Muslims who remained in India and

entered the Indian system, both politically and economically. And then with the loss of Bangladesh, you know, who are we as Pakistanis? Why are we? You know, there are fundamental existential issues at play here, which you see reflected in Kashmir and elsewhere, fundamental splits.

This military divide, of course, an obvious one, but within the civilian establishment and now really for the first time in this context divides within the military. That's happened before. I mean, you know, when you lose a war there are consequences, like '71 in East Pakistan. But there are things going on in the military where the kind of monolithic military I saw in the Musharraf years, '04-'07, when I was there, boy, the Chief of Army staff is, I think, the chairman of a fairly fractious board of corps commanders rather than the absolute leader of the military establishment.

And bear in mind, you know, some of you heard me yesterday, the law of unintended and long-term consequences. Let's do this now, it'll feel good. Let's just sanction the hell out of Pakistan over their nuclear program now that we don't need them anymore because we got rid of the Soviets. Well, we cut off all training among everything else, which meant no Pakistani officer for more than a decade entered an American military school or training facility. That sanction's generation of Pakistani officers are now moving into positions of command. They're your one-stars. You know, the current leadership, including the Chief of Army staff, went to at least two of our schools, perhaps three, I can't remember. Well, his successor's successor probably will not have gone to any of our

schools; won't know us; probably doesn't like us because lost opportunity.

And I lay all that out just to say, wow, how complicated and divided it is. And I haven't even turned to the Islamic insurgency that Pakistan itself faces. Granted, they created their own Frankenstein's monster in many cases with Lashkar-e-Taiba and its ilk that they brought into being in '48 to try to wrest Kashmir from the Indians and have supported or tolerated since, but which are increasingly alarming to the Pakistani establishment as they make common cause with groups like the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, which is overtly and dangerously anti-establishment. They want to bring it down.

And then the Tribal Areas. I mean, I've visited every single agency. That doesn't make me an expert on them, but in talking to commanders out there, even back in '07, you know, a Punjabi battalion commander could tell you exactly how many days he had in his six-month rotation before he was back in 4th Corps again where it was safe and where he was doing what he was trained to do; which was be ready to fight an armor battle on the plains of the Punjab against Pakistan's true existential enemy and not get sniped to death by a bunch of tribesmen who were as strange to him and his troopers as they were to us. I've lost count of how many Pakistani military casualties there have been on their side of the Durand Line, but it's thousands.

So long prelude, well, why don't they do what we want them to do? You know, all of these contradictions, conflicts, challenges come into play, including the one we've never been able to get rid of. Again, what you do now

because we're the Americans, we're going to make a decision, darn it, and that will certainly carry us through the end of October and after that, we'll worry about it later. You know, the sanctions years are something the Pakistanis have not gotten over to this day. It's still, oh, you're back. When are you leaving? And they look at some of our actions, decisions, surge, drawdown, and so forth, and say hedge our bets? You bet because we've got to deal with it when you're gone.

Now, is there an antidote? Yes, I believe there is. I think the militancy; the anti-establishment militancy in Pakistan has developed to the point in all its various flavors that the Pakistani establishment is really genuinely worried. We've gotten over, you know, the November border crisis that led to the closure of the lines of communication. We're back in dialogue. Ambassador Grossman was just out to both countries. The Afghans, while, you know, to say the least, not being entirely sure it'll work, are oriented toward engagement, not its opposite.

I do think this is a moment to move forward with something we were talking about before I left of a sustained, high-level, focused, prepared, trilateral dialogue. We've had a trilateral dialogue, but it's never had, you know, the full weight of the three governments behind it. The three governments have a very serious common problem, more serious for Afghanistan and Pakistan than us, but serious enough for us. And I think, you know, this is a time for us all to take a deep breath and say here are my concerns, let me listen to yours, let's get

the complaints on the table, let's see which ones we can wrestle with, let's see which ones are part of history. You know, let us see how we can move forward. I do think there is that opportunity now.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent answer, thank you. That's very helpful.

Let's start here and please wait for a microphone. Identify yourself, if you could, and please just one question per person if that's okay.

SPEAKER: Thank you, Michael. My name is (inaudible) with Al Quds daily newspaper. I also want to add my voice in recognizing the distinguished ambassador. I was in Iraq with the U.N. when you were there, sir.

My question is about Afghanistan. Citing all the accomplishments, political accomplishments and social accomplishments, that you cited on the one hand, and on the other seeing the diminished return, the military involvement diminished return, why not put a marker down, you know, and leave by 2014 and perhaps even prior to that as has been suggested by the President? That's one.

And second, I want to ask you about Iraq and SOFA. In retrospect, should have SOFA -- should it have included American boots on the ground, continued presence, robust?

MR. O'HANLON: We can keep the Iraq one on ice, if you'd like, and come back to it later, depending on your preference.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: No, sorry, on the first one again?

SPEAKER: Well, you know, the President talked about departing

Afghanistan in 2014.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Right.

SPEAKER: He gets a great deal of criticism for that. I mean, all the political accomplishments seem to have been accomplished. So why not even leave earlier? Thank you.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Okay, I was confused on which president was leaving Afghanistan. You know, again, we're entering into a period of assessment as we conclude the drawdown of the surge. And it is going to be very much a bilateral -- well, not bilateral, multilateral assessment with our allies and, you know, I think, as the Afghans consider appropriate, with regional states. Their call. And, you know, I think clearly part of that question is going to be, you know, okay, roles and missions for international forces going forward. How many of whom do we, the Afghans, need to do what? What are we willing to provide in terms of numbers going forward to 2014 and beyond?

You know, I think everything significant to do with Afghanistan has to be part of a process like this. We have had simply too many moments in our engagement in the broader Middle East where we simply decide here in Washington it's going to be A and it's not going to be B, and off we go, and normally it isn't pretty. So I think a very careful, deliberative process is going to be important as we look at the international military role post-surge, you know. Depending on how that comes out and how events develop over the next couple of years, you know, obviously there's then going to be a discussion on, you

know, post 2014, one that we don't need to exactly rush into. But we do, I think, need a very measured process in this.

And clearly, we share with the Afghans the desire that they take as much responsibility as they can possibly carry as quickly as they can carry it. That said, what we cannot afford, particularly in a post-surge environment, is a substantial setback to the Afghan National Security Forces. They can afford a bloody nose. A couple of bloody noses aren't a bad thing for most militaries. What they can't afford is a broken face.

So, again, we're going to have to calibrate this, I think, very carefully and it has to be a collaborative process.

And I'm delighted to talk about the Iraqi security agreement when Michael lets me. (Laughter)

MR. O'HANLON: I'm going to, by the way, read one sentence that ISAF just put out today describing this purported change in policy for those of you who haven't yet seen it. "Recent media coverage regarding a change in ISAF's model of security force assistance to the Afghan National Security Forces is not accurate."

So, I could go on, but you didn't come here to let me read to you. I just want you to be aware that there's some clarification that may be in order on what's happening right now.

But let's go to the next question. Over here, sir, and then we'll keep moving.

SPEAKER: William Reid with DynCorp International. Ryan, what about the peace process? What's the prospects for reconciliation?

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Yeah, a great question. And again, having just made a big point about not being driven in my thinking exclusively by Iraq, you know, one principle that we kind of developed and adhered to out of Iraq is, ultimately you can't kill your way out of an insurgency, as Dave Petraeus and I said any number of times. You've got to have some basis of political understanding. That doesn't mean you get everybody in the tent, but, you know, to put it bluntly, it means that you reduce the people that you absolutely have to kill to the smallest number possible.

You know, I think reconciliation is important in Afghanistan. President Karzai thinks it's important in Afghanistan, but he watches it carefully and wisely, in my view. Though a Pashtun who obviously has his political base in the Pashtun community, he is an Afghan nationalist in the sense -- in more than one sense, but in the sense of really looking at Afghans as Afghans beyond ethnic or sectarian identity and uncommonly sensitive to minority concerns. And although women are not a minority, very much aware of what impacts women in Afghanistan.

So, yes, for President Karzai and his key lieutenants on reconciliation, but not at the cost of the internal cohesion he has been able to achieve. And the best example I can give you of that was the process he went through to choose a new head for the High Peace Council after the assassination

of Burhanuddin Rabbani, a year ago tomorrow. You know, there were lots of good contenders. He decided fairly early on in the process who he wanted and that was Rabbani's son. And he wanted Rabbani's son because it was his judgment that you have to have a significant non-Pashtun figure in charge of the reconciliation process or you're going to be heading for trouble with the minorities and with others who fear that -- like women, who fear that the gains achieved since 2001 could be washed away by concessions that re-Talibanize the country in form or another. So he's got his eye, you know, very much on holding together what's there and not building bridges to the Taliban at that expense.

The second point, though, again brings us back to Pakistan. The Afghans have had really an impressive number of contacts with Taliban figures, most of which don't see the light of day, mercifully. Secrets actually can be kept in Afghanistan, unlike Washington. (Laughter) And I, at Afghan invitation, have been involved in some of these discussions with Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin and with the Quetta Shura.

What is played back is, particularly for those resident in Pakistan, is the old, "you know, we're tired of being in exile going into our 11th year. It doesn't look like, you know, we're going to be back in charge any time soon. We'd like to at least see what the realm of the possible is here. But if we get caught doing it, we're going to wind up like Obaidullah, which is dead, former defense minister, in a Pakistani jail." Biradar, still alive at last sighting, also in a Pakistani jail. And a few others who visited with Afghan officials more recently

and nearly paid with their lives for it.

So as part of that dialogue I was talking about, you know, it would be a good thing indeed if the Pakistanis would say, all right, let's see where this can go, you know. Safe passage, guarantee of security for families who remain, no reprisals. Not a problem we faced, again, in Iraq, but there you do.

Is a reconciliation absolutely vital? Pretty important at some point. I'm not sure it is absolutely vital at this point. It may be post-election vital. The Afghans may be just fine with kind of the current state of affairs vis-à-vis Taliban leadership and other militant groups through the elections. And those elections, for better or for worse, may change the calculus, again, on both sides, i.e., I would not be in a roaring hurry on this because that can send the wrong signal. And I don't think the Afghan establishment is in a roaring hurry, rightly so. You know, pick up the phone when it rings. Be careful how many outgoing calls you place.

MR. O'HANLON: Stay here in the front row for a minute.

SPEAKER: That was fine.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay, good. Over here then, please.

MS. BOND: Hi. Ann Bond from Mercy Corps. Ambassador, thank you so much for your leadership. I served with USAID for a year in Kandahar City and you were always there for us. We really appreciate that.

MR. O'HANLON: A little closer to the microphone.

MS. BOND: Oh, sorry, thanks. So I work for Mercy Corps and we

have operations that have worked in Afghanistan since 1986 and have been able to do development in a war zone and have looked closely at some of the programs and how do we move forward and help during this transition process. We're hoping to get your thoughts on what State Department and USAID need to do looking forward over a transformation over a decade on what type of additional development can be done with fiscal constraints, but also looking more long term and over a five-year time horizon as opposed to, say, a six-month or year-long stabilization timeframe that has showed mixed results. Thank you.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Yeah, it's a great question and let me return the compliment. You know, we've got some terrific NGOs, U.S. and otherwise, working out in Afghanistan and, of course, Mercy Corps, you know, one of the finest. You have been there through -- I was about to say good times and bad, but let me be more accurate and say bad times and worse. (Laughter)

You know, let me just give you one anecdote from my early days. You know, in 2002, we had our military doing stuff, we had USAID starting to do stuff, and we had a range of NGOs doing other stuff, and nobody was coordinating with anybody. In fact, they weren't even talking to each other because, you know, back in 2002, for most NGOs, the notion that you sat down and talked to military commanders was ee-yuck. You know, over my dead body or theirs preferably, even though you're supposedly disarmed.

You know, we were successful on actually bringing into a room NGO reps, USAID, and military Civil Affairs personnel. It wasn't pretty. There

was a lot of yelling and screaming and finger-pointing. But out of it came, you know, I think -- well, I'm not going to say this was, you know, the defining moment. Everybody got smart and said, look, you know, we've got the same interests here. Let's kind of figure out, you know, what the limits of our cooperation are and whatnot. And, oh, by the way, the ICRC, the most scrupulously neutral NGO in existence, actually does not only talk to militaries, it talks to militias, terrorists, and everybody else. You know, surely, we can do this.

I give you this as preface to say we've come a long way. What I would hope to see, particularly in the context of a drawdown, is an intensification of that dialogue and coordination. We don't know what the military posture is going to be beyond 2014. But it is wise to operate on the assumption that there will be some.

And I think for NGOs -- USAID is doing this along with State, part of our dialogue with the military, what we would like to see in a post-2014 presence so that we are -- you know, to build synergy. I would like very much to see committed NGOs as part of that process. You know, coordination, by and large, between USAID and most NGOs isn't bad. It can be a lot better. And as resources shrink, and they will -- nobody knows it better than you -- you know, we have got to be at maximum effectiveness. Let's figure out who does what best. And when it's NGOs, you know, USAID, I think, should just back out of that particular picture. When USAID, for reasons of its overall weight, has the qualitative advantage, then, you know, they should be the supported entity, to

use a military term.

And depending on how things break between now and 2014 and beyond, we may have instances in which the military is best poised to lead. But, you know, let's get the three of us together again -- and by "the three of us," I'm talking about the international NGO community, not just U.S. NGOs -- and say here it comes, potential perfect storm: declining resources; declining popular appetites; declining governmental appetites to fund assistance programs, whether they be government or private; declining presence, military and civilian; possibly -- certainly not declining need and possibly increasing need. What do we do? And it's going to take everybody trying to figure that out.

So I look forward to Mercy Corps, you know, raising a banner and hauling everybody together and making it happen.

MR. O'HANLON: Sir, here in the fifth row.

MR. KASIM: Hi. I'm Mumet Kasim. And although I look South Asian, I am not really from South Asia, but I did work at the World Bank at Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The past is ever present, especially when it comes to borders. These are multinational states, but its cultures are really illegitimate -- the borders, I mean. So you've got a situation where you're saying, well, Afghans in Pakistan. No. It's Pashtun first, Punjabi first, then maybe everybody else. So I think it's very misleading not to cover the area along those lines.

I mean, there are 90 million Punjabis. There are more than there

are Germans. And 35-, 45 million, how many, Pashtun? And who are these Talis? What tribes do they come from? Why are they committing suicide? Do they face the existential threat? I know the Hazaras and they are out for revenge.

So if these are not brought out in the open everybody's going to be very confused and stay confused. Why do you think this is not being used, this multinational factor?

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Well, of course, it is. You know, all Pakistanis and Afghans are keenly aware of --

MR. KASIM: No, I meant here in America.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Because it's too darn hard for us to wrap our minds around.

MR. KASIM: Well, you're not a Republican. (Laughter)

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: The record will clearly show that that was not said from the podium. (Laughter)

Look, when I am faced with complex questions or when I was in the business dealing with the complex challenges that these issues present I always fell back on one surefire response, and that is to blame the British. (Laughter) Hey, look, you name it: partition of India, the Durand Line, Palestine, Cyprus, hey. But, of course, the British can't fix it anymore, so here we are. And we didn't even get into Transjordan and Iraq. And don't forget the French.

The remarkable thing about, you know, these -- and I've accused

us of being, you know, let's make a decision today that's good for six weeks and somebody else can worry about it then. Well, the British made some pretty arbitrary decisions, too, or in some cases calculated decisions that had some pretty awful consequences when you look at the Durand Line.

The remarkable thing is however arbitrary or imperialistic in the sense of not consulting native populations or even taking into account their realities, imperatives, and priorities, how these borders have persisted and how people on both sides of them have been ready to fight and die to preserve them. Think of the Iraq-Iran War, you know.

So I think a deeper knowledge of the incredibly complex nature of Western Afghanistan and Eastern Pakistan would benefit us greatly. We shouldn't think that that knowledge is going to lead us or them or anybody else to any easy solutions. I mean, there's a reason that the tribal agencies are juridically distinct from the rest of Pakistan. The British under the Raj couldn't figure out, you know, how to incorporate them into the Raj and not have the Raj torn apart, so separate status, which the Pakistani government preserved for the same reason.

Yes, there are more Pashtuns in Pakistan than there are in Afghanistan. Yet, it is the specter of Pashtunistan that scares the hell out of the Pakistanis.

MR. KASIM: Punjabis.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Yeah, and Sindhis, but mainly

Punjabis, you're right. So, again, I would come back to my mantra, since I can't think of anything else, you know, sustain a high-level, trilateral dialogue. Talk about the unthinkable. You know, not day one, for Christ's sake, but, you know, have a serious discussion at some point about the Tribal Areas, about the Pashtuns, about Pashtunistan. You know, there's going to have to be a level of confidence that doesn't exist now, but it is not beyond my thinking that one could arrive at that point because both countries are bleeding badly from these unresolved issues, not least the Pashtuns themselves.

So to me, I think there is a way to do it. And as you point out, it very much needs to be done, preferably by people who actually understand the problem, and that, largely speaking, would not be us. But there's hope we can always learn.

MR. O'HANLON: Take one more question on this part of the world, then we're going to do the Middle East in the remaining 15 minutes. So let me -- up here in the third row, ma'am, and then we'll switch.

MS. PHILLIPS-BARRASSO: Thank you. Kate Phillips-Barrasso with the International Rescue Committee. We've also been working in Afghanistan since 1988, and I wanted to thank you in particular, Ambassador, for raising concerns about the state of Iraqi refugees during your time in that country, which leads me to my question about Afghanistan.

2011, we saw the highest level of internal displacement in Afghanistan since 2002, and the lowest number of returns among Afghan

refugees in Pakistan that year as well, which paints somewhat of a concerning picture when you look at these types of indicators. We talked during your discussion about security indicators, police trained, Afghan National Security Forces, and I feel the conversation tends to focus on the security picture, but not really focused outside of Kabul and what life looks like for an average Afghan. So what do these indicators, like internal displacement, higher number of asylum cases over the last year, low returns, tell us both about the state of affairs outside of Kabul, but also about the government of Afghanistan's ability to provide security to average Afghans, whether that's in hard security terms or in terms of their ability to survive and provide for themselves, whether it's food security or attaining basic services?

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Well, thank you for your service and for IRC for its service again in Afghanistan and elsewhere over very many years. I'm going to start somewhere completely different because I think this is important.

Yes, you know, when I got to Iraq and discovered the pitifully small number of Iraqis accepted as refugees in the U.S., I blew my stack. And, you know, god, it's so great being free. (Laughter) You know, we have classifications of cables. And to protect sensitive information I decided to send a few unclassified, uncaptioned, unprotected cables on how we were failing our moral obligations, and so forth and so on. I did everything except hand them to Karen DeYoung, you know, precisely so it would go public. And it did and, you

know, measures were taken. So we went from 1,700 to 17,000. And then you know what happened.

I was at a forum in Boise, Idaho. And Boise, you know, you all sneer at Boise. I'm from Spokane, I don't. Boise is, you know, a medium-sized town that has a sterling record in welcoming refugees from all over the world. But Boise's gotten hit by the recession. It's been hit harder than most.

And I was at the University of Idaho for a symposium that had the Boise representative of the IRC and a very talented young Iraqi who had been a translator for the military. And what they were talking about was not "how do we get more Iraqis into the U.S. It's how do we take care of the refugees we've got?"

And he speaks perfect English. He was driving a cab. His wife couldn't get English language courses because there wasn't any funding for it. He wasn't sure how long he was going to be able to continue driving a cab because the company was cutting back. And six months later, the whole family was back in Iraq, not because Iraq was wonderfully safe and there were new opportunities there. They couldn't make a go of it in the States. There wasn't enough support for them to integrate.

So without taking anything away from contributions to Mercy Corps or anybody else, support the IRC because, you know, if we succeed in bringing those who deserve our protection and our nationality, it only works -- bringing them here only works if you can give them a life once they're here, and

we're failing in that, quite frankly.

Okay, I'm sorry, the preceding was an unpaid political announcement, but one I feel very deeply about.

In Afghanistan, yeah, we have done some assessments, you have done them in depth. Part of this comes from the surge, the increase, the inevitable increase of violence that accompanied that, that certainly for internally displaced. You know, as in Iraq, I worry about internally displaced, but, you know, because they are still within the country, they have better networks. They kind of know where to go, where not to go, when it's good to come home, what they're coming home to. It's those abroad who are often less well-placed to make those kinds of decisions and can wind up in a very bad situation.

Outside of the major metropolitan areas, security will be a concern for some time to come. You know, you can't do it all at once. I think, rightly, the focus of the government has been: secure your main population centers and then move out from there.

But the other thing that's got to happen and nobody knows it better than you, you've got to have something more to come back to than simply a secure situation. You've got to have a livelihood. You've got to have health services. You've got to have a school for your kids. And although a lot of progress has been made, boy, in lots of rural Afghanistan, as you know, those opportunities are not there. Part of it is, you know, in many cases, they've never been there. But in Iran, in Pakistan, they're not good.

You know, I've been through the Pakistani refugee camps, with one notable exception because I actually did not want to get killed. But, you know, there are rudimentary health and educational services. So a refugee will look at that and say I'd like to go home, but I'm better off here. And that may be a generational issue.

And, you know, one area where Pakistan does not get the credit it deserves, I think, has been its prolonged hospitality to Afghan refugees at great cost to its own social expenditures. A lot of this is made up by the international community, but by no means all. I hope the Iranians never follow through on their threats. Well, actually they have followed through on some of their threats. But, you know, IRC knows it best: conditions have to be right. And in rural areas it's going to be a long time to make it right and it's a lot bigger than security.

MR. O'HANLON: So as we now make the transition to open it up to the whole world, and I'm actually going to invite even those of you who still had questions on Afghanistan or Pakistan -- I saw there were a lot of you -- to keep your hands up and ask if you'd like, but let's also broaden the scope to Iraq, but also the broader Middle East.

But my transition question is going to still have an element of Afghanistan in it because I think the corruption issue needs at least a quick word from you. And you're in a great place to do this comparatively given the countries that you've worked in, what you've seen in your career. And I guess we all know there's a lot of corruption still in Afghanistan. I think I can infer from

your comments it's not necessarily a fatal problem, but is it getting any better? And is the drawdown in U.S. troop presence and pumping money into this economy going to at least have, you know, the silver lining, if you will, of reducing the corruption problem just because there's going to be less money to share?

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Yeah, it's an important question and very much on the minds of many who look at Afghanistan or indeed Iraq, and I wrestled with it in both countries, as did so many others. It is beyond doubt corrosive in every sense. It bleeds money away from development. It bleeds confidence away from people in their government. It makes the guys you just overthrew look better by comparison, particularly as their outrages fade a bit into the mists of time. It is a very dangerous phenomenon.

That said, I do not see it in Iraq -- did not see it Iraq, do not see it in Iraq. At current times do not see it in Afghanistan as the fatal flaw. It could become that, but corruption in South Asia, I am sad to report to you and I'm sure you'll be shocked, is not entirely a new phenomenon. There was just a piece the other day on the corruption in India and how endemic and widespread that is. You know, I'm not in a position to judge on that score, but I am in a position to judge that India is a vibrant, functioning democracy with a booming economy. It looks like they're managing both. I do not put this forward as a formula, but I think the real issue here is, again, security, it is institutional development. It is economic development that has meaning, you know, again, down to the lower echelons of society that is really critical. Corruption works against all of this, but I

don't think is necessarily fatal to it.

The first step in anti-corruption is an awareness of the problem. And earlier in Iraq, more recently in Afghanistan, you have leaders saying we've got a problem. Karzai was pretty blunt about it. But you are, again, astute to note that it is not purely an Iraq or an Afghan problem. Let's face it, the international community contributed, for the best of motives. I mean, you know, you're trying to fix problems; you're trying to stabilize and operate in an environment, so you're pushing money out the door. You're not vetting your contractors. You don't even know who your -- not only don't you know who your contractor really is, you don't even know the names of the subs or if he's got them. And we did fuel a lot of corruption, there's no question about it.

Now, we have taken measures. The Wartime Contracting Commission's recommendations were taken very seriously in the Pentagon. And USAID has gone through not just a parallel, but almost a linked process. They call it AAA, Accountable Assistance in Afghanistan, to ensure that contractors are vetted, subcontractors are vetted. If they've had prior contracts, what's their performance? So we've gone a long way to clean up our end of the act. A lot needs to be done more on the Afghan side. Again, recognition's half the problem or half the solution to that problem.

Not part of your question, but I'll just say a word on it, the economic impact of 2014 as forces draw down substantially, if not completely, the World Bank is wrestling with this. Estimate vary widely, but at the time I was

wrapping up people were saying you know what? An awful lot of that money that we say is no longer going into the Afghan economy never got there in the first place. It went offshore. You know, it was invested in projects or accounts outside of Afghanistan, perfectly legally in many cases, but it never -- you know, those payments to Afghan contractors, the legitimate payments, wound up banked elsewhere. So, again, to be determined, one of the many things to watch.

MR. O'HANLON: A couple more questions. Sir, here in I guess the sixth row or so, seventh.

SPEAKER: Hello. I'd just like to start thank you very much for coming today. I'm a student at American University and I was just wondering with the whole Pakistani situation with hedging its bets, do you think an NPT-like recognition of its nuclear weapons publicly would, in fact, bring them into the Western-leaning camp and formalize their alliance with the United States -- not alliance, sorry, strategic partnership? Thank you.

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: That's a great question because, you know, the Non-Proliferation Treaty was a great achievement, but, as has often been pointed out, it created one of those segregated clubs that we don't allow in this country anymore. If you had a declared nuclear weapon at the time of the conclusion of the NPT and you signed, you were in the club. If you didn't, you were never going to get into the club, not ever.

So what do you do with those states that have developed and

tested nuclear weapons and overtly acknowledge it, like India and Pakistan? Do you just say you're forever out? Because -- and this is one of the reasons I'm so glad you touched on this -- we talked about the reasons for, you know, the rocky, uneven relationship between the U.S. and Pakistan. Plenty of fault on both sides, but there is an absolutely pervasive belief in Pakistan that we are out to discover and destroy their nuclear arsenal and that everything we do, every form of engagement we pursue -- military and civilian -- ultimately has as its aim that goal. Is that a good thing?

You know, my own view, and I have never been involved in the world of proliferation and nonproliferation except as a political issue, for example, in Iran, but, again, I now get to not only hold, which I have for a number of years, but actually express the most ill-informed, if not positively idiotic, views that anybody can imagine. I think we have got to sit down as an international community, starting with the NPT members, and say, okay, the Indians and the Pakistanis are not, guess what, flash news bulletin here, they're not going to give up their nuclear weapons.

And here's a second guess what. We're not going to be able to get at them because they are not exactly dumb. So what do we do? You know, under the George W. Bush administration, of course, there was the nuclear agreement with India, which has had its ups and downs. It led some to think, okay, maybe there's going to be a fresh look at this whole question. Well, it didn't quite play that way.

My own view is it is past time to think seriously about how we deal with declared nuclear weapon states who are outside the NPT because there are no controls over them. And as I said, there's a downside that you see in Pakistan; where they think that everything we're up to is about getting those weapons.

So, you know, as you move through your higher education, I look forward to your thesis in which you will define not only the problem, but the solutions and you'll make a fortune.

MR. O'HANLON: We're going to have to have the last question be on Iraq because I want to couple it with the one that was posed earlier and wrap up. It's already 5:30. I could sit here for another hour listening to the ambassador, but I better not do that to him. So whoever has an Iraq question, please? We'll go over here and then ask you to wrap up, as you wish, with the earlier question about whether we left too soon.

MR. IQBAL: Sir, my name Waseem Iqbal. I'm a U.S. Supreme Court fellow. I had a quick question. It was not specifically pertaining to Iraq, but my hand was up and I kind of cheated.

MR. O'HANLON: Uh-oh. (Laughter)

MR. IQBAL: It does relate to kind of what's going on today. There seems to be throughout the Middle Eastern world, including Iraq, regardless of who you are, whatever ethnic differences you may have, they're very, very quick to rally under the Islamic flag. And I think it seems on our side we're very

hesitant to talk about that topic. And it seems like that whatever grievances they have, whether it's our foreign policy or whether a perceived war against Islam, they're very quick to sometimes even become violent against U.S. personnel, especially what happened to our embassy. What do you see is the future of this apparent conflict and what we can do to fix that?

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: God, okay, Waseem. Well, look, first on Iraq and the security agreement. It was never a status of forces agreement. Status of forces agreements follow a very rigid outline. They take years to negotiate even with states who have a long history of military cooperation. We'd still be negotiating if we tried that with Iraq.

The discussion at the time was, you know, look -- and this is where history plays -- for Prime Minister al-Maliki he had a couple of things on his mind, largely the way the relationship with the British discredited the monarchy and discredited its governments to fatal consequences in 1958, but also more particularly the Treaty of Portsmouth. The Treaty of Portsmouth was a renegotiation of the UK-Iraq agreement of the 1930s on security cooperation, among other things, on terms far more favorable to the Iraqis than the '30s agreement, but it was too late. Nationalist sentiment by 1947 had reached the point that what were perceived as Iraqi concessions were played as a transgression of Iraqi sovereignty and it brought down the first Shia prime minister in Iraq's history. Nouri al-Maliki is the second. He did not want to follow that road.

And his argument to us was, look, you know, we have got to take the occupation argument away from our common opponents. And the way we do that is we say date certain, and then we renegotiate down the line. And he was right on the first because we concluded the agreements. They went before parliament, the Sadrists kicked up a fuss. Every other bloc, party, and member voted for both agreements. And, you know, the occupation argument died the day that that agreement saw light.

Okay, then when we went to phase two, which was renegotiating the agreement, I think both of us screwed up, you know. And I could give you a disquisition on that, which I will spare you in the interest of time. I just don't think either side handled it right.

But, you know, the game plan as of '08 I think was the right one. If we had insisted on an agreement that said, you know, military forces present to the year X-hundred, you know, I don't think we would have gotten it by either country, quite frankly. But, again, history is made up of mischance. It is not forward aimed and mischance bedeviled us when we got to 2010.

Waseem, your question, you know, it's a mega question and I can't do it justice in the minus four minutes that are now allotted to me. Again, simply to say, and you know this very well from your time in the region, it is hugely complex. And, again, the past isn't history.

You know, take a look at how the Crusades are taught in the Muslim world. I mean, chapters are devoted to the Crusades. And there's a

great book out there, you all are looking for ways to fill your endless idle hours, Amin Maalouf, Franco-Lebanese, wrote a wonderful book called *The Crusades Through Arab Eyes*. And he draws strictly on Arab and Muslim chronicles, both contemporary and subsequent.

Well, if you studied the Crusades at all or remember a darn thing about them, which most of us probably don't, you will not recognize the narrative of Christian perfidy, of double and triple deals, of Muslim nobility -- a lot of factually based, I mean, Saladin and Richard the Lion-Hearted. I mean, this is today and, you know, when you look at the diverse region from Morocco through Pakistan and beyond, many different languages, ethnicities, and so forth, they all share one thing in common: they've all been occupied by Christian countries, every single one of them, and many of them more than once.

Now, the reasons for the entry of those Western/Christian armies had nothing whatsoever to do with the propagation of the faith, but that's not how it's seen. You know, Crusades are still going on. And it is why we have to be very careful. You know, we see ourselves as the utter, ultimate anti-imperialist, but we've got to be very, very careful in how we comport ourselves in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, because of this legacy.

All of that said, of course, then on the other side it becomes a convenient cudgel to beat up the Westerners in general and the Americans in particular. You've got problems at home, repressive governments, economic failure, political stagnation, well, let's press the hot button, look what the

Americans just did. You know, some Looney Tune out in California, I didn't know 16-millimeter cameras still existed, but he must have found one, you know. And let's kill an American ambassador and three good American colleagues.

You know, there was some spontaneity to these demonstrations. There was a lot of calculation to them, too, some of which we'll sift through, some of which we won't. And the calculation, in my view, is not limited only to militant, pro al Qaeda groups. I think more mainstream groups or possibly governments said, hey, here's a way to take heat off of us, you know. Boom, blame them.

So, again, all of this and more goes into that profound question you asked. And the only way you answer it to a satisfactory point, again, is for people of good will of all faiths to kind of, you know, sit down and say why are these things happening? You know, why do you have Christian preachers in America burning Korans? Why do you have violent reactions to such acts that have no official sanction and, in fact, stand against what this country stands for?

So, you know, maybe that can be the next Brookings project.

MR. O'HANLON: With apologies to the crowd, I'm going to ask one last question because you have raised a very big issue about the Middle East, and it's an impossibly big question, but I'm hoping there's a way to answer it briefly. Are you still hopeful about the Arab Awakenings? How do you view this entirety? And knowing that you served in Syria, and no one can be very happy about that tragic situation today, but taken as a whole how do you feel about what's been going on in the last year and a half, recognizing you were

watching it from a faraway place?

AMBASSADOR CROCKER: Yeah, it has not had my full and undivided attention the past year plus, to say the least. You know, look, as I said about Iraq in a slightly different context, we are at the beginning of the Arab Awakening. It's not just Act 1, it's Act 1, Scene 1. Well, maybe it's Scene 1-1/2. I mean, you know, when the TV lights went off in Tahrir Square, you know, after Mubarak stepped down, you know, like usual we said end of story, end of autocracies, end of problem, you know, it's a wonderful new world out there. Well, not exactly.

You know, I don't know where it's going to go in Libya. I don't know where it's going to go in Egypt, where Prime Minister Morsi is going to take the country or whether he's going to be in a position to take the country anywhere, whether he's going to be able to hang on to what he's got. You know, Syria, oh, man, you know, the past isn't past? Hama, 1982, tens of thousands of individuals murdered by Syrian armor and artillery commanded by the president's son to eliminate the Muslim Brotherhood and anybody who happened to be within 10 city blocks of them. The Sunnis haven't forgotten. You know, not a good time to be in Alawi or a Christian in Syria. That could get way worse. And if it gets way worse in Syria, watch out in Lebanon.

So the Arab Spring has born some bitter fruit. How will it eventually turnout? I cannot, Michael, give you a prediction. But I can tell you there is going to be some very, very turbulent times ahead.

MR. O'HANLON: Please join me in thanking Ambassador
Crocker. (Applause)

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