THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

HOW OSAMA BIN LADEN ESCAPED AFGHANISTAN:

LESSONS FOR FUTURE COUNTER-TERRORISM MISSIONS

Washington, D.C.

Thursday, January 23, 2014

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. RIEDEL: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I want to welcome you to the Brookings Institution. I am Bruce Riedel. I am the director of the Intelligence Project at the Brookings Institution, and today's event is being sponsored by the Intelligence Project.

We are going to focus this spring and summer in our public events on the War in Afghanistan and the intelligence community's role in Afghanistan, but not just the intelligence, the War in Afghanistan in general.

2014, as you all know, is to be a critical year in America's War in Afghanistan. We may end up being the last year of America's War in Afghanistan. The war, of course, will outlast the United States. This is now the longest war in American history. It is one of the most controversial wars in American history. Polling shows that a majority of the American people have come to the conclusion this war wasn't worth the effort.

It seems useful in that light that we take a look backwards at how this war developed and how the United States got into Afghanistan over the course of what really is now three decades. Today we're going to particularly focus on the first 100 days of our current War in Afghanistan.

We all know what the casus belli was for America to go into Afghanistan in 2001 -- the attack of September 11th on the nation's capital and on New York City. Less known is what happened in those first 100 days, what actually took place in Afghanistan. We've tended to forget some of that. When I look back on it, it's a fascinating dichotomy. On the one hand, we had a brilliant success. A small number of CIA officers working under a CIA plan, assisted by the United States Air Force, by American Special Forces and Special Operations Command, succeeded in less than 100

days in toppling the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan was a kind of medieval government that had harbored Osama bin Laden and the al Qaeda terror gang for some five or six years, which had refused repeatedly before 9/11 and after 9/11 to give up Osama bin Laden, to hand him over to justice, either in the United States or in Saudi Arabia, and they were toppled in about three months. George Tenet, then director of Central Intelligence, has written, "The routing of the Taliban and al Qaeda from Afghanistan was accomplished by 110 CIA officers, 316 Special Forces personnel, and scores of JSOC raiders, a band of brothers following a CIA plan that has to rank as one of the greatest successes in the CIA's history."

But the other hand of this dichotomy is that high value target number one, Osama bin Laden, and high value target number two, Ayman al-Zawahiri -- and we'll hear more about how many others got away -- that at this moment of brilliant success, the operation was also botched. The man who had carried out 9/11 was able to escape.

We now have a brilliant new book in my judgment by a very brilliant young diplomat that explains why that happened based on years of extensive research. Yaniv Barzilai was, truth in advertising, my student down the street here at Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies where I met him and where I found out about his book. He is a graduate of the University of North Carolina in 2011, and obviously a graduate of SAIS as well. He is now a diplomat in the United States Foreign Service. He has worked in the Office of the Special Representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan and in the Office of the Special Representative for Somalia at the United States Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya. He was awarded the Thomas R. Pickering Foreign Affairs Fellowship from the United States Department of State in 2009. He will shortly be posted to Baku, Azerbaijan.

I should stress upfront that as a serving State Department officer, he is

not authorized to speak about contemporary U.S. foreign policy, and his views obviously are his own views, not those of the State Department. I, on the other hand, am not authorized by anybody to speak about anything, and will be happy to talk about anything about contemporary Afghanistan and Pakistan when we get around to it.

The sequence today will be the following. As I've done on previous occasions, I'm going to interview Yaniv for about 35, 40 minutes. I have my list of questions to go through, and then we're going to open it up to you and take your questions. When we go to you, bear in mind what I said about the limits on what Yaniv can talk about and the lack of limits on what I can talk about so you can direct those questions appropriately. Also, please, when we do come to the audience, please identify yourself and let us know your affiliation before you ask your question.

So with that beginning, let me turn, Yaniv, let's begin by going back to 2001, to September 2001. Can you give us a description of the operation to bring down the Taliban? We've heard George Tenet's numbers but the CIA's role in all of that, and even more broadly, kind of the atmosphere in the decision-making circles inside the United States, particularly in Washington, about what was going on in Afghanistan.

MR. BARZILAI: Sure. Absolutely.

Well, thank you all for being here. I know it's snowing outside and it's cold, so I appreciate you coming in.

So my book covers the first 102 days of the U.S. War in Afghanistan. And when 9/11 occurred, the United States was caught vastly unprepared. As it turns out, when President Bush gathered his National Security team together on September 15th and 16th at Camp David, he turned to the Defense Department and asked them what the plan was for Afghanistan. They had no off-the-shelf plan and very little intelligence. And the three options that they presented to him was we can use cruise missiles; we can

use cruise missiles and bombs; or we can use cruise missiles, bombs, and troops. And as General Hugh Shelton, who was the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said at the time, it was obvious nobody was picking one or two. So he really presented one specific option. At the same time, when the CIA came in, they had a full matrix to attack al Qaeda across 93 countries worldwide and they could start the next day. So in contrast to the knowledge and availability of intelligence, the CIA came vastly prepared because of their connections and their experience in Afghanistan from the prior two or three decades.

The CIA deployed to Afghanistan and the first team entered September 26, 2001. About three or four weeks later, Special Operations joined them. But the basic idea was this. CIA teams would enter into Afghanistan and pair up with anti-Taliban opposition forces and pave the way for the Special Operations teams to come in and attach and provide close air support. How it played out on the ground was actually quite interesting. We had anti-Taliban opposition forces, like Abdul Rashid Dostum and some of his soldiers on horseback with AK-47s conducting cavalry raids to the tune of laser-guided and GPS bombs dropping. So 21st century bombs combined with a very old tactic as well. It was quite odd a contrast but it worked. It took a little while to get everything set up, but by the end of October I would say almost everything was in place. From the end of October when the teams were in, the close air support was secure, it took 13 days to topple the Taliban in Kabul. It was by all means extraordinary. The Northern Alliance went from controlling 10 percent of the country to controlling half the country in about 14 days, and after another four weeks, they controlled every major city in Afghanistan, including Kandahar.

Just to shift over a little bit and talk about the atmosphere, the pressure in Washington, D.C., was enormous. And if you look at Condoleezza Rice's memoir she talks about this as well. And she essentially states that the president kept saying, "We

will do this at our own pace. We will deal with what is necessary." But in truth, we knew that we had to act really soon. And when the time came to actually act, General Tommy Franks, who was the commander of CENTCOM at the time and responsible for putting together the war plan, had only eight days to go from literally nothing, a list of 700 or 800 static Taliban and al Qaeda targets, to a full-dedicated war plan.

And as we know for the O plan in Iraq, it's 200 or 300 pages with a 600-page appendix. The reality is that when the United States went to war in Afghanistan, it was largely improvisational and based on intelligence that came up as it arose.

MR. RIEDEL: I think that's a critical point here. The capacity of our government to play this, literally at the line of scrimmage with a little bit of a CIA game plan, is a testament to how good our government can do things when it really is faced with that.

But, of course, the real goal here was to destroy al Qaeda. Al Qaeda was then an organization with a clear leadership -- Osama bin Laden, Ayman al-Zawahiri. What we came to know over the course of the next decade is high value targets number one and number two.

How close do you think we got in the fall of 2001 to actually finding, fixing, and getting Osama bin Laden? And did we know then how close we were?

MR. BARZILAI: Sure. Well, let me paint the picture.

So after Kabul falls, Osama bin Laden retreats with a lot of al Qaeda to Jalalabad and continues moving eastward to a mountainous area called Tora Bora. It's about six-by-six square miles, just on the border with Pakistan. And it's actually very close to the area that Osama bin Laden first came to when he arrived in Jaji in 1984 to first see what was going on with the Afghan jihad.

The CIA had a team tracking Osama bin Laden as he moved eastward,

and within a couple days they had the first team going into the mountains of Tora Bora. And we're looking at right around December 1st. The team went in. It was four individuals. They went in without any other support and directed bombs for a couple days. Hundreds and hundreds of bombs killed a number of al Qaeda operatives at a place called Malawa, which is at the base of Tora Bora, and al Qaeda retreated further inward.

At the time, Gary Bernsten, who was the top CIA officer in Northeast Afghanistan, realized that Osama bin Laden could easily escape; that the area was just too porous; and there just wasn't enough individuals on the ground. And so he requested 800 Rangers to go after him and he was denied. Instead, the Special Operations community sent 40 Army Special Operations officers, bringing the total number on the ground at Tora Bora to 93 Americans. We were allied with three other regional factions. You can call them warlords, for instance, and they turned out to be relatively unreliable and not much help. One of them is actually suspected in helping bin Laden escape, but that's again, unclear.

On December 10, 2001, the CIA pinpointed Osama bin Laden using his radio to 10 meters. So that afternoon, the United States knew exactly where Osama bin Laden was. The 40 Army Special Operations commandos were about three miles away. They were at the base of the mountain, and they drove immediately up to go get him. As they're driving up, their allies are driving the opposite direction despite the agreement they would meet and move towards bin Laden's hideout. The specific instructions that the commandos had on the ground was not to go after or not to spearhead any assault but to make sure that they are supporting the Afghans in the battle.

So the top commander on the ground, who goes by the code name "Dalton Fury," continued forward. They got to a place where it was pretty dangerous to

continue onward on their own, and he had the tough decision of deciding whether to go after bin Laden or not. Ultimately, he chose to turn around because on top of everything else, he had a number of his men in another area that were pinned down and they had to go rescue them.

That was the closest the United States got to bin Laden for nine and a half years until the Abbottabad raid. And I would say that from my understanding of the locations, we were about 1,500 meters away from his last location.

MR. RIEDEL: That's pretty close.

Now, hindsight is 20/20. We all know what happened when Osama bin Laden got away. We know that within a year we had the attack in Bali. Within a couple of years we had attacks in Madrid and London. We know what surviving in Tora Bora meant for al Qaeda. Of course, George Bush and his administration didn't know in December 2001 what that would be.

You mentioned we knew where Osama bin Laden was. Based on the research you've done, who else was with him? Was this one guy alone? What was around him at that point?

MR. BARZILAI: Sure. That's a great question. A lot of people talked about Osama bin Laden being at Tora Bora. There has been less of a discussion about who else was there. We know that he wasn't alone, of course, and the best estimates place about 1,000 to 2,000 militants at Tora Bora during that period of time for the battle. But the identities haven't really been talked about. We know about 200 died and about 50 were captured, but I just want to talk about some of the people who were there other than bin Laden.

We know, of course, that Ayman al-Zawahiri, the second in command to bin Laden and now the leader of al Qaeda worldwide, was there. An interesting thing is

that the people who were at Tora Bora, not just Zawahiri, really formed the basis for al Qaeda worldwide today. So al-Zawahiri was there, but another individual was Nasir al-Wuhayshi, who is the leader of al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen and is now the second in command for al Qaeda worldwide. So not only were the top two officials for al Qaeda right now there, but the leader of what I would consider the most dangerous branch of al Qaeda in the world was also at Tora Bora and escaped.

Other people were Abu Ahmad Al-Kuwaiti, who was the courier that inadvertently led the CIA to bin Laden at Abbottabad, and apparently he was with bin Laden the entire time from Tora Bora onward. Atiyah Abd al-Rahman, who was once considered al Qaeda's second or third in command, and Abu Zubaydah, an al Qaeda lieutenant. Now, some of these people were killed or captured years later in extensive manhunts, but most of them escape. And people who escaped are people like Saif al-Adel, who is one of the FBI's most wanted terrorists, an explosives expert, an Egyptian special forces operative, and an elusive figure today. So part of the Bush administration's justification for not sending more troops was it was not worth going after one man to accept so much more risk and to put so much more resources.

And I just want to quote Secretary Rumsfeld from his memoir in talking about Tora Bora about this. And he says, "The justification for our military operations in Afghanistan was not the capture or killing of one person. Our country's primary purpose was to try to prevent terrorists from attacking us again. There is far more to the threat posed by Islamic extremism than one man."

And I think with this information about who was there and how many individuals were there, that argument truly falls short about the decision not to reinforce, not to go after the individuals at Tora Bora with some more veracity.

MR. RIEDEL: Well, that gets us to the $64 million historical question.

We knew where he was. Why didn't we close the noose? What was lacking in the decision-making process, the strategy that we failed to close the noose on not just bin Laden but as you rightly pointed out, what would be the next generation of al Qaeda followers and leaders, including the leaders today?

MR. BARZILAI: It's a complicated question, and I think that some of the simplistic answers that have been out there fall short. There are over a dozen major external-internal factors that culminated in bin Laden's escape. There was the distraction that Iraq posed at the time. There was the unreliability of the Afghan forces that were on the ground supporting us. There was some of the decisions that Pakistan had made. Some duplicitous, some inadvertent.

But I like to focus on three individual American internal decisions and failures. And the first one is the tactical failure. You know, our inability to stem bin Laden's escape and the rest of al Qaeda's escape into Pakistan has to be looked at as a major decisive blunder on the part of the United States. The decision not to reinforce was made based on a lot of things, but to start out, the method that we were using in Afghanistan to topple the Taliban, with low numbers of American troops paired with Afghan forces only got you so far. It was very useful in terms of removing a political power in a city and getting them to flee. So in terms of topping the Taliban, it was the right method for the right objective.

But when you're talking about Tora Bora, you're not trying to get people to flee. You want to close off that area and kill or capture everybody inside. And frankly, this light footprint approach was just not ready. It was not appropriate for the mission at hand. It was the classic "ends and means" mismatch. And so that would be the first thing that I'd like to say about it.

The second would be that there was also a failure in policy that occurred.

The policy for the United States in Afghanistan was never really decided upon in a clear, concise, and coherent manner. President Bush's understanding of the objective was to remove Afghanistan as a safe haven for al Qaeda, and that's a fundamentally different objective from destroying al Qaeda as a terrorist entity and as a threat to the United States. And that seemingly simple distinction had great operational and strategic outcomes that to this day are still relevant.

So what we did at Tora Bora was the fulfilling of that objective. We did remove Afghanistan as a safe haven for al Qaeda, but in doing so we just allowed al Qaeda to escape into Pakistan. And so that shows the inadequacy of the objective that we had.

And the final failure that I like to look at is the failure in leadership. And by far, the biggest failure that I think President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld made at the time was that they failed to intervene in the affairs of the military, and they failed to examine what was going on. And this gets into civil-military relations, but the basic idea, as Georges Clemenceau famously stated is that "War is too important to be left to the generals."

And I think this actually proved prophetic. President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld never got down to the details of what was going on at Tora Bora. They never examined General Franks' approach. They never asked the details and the necessary questions to understand that what was going on was inappropriate for the mission at hand. And I think that given what was at stake at the time, it would be shocking that two very smart, very capable individuals, like George Bush and Donald Rumsfeld, would allow such an approach to occur had they gotten down in the details.

MR. RIEDEL: Let's look at those two individuals and the institutions just a little bit more because I think this is the nub of the book.

Donald Rumsfeld is not regarded as a receding person. He is most well known to most Americans as a big person with a big ego who used to like to send missives of e-mails and questions to all parts of the Pentagon and ask everybody everything. For example, this is an individual who on September 11th, when the Pentagon was attacked, didn't sit in his office. He got out of his desk and went to the point of attack and wanted to be one of the first responders.

So he doesn't come across as a person who kind of sits back in his office and says, "Oh, yeah. I know there's a war going on in Afghanistan but I'll read about it in the New York Times tomorrow. Why didn't the secretary of defense, and why didn't the secretary of defense staff, which is a huge organization, focus a little bit more on what was going on in the pursuit of the man who had just attacked the United States of America?

MR. BARZILAI: Sure.

MR. RIEDEL: I know you can't speak for Donald Rumsfeld, but what do you think is the answer?

MR. BARZILAI: Well, I think that just to talk a little bit about President Bush and then in contrast to Secretary Rumsfeld.

President Bush and his management style, from my understanding of this time, was a little bit more reserved. And I think Condoleezza Rice says this very well, is that during the earlier years he tended to trust the advice of his military subordinates more than he did to the latter half. And you can see that in the way he handled the surge, where he actually chose to override his generals on the military advice.

Secretary Rumsfeld, on the other hand, had been secretary of defense before and he'd written something called "Rumsfeld Rules." And in it he talks about how important it is for the Secretary of Defense to get down in the details when necessary.

And in fact, he did have that sort of attitude for most of the campaign. When the United States couldn't get special operations troops in Afghanistan initially, because of weather and because of overflight rights and because of establishing combat search and rescue, he was furious, and he was so furious at General Franks that Franks threatened to resign because he thought he'd lost confidence -- or Rumsfeld had lost confidence in him.

Sorry, excuse me. Secretary Rumsfeld does tone it down a little bit, but it's a very odd instance where he steps back, almost unequivocally and relegates the operation to Franks during the Battle of Tora Bora.

Now, part of the reason was he trusted Franks. Part of the reason is they may have been on the same page and part of the reason might have been that Franks didn't raise the issues or concerns that he didn't have to Secretary Rumsfeld. But the other part is that on November 21, 2011, President Bush asked Secretary Rumsfeld to start dusting off the war plan for Iraq.

So starting in the 28th, one week later when Rumsfeld asks General Franks to work on it, the O Plan for Iraq begins to get reviewed at CENTCOM. And they spend a couple weeks on it. And literally, as General Franks was supposed to be planning the air power campaign for Tora Bora, he's pulled off to revamp the work plan in Iraq. So his attention is taken away. I can't speak so much for Secretary Rumsfeld's staff, but I do believe that this played some role in it.

When I asked Stephen Hadley about what they were talking about on Tora Bora, my understanding is they were getting at least weekly briefings on what was going on, and that's shocking to think that the deputy national security advisor and the White House is only engaging on the battle of Tora Bora, where al Qaeda is, where Osama bin Laden is, at a weekly or even bi-weekly basis.

MR. RIEDEL: The other player, of course, in all this we haven't

mentioned yet is the place where Osama bin Laden and the rest of the gang ultimately ended up and where they rebuilt al Qaeda in 2002 and 2003, and that's Pakistan. In the book, you described the Pakistani role in some detail. You mentioned that Pakistan, under pressure from the United States, switched sides from being the Taliban's patron to moving to the other side. But you go on to say that "while the overt forms of support Pakistan provided to the Taliban quickly ended, Pakistan's Intelligence Service, the ISI, continued its relationship with the Taliban under the veil of secrecy." What was Pakistan's role?

How did they play this game? And how did they get away with it? How did the -- President Bush would go on to host President Musharraf in the Oval Office and to even plug General Musharraf's autobiography on national television. So he seems to have been pretty successful in putting that veil of secrecy out there.

MR. BARZILAI: Sure. So Pakistan played a very important role in the 102 days after 9/11. 9/11 occurred really at the height of the relationship between the Taliban, al Qaeda, and Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence. But right after 9/11, President Musharraf had a very daunting decision to make, and that is how to respond to the incredible events that had just unfolded and how to respond to the pressure that was being levied upon him and his country.

Now, the relationship between al Qaeda and the Taliban and the ISI was one of regional convenience. And I would not say that the ISI had any role in attacking the United States. But nevertheless, President Musharraf convened his core commanders on September 12th and 13th and tried to decide what to do. They actually war gamed opposing the United States to see if it would play out and they decided that it would not be feasible given the pressure that was going on. And nevertheless, what the Bush administration officials considered was 180-degree pivot, I personally consider

more like a 45-degree tilt.

And I think no single event is more emblematic than what happened in Kunduz in mid-November 2001. The Taliban was fighting and being pushed back against the Northern Alliance in the north of Afghanistan, and they came into a place called Kunduz. A number of -- about 200 Pakistani military advisors were still with the Taliban who had previously been providing military and operational support to the Taliban before 9/11. And somehow they managed to stay with the Taliban up until Kunduz. And President Musharraf of Pakistan called President Bush and asked to help get the Pakistani military advisors out. President Bush was fine with it and they opened up an air corridor. Now, this operation was kept extraordinarily secret, and in fact, Secretary of State Colin Powell wasn't even informed of the operation until well after the event, and neither was the top CIA operations officer on the ground in Afghanistan.

Pakistan flew in planes over a couple nights and evacuated a couple hundred to a couple thousand people. We now know that the people who got on those planes was not just Pakistan military advisors. It was some people -- some members of al Qaeda, some members of the Taliban, some members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, some Chechen rebels, and some other regional militants. We don't know the identities because we never implemented a method to go after and figure out the identities of who was there.

And I think that where they flew them to is also slightly interesting. They didn't fly these individuals back to Islamabad; they flew them back to Chitral and Gilgit in the northwest frontier province. So when Kunduz fell to the Northern Alliance on November 24th, thousands of individuals that they were expecting to be in that city had simply vanished into thin air.

Now, when we're talking about what occurred at Tora Bora, it's less clear

what Pakistan's role was. On December 13, 2001, as bin Laden literally is getting up out of Tora Bora to escape, Pakistani militants from Jaish-e-Mohammed attacked the Parliament in New Delhi and a number of bilateral mobilizations ensue. The forces that were on the border with Afghanistan, Pakistan pulled and moved them down to the border with India. It essentially left the back door open for bin Laden to escape. Whether or not it was inadvertent or not, we still don't know, but what I can say is that Jaish-e-Mohammed had extraordinary close relations with the ISI for many years. And we note that it was such a sensitive moment in international politics that it would be surprising if the ISI had no prior knowledge of something so important to occur.

I provide some evidence in the book as well, which I find less conclusive, and I say that in the book, about whether the ISI embarked on an operation to help anybody from Tora Bora get out. There is some anecdotal evidence; some of its hearsay. I will let you be the judge of that. I think that something like that is theoretically possible but I don't find evidence conclusive at this point. Nevertheless, it does fit into the pattern that Pakistan has played in Afghanistan from 1979 pretty much to the present day.

MR. RIEDEL: I just want to underscore and highlight the episode that Yaniv talked about -- the attack on the Indian Parliament, which if you think of what the United States had in mind, the United States was going to be the anvil that would drive al Qaeda against a hearth -- against a -- what's an anvil? You smash it on a --

MR. BARZILAI: Hammer and anvil.

MR. RIEDEL: Hammer and anvil. We were going to be the hammer; they were going to be the anvil.

Well, at the critical moment, the anvil moved from Western Pakistan to Eastern Pakistan. Now, anyone who was involved in planning that attack on the Indian

Parliament knew that at a minimum that would happen. At a maximum, it might have started a war between India and Pakistan. And one of the most interesting, unresolved questions -- Yaniv talks about it but he doesn't have the answer. I don't have the answer either -- is who made that happen? Who came up with that decision? And what role did Osama bin Laden play in that?

Sorry to disappoint you. The answer to that question is not in this book. It's probably in the archives of the ISI and those are planned to be opened to the world sometime -- well, actually there is no plan to ever open them to the world.

Let's step back from this for a minute because I think one of the interesting things you do at the end of the book is contrast President Bush's handling of this operation in Tora Bora in 2001 with President Obama's handling of the raid to go after Osama bin Laden in 2011. And I'll just quote what you say: “Ultimately, the manner in which George W. Bush and Barack Obama interacted with their military subordinates shaped the outcomes of their operations to kill or capture Osama bin Laden. President Bush's and Secretary Rumsfeld's absent role in the Battle of Tora Bora ensured bin Laden's escape, while President Obama's active involvement in the Abbottabad raid prevented the operation from going awry.”

Say a little more about the contrasting styles and what President Obama did that President Bush didn't do.

MR. BARZILAI: Sure. I do want to point out initially that these were very different circumstances. The nation was at war in a moment of crisis in 9/11 and at Tora Bora that was not the same case in 2011 in planning the raid. They were different circumstances. But what brings them together is both presidents had an opportunity to go after bin Laden. There was a level of uncertainty and both had to deal with the military in going forward.

I mentioned a little bit already that President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld were not engaged at all in what was going on in Tora Bora. In contrast, when you look at the way President Obama handled the military, he had a level of active involvement that really got down into practically every detail. As you may know, when the Abbottabad raid occurred, the two helicopters were moving towards the compound. The first one went down and it actually crashed. It had to crash land and was disabled. Well, during the planning process, President Obama actually looked at the resources dedicated for the battle and he said, "I'm sorry. This is not enough. We don't have enough individuals to allow the SEALs to battle their way out of Pakistan if they have to, and we don't have enough resources in case something goes wrong."

So he specified that up to four additional helicopters were to go on the raid. Two landed in the middle of nowhere in Pakistan at a riverbed and waited, two on the Afghan side. When that first helicopter went down, the other one was ready to go and came over immediately. It's about a, I think, a 90-minute flight. I'm sorry, maybe a 45-minute flight to Abbottabad. It took the Pakistani military much less than that time to respond to the downed aircraft message.

So had there not been those helicopters there, we could have been looking at a major international incident where Navy SEALs were battling Pakistani military forces. It could have been an extraordinarily difficult circumstance, and because President Obama really got down in the details, we can say that the operation went off without a major hitch.

I do want to say also that this can be looked at really politically, and I don't mean for it to be that case because President Bush really filled his role and stepped into it as he got more involved into his presidency. If you look at the way that he handled the surge in 2006 and 2007, he listened to the military advice and he overruled them.

And so he did get down into the details. He did examine the information necessary, and I think he did the right thing. So I hope that it's not considered a political comparison because it's just two different instances in time where they were both going after bin Laden.

MR. RIEDEL: Let me underscore that point. This is not an advertisement for the DNC, and after all, President Obama is not running again so it would be a waste of the DNC's time. What it is trying to do is take a look at leadership, the role of leadership, and the lessons that we can learn from all of this. To be fair to the Bush administration, they were responding to an extraordinary event, the attack of 9/11, which created a sense of panic in the United States, a nervous breakdown if you wanted to. There was a sense that at any moment there could be another attack on the United States of America.

President Obama, in 2011, was in a very different place. There wasn't a sense of imminent threat to the United States homeland, and he had the opportunity to spend as much time as he wanted to before he decided to send in the SEALs. If he had wanted to wait another month, there was nobody -- there was no pressure coming on him from the outside world because none of us knew what he and his inner circle knew, that they had a reasonable belief that they'd found Osama bin Laden.

So accepting these differences, I think the other big question that I just want to close my part of this interview with you is, what are the lessons learned? If you go back and you look at 2001, a failure of a counterterrorism mission, what lessons can we learn from that about future counterterrorism missions and future military operations and intelligence operations like this?

MR. BARZILAI: Sure. I'd actually like to go back just to that point very quickly before I address it. One of my professors who I consider a close mentor was in a

high level position during this time in 2001. And he was at the 9/11 site a couple weeks later with Vice President Cheney and he gets a call from Stephen Hadley, who was the deputy national security advisor, saying that the bio toxin detectors in the White House had gone off. And apparently, it was botulism and in 24 hours everybody in the White House would be dead if it was an actual attack. So he had to go over, while at the 9/11 site that is still smoldering, and tell the vice president that and begin to plan for the chain of succession. Then he has to go home that night, lie next to his wife, and not tell her anything, not knowing if he'll wake up the next day. It is an extraordinarily difficult set of, you know, set of, you know, challenges to have to face. And to make decisions under that sort of pressure is very difficult. So it is not something that we want to take lightly when we look at it. How emotions and how these challenges and the feelings of guilt and responsibility and everything else that was associated with it affected the operations is not something I can quantify, but it was definitely an undercurrent and it was there.

Shifting over to the lessons, the first one I want to talk about is that clarity of mission really matters. Precision of objectives, a unified understanding of what's at stake, these are all vital aspects of a war effort. And muddled objectives will inevitably lead to a muddled outcome. And I want to quote Clausewitz because this is my favorite quote on any military history or military theory, and I think that if leaders understood this we'd be a lot better off. And that is, "No one starts a war, or rather, no one in his senses ought to do so without first being clear in his mind what he intends to achieve by that war and how he intends to conduct it. The former is its political purpose; the latter is its operational objective. This is the governing principle which will set its course, prescribe the scale of means and effort which is required, and make its influence felt throughout down to the smallest operational detail." That's exactly what happened at Tora Bora and it's one of the special cases where you can see objectives at the highest level, at the

White House, having a direct impact on what occurred on the ground.

The second lesson I think that's important is that civilian leaders in the chain of command must treat military advice as just that -- advice. They must be cautious and exercise good judgment on when to intervene in the affairs of the military, but when an issue is vitally important to the United States, civilian scrutiny is absolutely necessary. I think every leader should be reading *Supreme Command* by Elliot Cohen, because I think he gets it right. And as I mentioned before, there are some examples of proper civil military relations and leadership in the recent past -- President Bush in dealing with the surge, and President Obama in dealing with the Abbottabad raid.

There's a really interesting quote in Doug Feith's book, in his memoir, that says that, "The suggestion that the president should have told Franks which forces, U.S. or foreign, to use for a particular cordoned mission reflects a bizarre conception of the relationship between a president and a wartime commander." He goes on to say that, you know, "It's hard to imagine any president overriding his general's judgment, and a president who would do that needs a new commander." And I think that's exactly the point that is wrong. That is the notion that Samuel Huntington conceived of in his book many years ago, and I think that Elliot Cohen and many others alike have taken a look at successful wartime leadership and shown that that's not the appropriate manner.

And the final lesson that I just want to mention is that opportunities to decimate your enemy with one fell swoop are few and far between. And when the United States has an opportunity like that, it must do everything in its power to take advantage of its enemies' extraordinary miscalculation. No matter how brave the 93 American troops were on the ground at Tora Bora, no matter how skilled they were, no matter how well they did their job, that is not a full effort, and ultimately, if the United States had committed to take advantage of this extraordinary opportunity, I think we'd be in a very

different place in the world right now.

MR. RIEDEL: Of course, we can only speculate but it's an awesome question to speculate about and to think about.

I said that was my last question but I cheated. I have one more question. That's the prerogative of being the director of the Intelligence Project.

You've alluded throughout in your answers to how you got to these conclusions, but let's be a little bit more specific. Tell us a little bit about your research and how you went about researching this book.

MR. BARZILAI: Sure. So the book is based on about 15 interviews that I did with people at every level of the war effort -- people in the White House, military, intelligence, on the ground at Tora Bora, in Afghanistan, all around. And that's where a lot of the new information comes from. But the reality is that when I started looking into this question way back when I was at UNC in 2010, there just wasn't information out there. There were bits and pieces in different memoirs and different military histories and different narratives and different second-hand accounts, but nobody put it together to actually understand what was going on at the White House, how did it affect what was going on on the ground, and what was the interplay between them.

So it started out as a paper. It evolved into this book. But I think the real reason why I wrote this is because, as I was mentioning before, these 102 days were an extraordinary moment in American history, in modern American history. It shaped the future of the United States for at least a decade. The role that America has in the world is a direct result of what was occurring right after 9/11. And the fact that nobody was talking about it and the debate hadn't really begun yet in historical terms, not in finger-pointing terms of this person said this and that person said that, but the valuable historical debate hadn't started. And I was hoping to be a small part in that. And I hope

that I will be. So we'll see.

MR. RIEDEL: On that note, please raise your hand if you have a question. We have microphones. And as I said, please identify yourself. Sitting in front is something every professor urges students to do, so I'm going to go to you first.

MR. DUGGLESON: George Duggleson, policy consultant for Special Operations and Counterterrorism.

The people you interviewed and everything else, I talked to you earlier, I find significantly missing. You said that you couldn't talk to Lieutenant General Dell Dailey, who was the JSOC commander there. But there are other people, like Major General Jeff Lambert, who was the commander of Special Forces Command, who Colonel John Mulholland worked for at that time. Another key person who's here in Washington, retired Vice Admiral Bert Calland. Bert was the SOCCENT commander; eventually later became the deputy director of the Central Intelligence Agency. You talk about the decisions made of which helicopters; you needed more, but no reference to anybody in the helicopter community. And there are people in this town that were actively involved in that.

MR. BARZILAI: Absolutely. And the 160th was responsible for getting most of our troops into Afghanistan in 2001.

I did my best to get to sources. Some, frankly, weren't willing to talk, and Dell Dailey was one of them. Ambassador Hank Crumpton was another. General Hugh Shelton and General Tommy Franks weren't interested in talking. It's difficult to get to everybody. I only had so much time. I really wish I could have gotten to everybody, but I think that the individuals I interviewed provided a well-rounded narrative of what was going on and did have the access to information that was necessary. The helicopter community was very important, but so was the people who were on the ground, and I did

my best to get what I could from everybody.

You know, again, I don't claim that my book is comprehensive. I don't claim that it's the ultimate account. It's just the start in a long debate. And I look forward to hearing what other people have to say, and especially, I really look forward to when the United States declassifies the information about it because I think that's when the real answers will come.

MR. COWAN: I'm Edward Cowan. I'm a retired *New York Times* correspondent. Now I write reports to D.C. voters here in the District.

Before I ask my question, I just would like to ask you to clarify one point.

MR. BARZILAI: Sure.

MR. COWAN: The distance between the U.S. Special Forces and Osama, did you say 600 yards?

MR. BARZILAI: About 1,500 meters is my understanding.

MR. COWAN: Sixteen?

MR. BARZILAI: One thousand five hundred meters.

MR. COWAN: Fifteen hundred meters?

MR. BARZILAI: Fifteen hundred meters.

MR. COWAN: Good. Thank you.

The question I want to ask is this. It has to do with the chain of command and how high up the chain of command, which goes right up to the president, was there knowledge that we had these assets on the ground within 1,500 meters of Osama? Did the secretary know? Did the president know? Are you able to answer that question?

MR. BARZILAI: I cannot answer that decisively. There's still some debate about it.

When I talked to Gary Bernsten, who was the top CIA commander on the ground in northeastern Afghanistan, he claimed that the president and the secretary of defense knew about it. My understanding from following up with people and talking is that that was not quite the case. I believe that there was a filter at some level, and I can't pin it down exactly. I know that Hank Crumpton, who was the deputy director of CTC Special Operations -- Counterterrorism Center Special Operations -- was aware of it. So we know it got back to D.C. We know that it got to levels fairly high up in the Central Intelligence Agency, but we don't know what happened from there, unfortunately. And I could speculate on it but I think it would be irresponsible. I provide a good amount of that evidence in my book and what people have said, and I hope you draw your own conclusions from that.

MR. ULLMAN: I'm Harlan Ullman. Thanks for a very interesting discourse.

MR. BARZILAI: My pleasure.

MR. ULLMAN: My understanding of Tora Bora is somewhat biased because it comes largely from Jim Mattis and Bob Harwood. Were you familiar with Jim's plan to run down Osama? Why that was not implemented? If you could go onto that. And then what happened with the subsequent deployment of the 10th Mountain Division, which was really a catastrophe. Plus the fact you didn't talk about SAS, and as you know, there were SAS present at the time.

MR. BARZILAI: There were. So of the 93, there were some.

MR. ULLMAN: Right. And I wonder if you could just elaborate on why Jim's plan was defeated. I have Jim's version, but I'd like to know yours. And then what happened with the 10th.

MR. BARZILAI: I did briefly interview General Mattis about this. He was

a little hesitant to talk about what was going on because he considered it a top-secret discussion. What I could find out, and this is very limited, is that General Mattis had about 1,200 Marines on the ground at Camp Rhino near Kandahar. They were essentially not doing much. They were sitting around waiting. General Mattis approached General Franks and the larger military commanders, including, I believe, Secretary Rumsfeld, and asked to move to Tora Bora, relatively early on when it could still count. He's only a couple hundred miles away, it was easily doable, and he was turned down.

I think -- I can't tell you specifically why General Mattis was turned down, but I think within the broader perspective it's because General Franks was committed to the light footprint approach and because Secretary Rumsfeld wasn't engaged, and General Franks wasn't going to talk about concerns that he didn't have with Secretary Rumsfeld. So I think it just fell through the cracks ultimately. General Mattis was denied by a superior and that was the end of it. There were individuals of the 10th Mountain Division. There were a number of other troops around the country. They were completely available. And there is a Ph.D. student named John, I think Krauss is his last name. I don't want to say the wrong first name. Mr. Krauss actually did an article about the potential for moving against Tora Bora and providing a couple thousand troops. He found it completely feasible. It's very detailed. It deals with the military logistics and everything else. I highly recommend reading it if you're interested in seeing what could have been done.

MR. ULLMAN: Can I follow up?

MR. BARZILAI: Sure.

MR. ULLMAN: There were some rumors -- this did not come from Jim Mattis -- but that interservice rivalries played a lot of this and that Franks was not

prepared to give the Marines more credit for having gone into Kandahar. And I know some people who really, really feel that very, very strongly. And the conversations that I've had obliquely with Franks would tend to confirm that, but obviously, that's just supposition on my part.

MR. ULLMAN: Well, let me just pull a little piece out of it. Interservice rivalry was an issue, but I think the bigger issue was General Franks' personality at the time. He was in a meeting in the tank proposing the war plan for Afghanistan, and he looked at it as a formality with the chiefs of every service branch -- the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps, everybody else. They were all in there and he proposed the war plan and he starts getting criticism about this is how you could do it better. He gets so angry he slams his books on the ground, his briefing binder on the ground, and he goes, "Bullshit. It's my plan and I'm sticking to it." And he walks out. And he tells everybody that if they want to provide advice on the war plan, that they have to provide it through their component commanders at CENTCOM. So he essentially cuts out every other branch of the military, their top four-stars, to provide information to him, and he isolates himself at a critical moment in the campaign. I think that that sort of event is indicative of what was going on during the entire time.

MR. RIEDEL: I don't want to reinforce the image that I'm nearsighted, so I'm going to come to you, Garrett. Is there anybody in the back? Please, over here.

MR. WALTER: Good afternoon. Captain Peter Walter, United States Army.

I have a slightly different understanding of the request for the Ranger battalion to reinforce Tora Bora. That slight difference in my understanding has clear implications for getting at the root of the problem. The request for the Ranger battalion, I believe, was as a containment force outside of Tora Bora as opposed to pursuing Osama

bin Laden into the mountains of Tora Bora. The implications of that being that when the request for the Ranger battalion to contain along with ISI that were supposed to be present along the Pakistan border, you have a lot of political implications when you look at U.S.-Pakistan relations. From my understanding, that was a big driving factor why the decision, not a sound tactical decision to not have that containment force, it was made because of political considerations. Did you find that at all in your research?

MR. BARZILAI: You know, I can't speak to the political considerations. My understanding was that the 800 Rangers were initially going to be designed to go to the Pak side -- not on the border but the Pak side of Tora Bora, the Pakistani side, and provide kind of the sweeping dragnet for al Qaeda to be pushed into essentially. That was denied.

What was also denied was the 40 Army Special Operations forces who were going in, requested to go on the Pakistani side and move their way down the mountain rather than up the mountain range. It was something that Osama bin Laden wasn't expecting. It would have created a dragnet that would have worked very well, and that was also denied.

I really can't speak to the political considerations because I just don't know enough about it. And I still haven't been able to nail down who made the ultimate decision. So unfortunately, I can't answer that very well. I'm sorry.

MR. RIEDEL: Garrett.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks very much. I'm Garrett Mitchell, and I write the Mitchell Report. And I want to ask a two-part question.

MR. BARZILAI: Sure.

MR. MITCHELL: First of which is we've gone thus far in the discussion and have not mentioned Vice President Cheney, and I'm curious about that. Maybe you

can respond to that.

And the second thing is I want to be clear about what sounds to me like an assumption in all of this, and I suspect I might be wrong but let me just say it this way.

MR. BARZILAI: Sure.

MR. MITCHELL: Sitting here listening to this, it sounds to me as if the message of this research is had we eliminated bin Laden and Zawahiri and others in Tora Bora in December of 2001, all that followed would not have. And if that's the case, I find that at odds with what I think I've learned from a number of experts, one of whom is sitting next to you and I may be misreading him, on the nature of the al Qaeda-Taliban -- this network. So I want to understand had we been able to nail it in December of 2001, are you saying the rest would not have followed?

MR. BARZILAI: Maybe I can take the second question first and then I'll come back to Cheney.

It's a counterfactual. So the answer is no one knows. No one knows what would have been, and there are millions of different outcomes that could have occurred. What I can tell you is that the outcome that has occurred today would not have been the case. I'm fairly confident of that. The people who were at Tora Bora were the top-level commanders for al Qaeda, the majority of them. There were some that went towards Iran actually and escaped that route. You can always find a substitute for a leader in al Qaeda, but the quality of the substitute, when you start getting down into lower levels, decreases. This is why, you know, as al Qaeda continues to go on and it's third in command keeps getting killed, you know, we see, you know, al Qaeda kind of retreat a little bit.

And I actually defer to Bruce Riedel about this because he knows more about it than I do. But I think that I wouldn't assume that the war would have ended. I

wouldn't assume that we would be, you know, back in the United States and nothing would be going on in Afghanistan or Iraq, but I just think that it would be a fundamentally different circumstance that the United States would be in. The nature of how we engage in the world, our role in the world right now, would be fundamentally different.

MR. RIEDEL: Why don't you address Cheney and then I'll come back to that question, too.

MR. BARZILAI: Sure.

As to Cheney, I guess surprisingly or unsurprisingly, I didn't find much about his role there. I would be curious to know more. I've been actually looking around. I just read *Days of Fire* by Peter Baker, which talks a lot about the relationship between Bush and Cheney. There wasn't much in there at that time. The only thing that I found salient and interesting was when Iraq first came up, in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 -- September 12th, 13th, 14th, 15th, 16th, 17th -- he was against going into Iraq. He said that this was not connected. It was not the right time. Now, I assume that a lot changed between that time, the fall of Kabul, and November 21st when we started dusting off the war plan in Iraq. But at the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the only advocate from my understanding of it was Paul Wolfowitz and the people who were still on the fence were Secretary Rumsfeld.

MR. RIEDEL: Let me come back to the counterfactual. It's obviously a question that will intrigue historians for years to come. I suspect many trees will be sacrificed on this issue.

And I would separate a number of things. One, as Yaniv said, it's the people. This really was the brain trust of al Qaeda. If you had taken bin Laden, al-Zawahiri, Atia, Al-Kuwaiti, if you take those people out, Wahashi, that would have been a devastating blow to this organization. Would it have survived? Maybe. Maybe not. It

might have been destroyed there.

But I'd take it a little bit further than that. The fact that they did get away began to create a new mythology, a very, very powerful mythology that Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda have used for a decade and still use today, and it's the mythology that they're beyond the reach of the United States of America; that Osama bin Laden could hide successfully for a decade and Ayman al-Zawahiri is still hiding. Today, we have reports from Israel. I can't speak to the authenticity of them but they're coming from the Israeli government that they claim they just foiled a plot by al Qaeda to attack the American Embassy in Tel Aviv that was being directed by Ayman al-Zawahiri. I find the last part of that a bit of a reach as an al Qaeda specialist. I look forward to what the Israelis have to say.

The point is it's not just the people. It's also the mythology. It's al Qaedism. Al Qaedism was given a huge boost by the fact that they survived what happened in Afghanistan and that within months they could begin claiming new attacks -- Bali, London, Madrid, and other things like that. And once the genie is out of that bottle, you can't put it back in. There's no putting that genie back in the bottle. The image that these guys are -- I use the analogy sometimes -- I know it irritates my British friends -- of Robin Hood. You know, Robin Hood hiding out in the forest and the sheriff can never find him. Well, Osama bin Laden is no Robin Hood. I'm not making that analogy, of course, but it is that same kind of charismatic mythology which became very, very important to the al Qaeda brand and remains very, very important to the al Qaeda brand today.

Question all the way in the back.

MR. CEDNY: Hi, David Cedny. I have two short comments and a couple questions.

First, I want to thank you for doing the book and for the research, particularly for the oral interviews because I would caution you and others who are looking forward to great amounts of information when it ever becomes declassified because I can assure you in today's day and age a lot of people never write anything down. A lot of the stuff that you're writing about only exists today because people recall it and how they recall it. So the more work like yours that is done now before people's memories change even more, the more important it is.

The second comment is the anecdote you repeated about General Franks is, of course, in terms of chain of command, absolutely correct. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have no input into war plans. It's only by the good grace of the commander they do. And I would offer that that might be a subject for further investigation as to whether the current chain of command system and the Goldwater-Nichols actually works in wartime.

My two questions. First, you mentioned failures of leadership, and you specifically focused on the president and Secretary Rumsfeld. But the third major leader, and what was not just a civil military operation but a civil military intelligence organization, was George Tenet, the director of the CIA. So I'd like to know what you see as his roles in terms of leadership during this period of time because he was just as much involved as the others were in that.

And then my second -- actually, I'll leave that. I've taken up too much time already. Thank you.

MR. BARZILAI: So the question is the role of George Tenet, CIA director.

I did not interview George Tenet, but I did get to interview his deputy, John McLaughlin, and we did talk about this in some detail. And George Tenet and John

McLaughlin, and the CIA in general, spearheaded the war effort in Afghanistan. They formulated a plan. They maintained the relationships -- the CIA, I mean -- formulated a plan, maintained the relationships, put people on the ground and paved the way for what ultimately occurred. And at Tora Bora, for the first time probably since the Vietnam War, we had civilian intelligence officers spearheading a war effort until Special Operations got there. So a very rare instance. The CIA had a major role. I'm not too familiar with General -- or sorry, with George Tenet's specific relationship with the president. I wish I could tell you more about it. I think that what I know is either in the book or it's in George Tenet's memoir. There was a lot of engagement between them and the CIA, I believe, is a little bit more of a flat organization in terms of information, so lots of information got in from on the ground to CTC, to the Counterterrorism Center, and that was Cofer Black and Hank Crumpton. They were often at NSC meetings and very often they were the ones who were briefing the president. I don't know where George Tenet fell into that ultimately.

But when I talked to John McLaughlin about it, my understanding from him is that he did not recall very much about the request for 800 Rangers at Tora Bora. So what his individual on the ground in Afghanistan was requesting, 800 Rangers, his CIA officer, it was not coming up to him in the same way that we would expect it to come. Where the filter is, again, as I mentioned before, I don't know.

MR. RIEDEL: I'll offer my two cents on this subject. I re-read George's memoirs last night on this subject, and I quoted you one passage where he says, "One of the most brilliant successes in the Agency history." He also in a passage I think two pages later says, "But we failed to get the most important target." So he acknowledges in his book the dichotomy that we started with -- brilliant successes vis-à-vis the Taliban and a botched operation to get the mastermind responsible for the bloodiest day in American

history.

But to step back for a minute, George Tenet in the 102 days here is in a pretty awkward position. First of all, he's a holdover. I've been a holdover. A holdover means you were in the previous administration and for some reason they decided that they were going to keep you into the next administration. I've been a holdover three times. It's a very, very awkward business. First of all, you go to a lot of meetings where everybody sits around the table and says, "Those previous guys who were in this room were all a bunch of idiots." And of course, you're sitting there saying, "I guess they don't really mean me. It's everybody else they're talking about." Secondly, you know from day one that they're thinking a lot about who's going to replace Holdover X who's still here? So your tenure in office is open to a lot more question than everybody else in the room.

In George's case, of course, there's another factor. The CIA had just had its biggest intelligence failure arguably of all time, 9/11. Many, many people in this country in September 2001 were calling for George Tenet's head. They wanted this man fired. The president decided he needed him and that he wanted to keep him, but that creates a pretty interesting dynamic between your DCI, who is now kind of hanging, twisting in the wind, and your president. It's not an enviable position for either one of them to have been in.

More questions? Right here.

SPEAKER: (Inaudible) from BBC News.

You mentioned Jaish-e-Mohammed's attack on the Indian Parliament.

MR. BARZILAI: Yes.

SPEAKER: And considering Jaish-e-Mohammed's very close relationship with the Pakistan Intelligence Agency ISI, what would they have hoped to achieve at that point considering a full-blown war was on in their neighborhood, refugees

were pouring into Pakistan. So did you get some idea about that?

MR. BARZILAI: I didn't look into it too closely to be honest. I mean, there is the conspiracy sort of theory that they were really just trying to open the back door for Osama bin Laden.

I know that you were actually on NSC covering this very closely. Maybe you can provide a little more insight.

MR. RIEDEL: It's a great question. For those of you who are not specialists in Jaish-e-Mohammed, Jaish-e-Mohammed was formed in the aftermath of an earlier terrorist operation, the hijacking of an Indian airliner which was hijacked out of Katmandu, Nepal, flew around the subcontinent, took a left wing trip out to Dubai, and came back to Kandahar. The demands of the hijackers were very specific for the release of three individuals, one of whom would go on to found Jaish-e-Mohammed, who is still alive, who is still very active. When he was released by the Indian government, he was brought to Kandahar and the hostages were released and he was turned over. He was immediately turned over to the ISI and taken on a fund-raising tour across Pakistan to raise funds for Jaish-e-Mohammed. So to say that Jaish-e-Mohammed and the ISI have a close relationship is barely to begin to describe how close this relationship is.

Now, we don't know what the purpose of the attack on the Indian Parliament is, but it's pretty hard to take at face value the assertions of the Musharraf government that they knew nothing about it, that they weren't involved in it, that this was all a serendipity that suddenly occurred at that time. It's, to me, one of the, you know, one of the most interesting questions about the whole first period right after 9/11 because I can make an argument to you that the whole purpose of that attack was to make it possible for Osama bin Laden, Mullah Omar, and the rest of these people to get away by distracting attention away from the eastern borders -- the western borders of Pakistan to

the eastern borders of Pakistan. I can't prove it but this is a pretty powerful circumstantial case.

Next question to the ladies.

SPEAKER: Bruce, you're my favorite holdover.

But my question is to the author. Thank you for your presentation. And I would appreciate it if you could clarify something that I didn't quite hear. I think you were pointing to the impact of human emotions when you referred to one of your mentors at SAIS and who went with Steve Hadley to a 9/11 site -- I don't know which one -- but he got a telephone call and I simply lost hearing. What was the content of the telephone call? Was it a report of another attack that was planned?

MR. BARZILAI: Sure. So when he was in New York City at the 9/11 site a couple weeks later -- he was with Vice President Cheney -- and he received a phone call saying that the White House sensors that detect biological attacks went off. And apparently, it was botulism, which is one of the world's most deadly biological agents. If you have the proper type of botulism and you were to spread it out evenly, it could kill a million people in one small, like one gram vial. It's super, super potent.

So the question was whether it was real or whether it was a false alarm, and they were testing it on mice. If the mice survived after something like 24 hours, then everybody was okay. If they were feet up, everybody in the White House was going to die. And so he had to go at the 9/11 site and go inform Vice President Cheney, and they had to go together and talk with the president about how to plan for the line of succession.

I think that, I mean, there was, you know, after 9/11, the intelligence threshold for what made it to the president in terms of threats went way down, and every threat possible went to the president or went to a very high level. But this is a very

legitimate one. There were real concerns about follow-on attacks. No one knew on September 11th if there were going to be a dozen more attacks, if this was the first one of many. There was evidence that al Qaeda had been experimenting with biological and nuclear and chemical weapons, and there was, I believe, the D.C. sniper shootings shortly after. There was also the anthrax attacks. It was a very tense moment. It was a very emotional moment, and very difficult for people in places of responsibility.

MR. RIEDEL: I just want to add to that. You know, we did have attacks in this city, anthrax attacks. Now, in 2014, we can look back and separate those two things. At the time, it looked like those were part of the follow-on attacks. And if you recall back to those anthrax attacks, in the letters that the anthrax was supposedly delivered through, there were statements about Allah's will and this is an Islamic retribution. As best we know now, this was a deranged American individual who had no contact with al Qaeda and probably wasn't a Muslim at all, but for his own reasons, which we don't really understand, he was doing this.

And it gets to a very critical point about this whole period in time, and which I think both in the book and I know also in my forward to the book we stress, which is we're not trying to judge George Bush or anyone else. They were dealing with an extraordinarily difficult moment, probably one of the worst in American history. But how well did they do? How well in the perspective of time did they do in the pursuit of their objectives -- and in what we now know in retrospect, and we both admit it, this is 20/20 hindsight -- proved to be a botched operation to get Osama bin Laden.

More questions?

MR. DIAMA: Thomas Diama, U.S. Army Reserve officer. Good seeing you again, Yaniv. We were stationed in Nairobi together last year.

MR. BARZILAI: That's right.

MR. DIAMA: Just a quick question regarding the intelligence that actually led to Osama bin Laden on that day in 2001. Was there a particular intelligence discipline -- HUMIT, CIGNET, GON? Was it an all source fusion? And what were some of the lessons learned for intelligence professionals coming from -- was it the intelligence was good, lack of action or was it we needed more fidelity, you know, the target package going out the door?

MR. BARZILAI: The intelligence was very good and it was very specific. It was Osama bin Laden spent too long on his radio. They located it to an eight-digit grid, so that's 10-meter accuracy. They had the premium -- like the premier expert on Osama bin Laden in the field who speaks Arabic and can listen to his voice and tell you if it was there. He was in the field, so they knew it was him. The fidelity was quite clear. We knew it was Osama bin Laden at the time -- or the people who were analyzing this. They passed it on quickly. It got to the military very quickly. It was all there. I think the lesson was that simply 40 Special Operations forces aren't a good substitute for what you really need to do if you're looking at this massive area, very difficult terrain, 15,000 foot peaks. It's just tough terrain to go after. And if you're instructions are from your supervisor, very clearly say you are not to spearhead assault. You are to follow your Afghan partners and support them, I think within that context I can certainly understand the decision to turn back.

MR. RIEDEL: Let's take one more question. Right here.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much for an engrossing discussion.

I can't help but think I guess one of the counter narratives, creative ones I've seen at least in the Arab media, is a series called Sanan Mote or Manufacturers of Death, where they featured in one series an individual who had been with bin Laden in Tora Bora, and that individual alleges that at the end of the day he says, "I followed a

charlatan and a coward because he abandoned us. He left us to our fate." And I'm just curious, since we talk about the, of course, the attack on parliament and all that, you know, what your thoughts may be on I guess a statement like that. Thank you.

MR. BARZILAI: I think that some people really felt like that. He'd brought them to a final stand against the United States military, and the United States military dropped over 750,000 pounds of bombs over the course of two weeks. It's a lot to handle, especially when you are in a cave essentially with AK-47s and some mortars.

Osama bin Laden wrote his will at Tora Bora. He wrote it. He expected to die. He got on the radio. It was the radio intercept after we'd already located him. It was the last radio intercept we ever picked up, I believe, and he said something along the lines of, "I'm sorry for getting you into this battle. You know, you may now escape or you may surrender with my blessing." And I think that there was a general atmosphere at the time that things were going terribly.

Now, as it happened, one of the American partners, the Afghans -- one of the Afghan military groups that was there, negotiated two cease fires with Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda, which ultimately enabled them to escape. That was one of the pieces to the puzzle. And in fact, on I think December 12th, that militant group or that warlord group that was supposedly our allies, raised their guns on us, on our Special Operations forces, and told us to stand down. So there was opportunities to get out and that opinion changed. But I think the general consensus from a lot of people who were on the ground was that they were in a pretty tough spot and they had been abandoned by Osama bin Laden. He disappeared for many years without being heard of as well, and you know, we didn't know as a government or as the world whether Osama bin Laden escaped for many years until he released another tape I think in 2004.

MR. RIEDEL: Right on the eve of the 2004 elections. It may have been

that that tape which played -- it's another "may have been" of history, a critical role in tilting the vote of the American people in that election.

One of the important things in holding an event like this where we talk about a book is to make sure that at the end of the event you don't say, "Well, I know everything about that book. I don't need to read it." I hope that we've failed in that sense. I hope you will go out and buy the book. There are copies for sale here in the room. You've gotten a taste, but believe me, having read the book myself, you've got a long way to go in understanding all the complexities that are in this book.

Let me also say that this is a start, not the end. The start of the historical examination of what happened in those 102 days, and the start of the historical examination of the longest war in American history. We've asked more than 2,000 Americans to make the ultimate sacrifice for their country in Afghanistan. We need to study this war a lot better than we have so far. I don't think we've done as much effort as we could on this.

The last point I would like to say is as I promised you in the beginning, the Brookings Intelligence Project this year hopes to do a number of events on the history of America's role in Afghanistan starting back in 1979, so I hope you will come back in the future for the next in this series as we do that.

Let me thank Yaniv. Thank all of you for coming today. And now it's time to go back out into the snow. Thank you.

MR. BARZILAI: Thank you, everybody.

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CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

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

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Expires: November 30, 2016