

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

A PIVOTAL YEAR IN AFGHANISTAN:  
2014 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION AND THE  
PLANNED DRAWDOWN OF U.S. AND NATO FORCES

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## P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Brookings. I'm delighted to see you all here. Thank you for coming to discuss Afghanistan's future and America's future in Afghanistan with us this morning.

I'm Mike O'Hanlon from Brookings Foreign Policy Program, and we have a very distinguished and experienced group of American and Afghan individuals and officials to talk with us -- former officials I should say but continued scholars and experts on Afghanistan -- to talk about the important transitions that are now under way. Saturday, this upcoming Saturday, is Afghanistan's presidential election. It will probably not be the conclusive round. There will have to be a runoff more likely than not between the top two vote getters, so one will ultimately get a majority, and that will probably happen in the late spring one hopes, maybe even sooner. But that would be -- anyway, we'll talk more about those details in just a second.

We have seated from your left to right former Ambassador Ron Neumann, who was a career foreign service officer, ambassador not only in Afghanistan but also in Bahrain and Algeria. He and his father were both U.S. ambassadors to Afghanistan, making them along with the Adams the only father-son team in American history to be ambassador to the same country. That's not just an interesting historical factoid; it indicates the commitment by this family to this important country and subject, and Ron continues to be very avid and active in his interest in Afghanistan. He and I were there just recently on a research trip, and he's been many times since being ambassador.

General John Allen was the commander of International Security Assistance Force units of all countries through last year at about this time. He's actually retired just a year ago today, so we thank him and congratulate him again for his service. It was in February 2013 when he passed the reins to General Joe Dunford, who remains the commander today. General Allen continues to serve this country actively in ongoing support for the Israeli-Palestinian peace effort, and he is a distinguished fellow here at

Brookings. We're delighted to see him whenever his journeys to the Middle East allow such time, but he, again, is one of the most experienced commanders. And I might note that his 19 months as COMISAF to make him one of the longest serving and most experienced experts on the subject and former officers involved in that country. He was also deputy commander at Central Command. He was a deputy commanding general for the Marines in Iraq. He was a leading U.S. voice at the Pentagon on Asia Pacific policy prior to that as a one star general, and again, we're just thrilled to have him here. I might also note that I think he's still the only marine in history who was the superintendent at Annapolis. So for the Navy to trust their midshipmen to a marine tells you even more about General Allen. And again, we're thrilled to have him here.

GENERAL ALLEN: It was called the "Great Experiment," Mike, by the way.

MR. O'HANLON: It has not been repeated but I think that's because we're still honoring the experiment and the accomplishments.

Najib Sharifi is a very accomplished and distinguished Afghani who has been a journalist much of his career. Like Abdullah Abdullah, one of the three presidential candidates, he was trained as a medical doctor, but like Dr. Abdullah, he has also had an interest in Afghanistan's future in many other ways, including in politics and security. He has been an analyst for Afghanistan Awareness and Analysis, the place where he now works. Excuse me, Afghanistan Analysis and Awareness. And we'll talk about websites in a moment so that we can make sure you can all access various writings and learn more from these distinguished gentlemen as you wish. He has also worked for the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit. He's covered Afghanistan for a number of news media outlets, and he's been an active member of Afghanistan's civil society throughout recent years as well.

So what we'd like to do today is to cover the elections, obviously, but also everything that surrounds them and everything that's going on by way of transition and the support in the year 2014. As you know, this is also the year when ISAF will end

its mission with uncertainty at present over what, if anything, will follow, and that's clearly going to be a key issue. And so security will be front and center not only as we think about the elections and all the violence the Taliban has been trying to employ in recent days to color and influence the coverage of the elections, but also as we look forward and think about Afghanistan's stability. So not only General Allen, but everyone will be thinking certainly about security.

But the more immediate question at hand is to think about what's going on this week in Afghanistan and the runoff, or excuse me, the first round elections for president on Saturday. There will also be elections at the provincial level on Saturday, and we may wind up talking about that as well.

We'll talk amongst ourselves a bit up here and then go to your questions and answers about halfway through.

So if I could, I'd like to begin with Ambassador Ron Neumann, again, who was ambassador from 2005 through 2007 in Afghanistan, whose book, *The Other War: Winning and Losing in Afghanistan*, is one of the most recommended books I could ever commend to you on the subject, and ask Ron to discuss how he sees the basic situation today, the stakes, and American policy choices.

MR. NEUMANN: Mike, thank you very much. Thank you all for coming.

You know, I've been now heavily involved in Afghanistan for seven years, and at least six of those, if not all seven, have been referred to as the decisive year in Afghanistan. Thinking about that, it occurred to me that there is some truth in that because it's a bit like a really difficult graduate program or military elite training program where you have one test after another and if you fail you're out, but if you pass, you get to take another test. And the elections are very much that kind of test for Afghanistan particularly, maybe even more so than for us, that if they fail it, it's very difficult, and if they succeed, they get another chance. But it's a chance.

As we will be going down the line, we have military expertise, we have Afghan expertise. I wanted to talk, since I'm the ex-diplomat, about what the U.S. needs

to think about in its own policy as we start off talking about Afghanistan, because we know this will be an election which is dispute, where there will be a measure of fraud, where there will certainly be violence, if not between candidates, certainly from the Taliban. I think it's very important to understand that we really have two -- we, the United States, have two goals, which are related and interlocking but separate. One is an acceptable passage of power to a new president with a broadly recognized acceptability by Afghans. The second is a reasonably better election, more progress, and democracy.

Now, the two are related. Polls, conversations show that Afghans care about the transparency of the election. They're excited about the selection, despite all the violence. I'm going to do something which is very dangerous, especially for diplomats, and that is to make a prediction close enough to the event that anyone might remember what you said. But the definition of a pundit is someone who is frequently wrong but never uncertain.

On that basis, I'm going to predict that the turnout is going to be heavy in this election, notwithstanding the violence, because I think Afghans want it. And the fact that they want it means that they have a potential to react if they are denied a fair election and if it is massively fraudulent. But there will be a high level of tolerance for what you might call equal opportunity fraud, which I expect will take place all over other country by all the candidates and their backers.

So the second goal is progress and democracy. And obviously, the two are related. But I say that this passage of power in a way that is reasonably smooth without too much violence between contending parties which Afghans accept is the higher priority, because if you have that, you go forward with the state, you go forward with building, and you have a chance for more elections and for more progress and democracy. If you have purity and dispute, you are just going down a road into chaos.

Now, I say this because the difference is a difference about how America relates to the early results. It's not an academic distinction alone, but one that controls

policy. So that if, as I believe, our first interest is this fairly smooth transfer of power, it means that we should not be instantly reacting to all the cries and yells of fraud and misbehavior which will immediately break out after the first vote. First of all, because Afghan culture is also a shame culture in which losing is a shame. So even if you lost fairly, you're going to call fraud because it redeems your honor. And that's on top of the actual fraud that I expect to occur.

But the fact is what we need to be doing is not putting ourselves in a corner taking rapid positions on fraud. We may have to do that as time goes on, but our initial effort ought to be push the Afghans out in front, support the election machinery, support the electoral bodies as long as they even partially deserve it, counsel Afghan candidates to look to their longer term interest in their country and not to bet everything on winning or death, and work behind the scenes without being responsible as the great super power for the result to encourage Afghans to pull themselves together. Because this election is not going to be over after the first round. This election is -- first of all, it's going to be disputed. Secondly, it's very unlikely that one candidate makes 50 percent, which is required, or crosses the 50 percent line I should say, so that there will be two candidates in a runoff. And the dispute between number two and number three is likely to take some months or weeks to work out with dispute balance. Think Florida, except with Kalashnikovs. And recognize this process is going to go on for a while and then you're going to have a second round. And this is why it's important that we not be locked into an early view and be able to push and cajole and work with candidates because it will go on. It could go on for five or six months, and violence is going to intensify with and as it does because the Taliban have already declared that they're going to make every effort to sabotage the election to prevent it from happening and to prevent it from being successful. So we need to make up our mind on that, and at that point I'm talking about security, and that's somebody else's job.

MR. O'HANLON: Well, it's your job, too, because you're good at it, so I'll come back to you on that one as well, I'm sure. But thank you for an excellent framing of

the basic choices.

I think I'd like to go now to -- before we ask General Allen to describe where we are in the security transition, go to Najib and tell us a little bit about what the election is shaping up to be. A little bit about the candidates, if you wish, or the media coverage, the role of independent civil society in overseeing this, your confidence that the process is going to be, you know, reasonably constructive and helpful to the future of the country. Just whatever you think you want to tell us so we understand what's been going on in Afghanistan and the choices that Afghans are poised to make this Saturday.

MR. SHARIFI: Thank you, Michael. Good morning. I'm glad to be here among you.

Well, let me start from here. Let me start about the general politics of elections in Afghanistan and I'll probably go into details at this time.

In the current elections, the first thing that we have to keep in mind is that President Karzai will play an integral role in success and failure of the elections, and he will also play an integral role in who will win the results of the elections if he puts his weight behind a particular candidate.

The second thing is that this election is not about a person. That's because we do not have an outright favorite in this election. It's mainly about the team. And in Afghanistan, ethnicity plays a prominent role in politics, particularly in issues related to elections. So we have teams of -- well, according to the constitution, we have a president and the president has to have two vice presidents, a first vice president and a second vice president. And the teams have shaped up in a way that cover to a large extent the major ethnic groups. But because we have four major ethnic groups, you know, every team cannot be complete because it will leave out at least one ethnic group. But ethnic politics, ethnicity plays a prominent role in the elections.

Continuing on the role of ethnicity, the votes of the three big ethnic groups -- Pashtuns, Tajiks, and Hazaras -- will be divided because we have got many candidates who represent the ethnic groups and they're on different tickets. But the only

ethnic group which has got the best solidity is the Uzbeks. And General Dostum is on Dr. Ashraf Ghani's ticket, who is basically one of the front runners according to the polls.

We had 11 candidates that were in the vetting process by the ISC Electoral Commission approved, but right now we have only eight candidates because three of them -- well, two of them dropped out in favor of other candidates, and one of them abandoned the elections. The reason they do this is to secure political concessions from the candidates who have got the best chance of winning. Political positions and administrative positions. So currently, we have eight candidates, but we expect to have some more withdrawals in the coming week in favor of the frontrunners, and mainly, Dr. Zalmi Rassoul, who is believed to be Karzai's favorite candidate.

I've also got some other facts about the elections, which are extremely striking. Free and Fair Election Foundation (FEFA), which is Afghanistan's biggest election monitoring organization, issued -- declared the results of the survey that they carried out a couple of months ago, and according to their survey, 92 percent of Afghans support elections. Ninety-two percent of Afghans. Only 5 percent of them are against the idea of elections. Seventy-five percent of the public, and this survey, you know, covers all parts of the country and 50 percent of them are women and 50 percent are of them are men. Seventy-five percent of them have said that they will take part in the elections, which is, again, striking because as far as I remember, in the previous presidential elections the turnout was below 30 percent, something around 29 percent or something.

Another important fact is that Taliban attacks have intensified in Afghanistan to disrupt the process. So with the intensification of the attacks, people's desire has increased to go and take voting cards and express themselves that they are going to vote. It's mainly in opposition. And I must admit the mainstream media and social media has made a significant (inaudible) in enhancing the civic role of Afghanistan citizens, which is a huge change in Afghanistan.

We are going to have a lot of national observers. Unfortunately, we are



not going to have a lot of international observers because of security concerns. We are going to have around 65,000 national observers all across the country from among 6,775 voting centers. Because of security issues 748 centers will not be operational on the election day, and that's good because places in parts of the country where there's insecurity and where observers cannot take part, those are the parts or the voting stations that are the most vulnerable to fraud. This is the experience that we had in the 2009 elections.

I think I'll stop here.

MR. O'HANLON: That's fantastic. Thank you very much for that excellent overview. And as we get into a second round up here, after we hear from General Allen, we're going to talk more, I'm sure, about the major candidates and what they stand for and who they are. I'll just make sure that I mention their names very briefly. We've already heard them in passing a couple of times, but we have former Foreign Minister Rassoul, who as Najib just said, is thought to be President Karzai's preference, but President Karzai has avoided making any public endorsement so far at least. We have former Foreign Minister Dr. Abdullah, who as you'll recall was the runner up in the 2009 race to Karzai, and also has a mixed Tajik-Pashtun background, which makes him an interesting candidates on those grounds. And also, the closest association with Afghanistan during the difficult years. He stayed in the area during the difficult years of the '80s and '90s, partly as a physician working with refugees, partly as a leader of the Northern Alliance.

And then we have Dr. Ashraf Ghani, who has been in Washington many times, friend to many of us here in D.C., a brilliant man, a very good economist, former World Bank economist, and also a person who has been finance minister in Afghanistan, and also helped in various informal advisory roles, subsequently. He also was a presidential candidate in 2009, did not do particularly well then, but he's done quite well in the polling so far. So we have these three candidates who look to be the strongest. I know everyone is going to want to talk more about them.

But first, General Allen. We have a lot to talk about with security, and clearly, the overall impression of the casual American consumer of the news media is of a deteriorating security involvement, especially with the tragic attacks of the past couple of weeks. I wonder if you could help us understand this in context, including the question of what the Afghan security forces that you and others worked so hard to help build, what they are now doing in the country as we downsize.

GENERAL ALLEN: Mike, thanks a lot. It's great to be with you all this morning. I'm a bit reflective this morning. It's a year ago today that I retired. And it's the old saying that you can depart Afghanistan but you can never leave Afghanistan, and there isn't a day that goes by that I don't think about the wonderful Afghans with whom I served with for whom I felt such great affection.

But the other bit of reflectivity today for me is I see a German uniform out in the audience. There are probably many folks from diplomatic missions here who represent many of the 50 countries that served in that coalition, and I just want to remind this audience as I remind every audience that the 150,000 troops, and we're far fewer than that today, that served at the height of this war, performed magnificently, and they really did. Seldom have we seen so large and so capable a field force do so much for the good of a country when it had such capacity for destruction. And it really is a great example of how when companies come together with a common set of values they can, in fact, make a contribution in a very difficult environment.

I'd also like to say that I think for the United States and for the coalition, we're exceptionally fortunate to have a fellow by the name of Joe Dunford currently commanding in Afghanistan. It has been beyond his many personal-professional characteristics which recommend him for this very difficult job. It's been a long time since we have handed a commander, an American commander or a NATO commander a more challenging set of missions and mission sets than Joe Dunford is attempting to undertake right now with frankly some significant success. There's an old saying that the farther away from Afghanistan you become or you are, you're far more remote from the actual

circumstances, meaning when you get closer to Afghanistan, it looks better than from the distance.

Joe, I think, has done a magnificent job in handling what I would say are five major tasks right now that could have been done in a precedence order at one point but tomorrow we'll be inside eight months remaining on the ISAF mission, and so many of these tasks that he is executing concurrently, and it requires enormous leadership, enormous skill in planning both operationally and planning logistically. And the first, of course, very importantly, is to maintain the very delicate advisory and support balance that the ISAF forces continue to have with the ANSF, the Afghan National Security Forces. They are leading. The Afghans are leading most of the operations. And while the last fighting season was the first fighting season where they had full operational control -- they were in the lead across the board -- this will be the first fighting season with that kind of experience under their belt. And so keeping the delicate equilibrium of advising and assisting as the Afghans continue to move to the front and continue their operations both in terms of security the local population but also in dealing with the Taliban is extraordinarily important right now.

The second thing that Joe is doing, and again, I'm going down the numbers one through five but I want to make sure everyone understands that some of these activities are occurring concurrently. Most of them are occurring concurrently, and as the pressures of this campaign continue to increase as the clock continues to tick down to December 2014, I think you can get a sense of the enormity of what we are undertaking and what we are requiring of our military. So maintain the equilibrium of advising and assisting and supporting.

The second is what we'll call the retrograde enterprise. Over the last year, General Dunford and his great team have had to close down several hundred bases. We started with 800 when I took command. I did a quick inventory because we hadn't closed any bases in a long time. We had over 800 facilities. We closed 500 in the first year, and we needed to get down to a basing platform of some 10 to 12 bases by the

end of this calendar year. So you can imagine when you have bases with as many as 30,000 people on board, which would be Bagram and Kandahar, the two largest bases, with many of them that number some several thousand on board those facilities, closing those bases is as much an operational commitment to keep the logistics platform relevant to the campaign as it is simply closing the base itself.

He's also retrograding the excess material that's been accumulating in this theater for well over a decade. When I took command, we found ourselves on our camps with about 60,000 excess armored vehicles, about 100,000 excess shipping containers with spare parts. He's been working very hard to move that material and those vehicles out of the theater as quickly as he can while he continues the third part of this, which is to send home the troops -- the troops and their organizational equipment.

So advise, and assist, and support; conduct the retrograde enterprise. The third area is what I'll call the transfer of tasks. On any given day, the headquarters of ISAF is undertaking several hundred different tasks in the execution and the accomplishment of the mission of this campaign, and as time goes on and as ISAF continues the process of moving towards the completion of its mission, those tasks are going to have to go somewhere. Many of those tasks will be completed and that will be the end of that, but a number of those will transfer directly to the follow-on mission. At this point, NATO's follow-on mission will be called Operation Resolute Support. A number of those tasks will transfer to higher headquarters, like SHAPE in Europe or the Central Command, which has responsibility operationally on the U.S. side and SHAPE operationally for the NATO side. Some of those tasks will go to civilian agencies, both on the U.S. side and civilian agencies within the coalition. And some of those tasks will transfer directly to the Afghans. And right now, of course, as we transfer these tasks, we're going to have to be extraordinarily careful that we don't overburden the Afghans at this really critical moment as they continue to get their legs up under them operationally and militarily.

The fourth task is providing support to the Afghans who have the

responsibility for the security of the election. And this obviously is extraordinarily important right now. And as I know from the planning that was done, the intent, of course, was that the Afghan National Security Forces would have lead for the security of the election with the police in close, and the Army providing outer cordoned support to the police with the Afghan special operators along with our special operators working very hard on the outer fringes trying to disrupt the Taliban formations as much as they possibly can. And of course, you mentioned the problems that we've had recently in Kabul. I think it's really important to understand that while those attacks in Kabul have received a lot of attention, in the end they did not have a widespread effect. They did achieve attention. They did, I think, cause some concerns about the security of the city, but at the same time that those attacks have occurred, I think what's not necessarily understood or not receiving very much attention is the activities specifically targeted against the Taliban to keep them off balance and to disrupt their support areas as well.

And then the final tasks that General Dunford is undertaking is the task associated with receiving the force that will be coming in, supposing, of course, that the bilateral security agreement will be signed, and employing that force right to the end of his mission, which will then begin the resolute support on the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 2014 (sic). It's important to remember that all of this activity is occurring in an environment where the Taliban is on the attack and the Taliban are right now heavily invested in both attempting to disrupt the election, the preparation for the elections and appearing to have the kind of omnipotence across the country that can shake the confidence of the population. And I think it's a really good point, and it's a very important point that the Afghan people are extraordinarily proud of their police and military; that the Afghan people have seen them fight a very hard fighting season in 2013, a lot of casualties, but they gave as good as they took. And while there was some ground lost, much of that ground was recovered. And it has only, I think, redoubled the intentions of the Afghan people and the determination that this election is all about their future. And it's no surprise to me as I've watched this process unfold over the last year and as I've been in touch with Afghans in

Afghanistan that this business of the election and the outcome and the peaceful transition of power from President Karzai to whomever will follow him is very, very important to the average Afghan.

So again, this whole process is underway with the Taliban attempting to disrupt it as much as they possibly can, and it's worth reminding everyone that the Afghan theater is 400 miles inland. This is a landlocked theater in which we've been conducting hostilities and combat operations now for going on 13 years. And so for General Dunford, for his team, for our civilian diplomatic partners and the interagency, the pressures are increasing every single day to juggle these many different balls associated with security to keep them in the right kind of equilibrium so that we deliver the Afghan National Security Forces at the end of this mission to the point where we wanted them, but we've also taken care of in an orderly fashion, moved the ISAF mission out and bring the resolute support mission in so we have a clear transition into the post-2014 period.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you very much.

And now we're going to go to round two and talk more about the elections, the candidates, what they might do if they win, why various people could win, what it would signify. I'm just going to amplify and add a couple of quick factoids before going to Ron again that build off of General Allen's discussion. For those of you who are generalists and trying to keep up on Afghanistan and all the facts and figures you hear, let me just remind you of a couple.

Now, more than 85 percent of all the total arms strength in Afghanistan is Afghan, as it should be. So the NATO coalition is down to below 50,000 troops. General Allen, when he began, had 150,000 as he mentioned. He began the process of downsizing. Went through quite a bit of that, I think a third under his watch. Now we're down two-thirds from the peak. So more than 85 percent of all the fighting forces are now Afghan. Last year they carried out some 95 percent of all the operations, either led them or carried them out themselves. And this is an important point and it's both

sobering and tragic on the one hand but also impressive on the other. They took 4,700 fatalities, the Afghan Army and police -- 4,700 fatalities in 2013. That is twice the number that we suffered the entire war. And I know as Americans we all deeply regret and honor the sacrifice of our own men and women in uniform, and General Allen is eloquent on that point, but I think it's also worth noting the Afghans suffered 4,700 fatalities last year. On the one hand that's very bad news. Its 4,700 individuals whose lives have been lost. All their families that have been affected. And it shows the Taliban is still strong, and I wish it weren't as strong. And five years ago I would have predicted that it might not be this strong.

Let me just acknowledge as a support of this mission that I hoped and thought we would be in a little bit better place in terms of having weakened the Taliban. That's the bad news. The good news is they're still fighting, and they have taken those casualties and they've held together and they've continued to be able to recruit and they've continued to take the fight to the enemy.

GENERAL ALLEN: Mike, let me just add to your last point. They have been able to continue to recruit. The number are still up there. And you said five years ago you had not imagined whether the Taliban would still be this strong. Five years ago, none of us could have imagined that the ANSF would have been this strong or this well organized and this resilient and able to conduct core level operations as a matter of routine. Once again, this is the reason that the Afghan people are so proud of their army and police as they have emerged into an effective operational force.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

So now, Ron, you know all the candidates, I believe. I was honored to be able to meet with several of them with you a couple weeks ago. Could you please help us understand the choice that's now before the Afghan voter on Saturday in terms of some of the strengths and weaknesses of the different candidates and what the choice might signify in terms of who the Afghans would like to see replace President Karzai after his 12 years now in leadership?

MR. NEUMANN: Thank you, Michael, although that's quite a big task, and I suppose one can drown people in detail without necessarily raising their understanding too much.

I think it's important to say that there are no huge ideological differences or big programmatic differences. This is not analogous to a kind of liberal and conservative campaign. What you have are personalities. You have a little more detail from some than from others, but no necessary assurances that the detail indicates where they would go. Dr. Abdullah --

I guess the other thing to say before going into this, you've got three, as we mentioned, that look like they have a chance at being in the top two. You've got a couple behind them who are going to be important in making deals. You're going to have a lot of politics in this election probably after the first round of the election as people pick sides, particularly some of the second string candidates like Sayyaf. And so as some of those people coalesce around one candidate or another, that is also going to tip the balance. And then just to make life really complicated, comparatively few rural Afghans will vote on an individual preference basis. They will tend to vote on the basis of community leaders, tribal affiliations, and groups. Najib may want to dispute with me on some of this.

There was some interesting work done, scholarly work done a year or two ago in which comparatively few people would agree with the idea that if they disagreed with their leaders -- tribal, communal, whatever -- they should vote for their own preference. That was not a majority view. And then you add, of course, power brokers, who as people have said, deliver votes, not voters. And you add complexity.

Of the big three, Dr. Abdullah is seen largely as the northern-western Kazakh, old Northern Alliance candidate, but it's not completely true. He has some support in the east. He has some support in the south. He has negatives as well because of being seen as the non-Pashtun. And there's a strong belief in Pashtuns who are, at least the plurality of Afghanistan. They would believe they're the majority, but then



if I accepted all the figures of all the groups in Afghanistan that they've told me about the numbers, the country would be at least twice as large as it is. But anyway, the Pashtuns think they ought to rule. And while Dr. Abdullah's father is a Pashtun, he's seen as a Tajik candidate. So there's one big issue there for many voters.

Ashraf Ghani is very popular in the west. An accomplished economist, accomplished administrator. Also with big negatives, which have not been much touched on in the western press discussion. His selection of General Dostum as a vice presidential candidate has touched raw nerves in people who fought against him in the war, particularly in the Pashtuns, many of whom regard him as particularly brutal. Of course, a lot of brutal people. Ghani is known to have a fiery temper, and people worry about -- Dostum has a pretty fiery temper and is supposed to be (inaudible). You know, people worry about putting the two worst tempers in Afghanistan together in leadership. And some people consider Ashraf Ghani, a communist who is surrounded by communists, and this is a big issue in a country that was dominated by a communist government and spent years in Majagan fighting against them. The charge may or may not be fair but it exists. So while Ashraf has big positives, he's touched off a lot of popular enthusiasm, particularly among younger people. You've got some big natives also seen as the Pashtun nationalists. There are some Tajiks who absolutely won't vote for him for that reason.

Dr. Rassoul is a member of the former ruling family of the King's generation. He is a Pashtun, although he hardly speaks Pashtun. He was a supporter of the king, so he is in many ways the candidate of continuity or most clearly seen as the candidate of continuity and that is both continuity some would say for power brokers, drug lords and criminals, but it's also reassuring to the Afghans who are really tired of being buffeted by massive social change. And remember, this is a fairly constant theme through the last hundred-plus years of Afghan history, is resistance to too rapid change. It caused the overthrow of two monarchs, and it was largely responsible for the early blowback against the domestic Afghan communists. It wasn't about their being

communist; it was about their changing too much. So the sentiment of not wanting a lot of change is not just about criminality.

Rassoul is looked at by most as Karzai's covert candidate, partially because one of Karzai's brothers dropped out of the race and now backs Dr. Rassoul. On the other hand, he's also seen as many as a weak personality, not quite tough enough to take on the problems of the country.

So every one of the three has some negatives. I guess probably the person I'd put in fourth is Sayyaf, a former Islamic leader but one who has performed actually quite responsibly in the last 15-20 years in the parliament. Again, hands that might be completely lily white. It's going to be interesting to see how these people shift because there's going to be a lot of deal making going on. There's already a lot of negotiation to make deal making, and there will be more, particularly after the first round. That's probably more than enough with which to saturate people for the moment.

MR. O'HANLON: That's fantastic primer.

Let me just ask one quick follow up. It sounds that all three, if I'm hearing you right, are people we should keep an open mind about being able to work well with. Obviously, the U.S. has no declared candidate; I'm assuming, or preferred candidate. I'm assuming you would recommend that we not officially or publicly support anyone and that we stay hopeful about being able to work with any of the three who might ultimately emerge.

MR. NEUMANN: Absolutely. There's no reason for us to be against any of the three. There's no reason for us to be strongly for them. They're all reasonable people. They're all people with whom our relations would be much better than they are with President Karzai, and certainly, we should not pick a candidate not only because it has a hubristic notion of how much we know but also because we're incredibly clumsy and ill-mannered about how we do those things when we try. So we should probably stay out.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

Now I'm going to turn to both Najib and General Allen on this same question, whatever they want to say about the candidates, the elections. And I'll leave to you and maybe subsequent discussion if we come back to General Allen on the issue of things like the bilateral security accord, the possibility of what kind of long-term planning we should do for U.S. forces. Keep the focus right now on the elections, the choices before Afghans as they go to the polls.

Najib, how would you frame the choices? Anything you want to add to what Ron said?

MR. NEUMANN: Or attack.

MR. O'HANLON: Or disagree with for that matter.

MR. SHARIFI: Well, there's one thing that I was really stricken by a fact that was reflected in FEFA's survey. Again, FEFA is the biggest election monitoring organization in Afghanistan. It's a local organization. And FEFA claims that their survey shows that 80 percent of the public have declared that they will vote independently without any consultations with their tribal leaders, you know, or elders, or family. It was a bit distracting for me, too, because the ethnic, tribal, and family patronation has got a big role to play in individual selections of who to vote for.

So other than that, I pretty much agree with what Ambassador Neumann said. We have these three candidates, you know, Dr. Abdullah, Zalmi Rassoul, and Dr. Ashraf Ghani. Something that has big potential to create a problem in the first round and the second round is the big margin between Dr. Zalmi Rassoul and the two frontrunners because the two frontrunners, the margin of difference between them is almost, you know, by a third, which means that Zalmi Rassoul is way lower than the two front-running candidates. And the difference between Dr. Abdullah and Dr. Ashraf Ghani is only 1 percent. This is what the polls have shown.

MR. O'HANLON: So like 20 percent, 19 percent, 14 percent, something like that?

MR. SHARIFI: It's 27 percent versus 8 percent. You know. So this is

the fear that a lot of people in Afghanistan have is that if Zalmay Rassoul is somehow pushed to the second round or he becomes the candidate that gets the second highest number of votes in the first round, then that will raise a lot of questions because all polls have constantly shown his low level of support among the public. You know, it's extremely high.

And, well, it's highly likely that the elections will go to a second round considering the composition of the teams that we have in Afghanistan.

Ashraf Ghani, there are some accusations among Pashtuns because he sided with, you know, Dostum, who is considered to have committed war crime atrocities, but having Dostrum on his team, he managed to vastly increase his constituency because in the previous elections, the 2009 presidential elections, Ashraf Ghani managed to secure around 3 percent of the votes. But this time it's mainly because of Dostrum that he has risen up. Mainly because of Dostrum.

And Dr. Abdullah, as Ambassador Neumann said, he's got a lot of support among Tajiks in the northern and western parts of Afghanistan, but because he was a very close confidant of the late Ahmad Shah Massoud, he is seen as radical Tajik, fascist by some Pashtuns, or a lot of Pashtuns I should say, and that will make them not vote for him. Although yesterday he had a campaign rally in Kandahar and from all candidates that went and campaigned in Kandahar, he had actually the biggest turnout, which means that he has the biggest rally in Kandahar, which was a bit surprising for everybody.

And coming back to Zalmay Rassoul, he is considered a very weak person. Not only him, but also the vice president that he has. The first vice president is Ahmad Zia Massoud, which is Commander Massoud's brother. Ahmad Zia Massoud's brother. And his second vice president is Habiba Surabi, who used to be the governor of Bamyan province, the only governor in Afghanistan, a very energetic woman. And it will help him to secure some votes of the women.

But the entire team is seen, as we say in Afghanistan, a yes saying

team, you know, which means that whatever Karzai may tell him if he gets elected.

MR. O'HANLON: I just want to follow up on one thing before we go to General Allen because there's, like Ron says, so much detail. And I just want to get one thing before we go to General Allen because there's, like Ron says, so much detail.

And I just want to get one thing to a focal point because this is an excellent analysis you're providing but I really want to tee up one issue. President Karzai still is 70 percent popular in Afghanistan, right? He's not 70 percent popular in Washington, but he is 70 percent popular in Afghanistan. And I'm really trying to think through this question that Ron and I were focused on on our trip -- what are Rassoul's real prospects? Because there is a certain undercurrent in the American discussion, which you've sort of implicitly supported that if Rassoul wins it must mean that something went afoul, that something was fraudulent. And so I want to, if I could, just push back a little and ask you the following -- isn't it possible that because he's Karzai's guy and Afghans actually don't mind that, because he's a candidate of continuity and won't rock the boat too much, and as Ron said some Afghans may prefer a little bit of stability, because he doesn't have the negatives of the other two, either Dostum as his vice president or his strong Tajik associations of Dr. Abdullah, for all these reasons, and because I have actually seen some polls lately or at least heard reports of polls that put him closer to the frontrunners than you mentioned, for all these reasons he may actually be a viable candidate, even though much of the narrative suggests that he couldn't be. Could I just put that to you? And obviously, feel free to disagree with the question, but I really want to put it to a point.

MR. SHARIFI: Well, in the elections, what's equally important to the actual process is the perception of the public towards the elections. And currently, people see him as a candidate or they see the team as a team which is on the low margins. So them being elevated, you know, to the level of Dr. Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani or even above them is going to raise serious questions among the public in Afghanistan.

MR. NEUMANN: Yeah, but Najib, I would just posit though that that is very true of the educated elite and of Kabul. I'm not sure it is equally true across the south and the east. It could be. I'm not saying it's not. But, and I think there will be questions, but I would also point out that Dr. Abdullah and Ashraf Ghani are making an avid effort to say that if Dr. Rassoul gets into the second round it's automatically evidence of fraud. And I think we should -- we, as Americans, should not accept that which is a campaign ploy in advance.

Just to sort of note that not everyone is of this view. For instance, I was having breakfast last week with -- Mike and I were having breakfast with Sayyed Musawi of Telo Television and a group of his people, which is also a pretty liberally-educated audience. And they were quite angry that Nadery of the Free and Fair Election Foundation had made a statement had made a statement that Rassoul couldn't get in. So there are divisions in the views and then there are political agenda behind the divisions.

MR. SHARIFI: I was going to come to that actually, you know, because there are some justifications even if, I mean, if he gets to that position, if he gets elevated, because we have -- we still have a significant number of undecided voters, and at any stage they can say, well, the undecided voters, you know, finally decided to vote for Zalmay Rassoul. And that's one issue.

And the other issue is that, to be honest, there is even now a huge frustration on the part of the Afghan people, you know, about the insurgencies that have been caused by the lack of locking BSA, and by what's going to happen in the elections, you know. Obviously, we have expectations that there shouldn't be any fraud and the process should produce legitimate government in the future, but it will not be a serious question or concern among Afghans, again, for the record, despite the fact that we desire a transparent and clean process. It's because, you know, BSA and elections, both of them have a significant impact, but the life of average Afghans, you know, the business people have stopped investing in Afghanistan because of these issues because they're

not certain what's going to happen in the future. You know, so why should they invest there?

And the uncertainty has caused a large group of young people to decide to flee the country saying Afghanistan is not going to work. But at the same time we have got a vibrant and huge community of young adults and civil society workers who are closely engaged in helping the process and showing that the process is a clean and transparent process. For example, one of the initiatives that my colleagues have took, actually this started last week, was to prepare a resolution and get the signature of every single candidate. You know, and the resolution says that -- well, the most prominent article is the independent, international, and national election monitoring organizations, endorsers of the elections. I acknowledge that I will not challenge or dispute the outcome of the elections because in Afghanistan political stability is very fragile. If any of the candidates dispute the result of the elections, you know, it will obviously create problems and further throw the country towards instability.

In general, again, what I would like to end with this is that people in Afghanistan understand there's huge insecurity. Afghanistan is a country that still lacks strong political institutions. You know, the analogy that I usually make is that it's a country -- it's a plane that's being flown, and while it's being flown it's being constructed. And if you look deeply into Afghanistan, you know, it's the same, because we do not have, again, strong political institutions. We do not have enough experience with regards to holding elections. The geography is extremely tough. Security is extremely tough. The Taliban and other insurgent groups will spare no efforts to disrupt the elections. It's mainly because if we have successful elections that produce a sufficient legitimacy, it will be a huge blow to the Taliban because it will show that the people of Afghanistan said no to them. People in Afghanistan chose to go and vote and elect their government. This is the way the people of Afghanistan want. So that's why they will do everything, you know, from attacking to publishing fake voting cards to undermine the legitimacy of the elections.

MR. O'HANLON: That's great. That's a great place to turn again to General Allen now and asking for any of your impressions that you would like to offer about the candidates, because I know you've worked with most, if not all of them closely, but also, your sense of security as we go into the Saturday vote and then the new fighting season as the snows melt in Afghanistan and the Taliban return in force.

GENERAL ALLEN: Well, the Taliban, as we just heard, have a great stake in trying to portray the image of insecurity right now and to shake the confidence of the population in terms of the future of Afghanistan. And I'll just say several things about this.

First, with regard to the candidates, I worked very closely with Ashraf Ghani and Minister Rassoul. I know Dr. Abdullah Abdullah well, but I also know Abdul Sayyaf very well. So in the context of security, and for me the security isn't just about the election on the fifth. Security is extraordinarily important with respect to the transition from the Karzai administration to the next administration. And ensuring that we have a secure platform to provide for that political transition, the first time there will have been a peaceful transition from one elected leader in Afghanistan to another. Peaceful, of course, is in the eye of the beholder, but in the context of a constitutional process that is recognizable, this is really important. And so for the coming months, with respect to a runoff, with respect to then the time necessary to form the government after the runoff, we have some big events, political events that are coming, that deserve as much attention as we can possibly give, to providing for stability, but also reducing uncertainty. And right now, as we just heard a moment ago, I think very clearly and very correctly, there is enormous uncertainty about the future of Afghanistan. One of the reasons for that uncertainty has been that we have been unable to announce a specific commitment in terms of the post-2014 period.

All along, this campaign has envisioned that there would be a post-ISAF mission that would be responsible for providing security or providing advice, assistance, and support to the Afghan National Security Forces in the post-2014 period, the idea



being to create an upward spiral of professional capabilities. And it's been essential. And that would take the form both in terms of the resources necessary for that commitment -- that's people, of course, and the equipment and the funding, but also the time. Ensuring that that post-2014 mission is properly resourced, both in terms of the capabilities that would be left in the post-2014 period, but also the amount of time necessary to truly give the Afghan National Security Forces what they need, which is a continued western touch, a continued upward spiral of professionalization, and again, the key point is we're going to have an election where the Afghans are in the lead for security. We're going to provide support, intelligence support, tactical mobility, QRF, special operation support alongside them to destabilize the Taliban's ability to disrupt this. There will be disruption. There will be areas where the Taliban will seek to create the appearance of an unstable environment. My sense is, as opposed to the 2009 election, the reach of the Afghan National Security Forces, the 350,000 plus, well advised, tactically mobile, will have a reach that we have not seen before in any Afghan election. It won't be perfect. There will be some areas where there will be substantial disruption, but as we've heard, there is great enthusiasm among the Afghan people to get out and vote. That enthusiasm is actually being hardened as opposed to necessarily being compromised.

And so we'll have the election. We'll have potentially a runoff. Then we'll have the formation of the government. And all of this will occur at the seam between the accomplishment of the ISAF mission and the establishment of the post-2014 mission Operation Resolute Support. And it will occur at a seam where the western forces are coming down and a post-ISAF mission will be put into place ultimately for an advisory assist.

So with those major political transitions, what's really essential in the first year after the election is to provide as much support as we can to the Afghans, not just in the resource space and not just in the longevity of that missions, but a very clear western announcement of support to the Afghan government, support to the ANSF, support to the

resources of that mission over time, because I think we have all seen, and we've talked about it this morning, in the absence of that clarity, we have seen a digging in and hedging strategies, people unwilling necessary to support investment, for example. People unwilling necessarily to commit to a peace process. It's not just a hedging strategy in the countryside. It's a hedging strategy in the cities. It's a hedging strategy regionally, in Pakistan as well. And so this kind of clarity, this kind of obvious pen and announced commitment is really important right now to give the Afghan citizenry, but also the Afghan elite and the region the sense that the West is going to be there for some period of time.

We learned three lessons at the end of the Soviet era. The Soviets produced an Afghan military, which in many respects is pretty effective. And they sustained that Afghan military force after they departed with advisors and with resources. And the intent had been that the Soviets, in some form or another, would remain for some period of time fighting the Mujahedeem.

In the beginnings of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the first thing to go were the advisors. And even when the advisors went, the Afghan forces still acquitted themselves relatively well until the Soviet Union completely collapsed, which was the beginning of the end of the resources and the funding that was necessary. Once that occurred and it became clear that the United States ultimately was pulling out of the region, that's when we saw first the ANSF fragment along tribal and ethnic lines and begin to collapse. We saw the civil war emerge and the chaos that emerged was the general departure and the perception of the departure of the West and the instability that would create.

Those were all lessons from which we studied significantly and made recommendations to influence the outcome of the end of this year and the post-2014 period, specifically. Seeking to create that kind of certainty in the minds of the Afghans they would not be abandoned, because that's the Taliban narrative that you will be abandoned, that we would be there in some number of forces to provide for the continued

development of the Afghan National Security Forces, and we'd be there for the amount of time necessary to accomplish that mission.

So right now, in the final throes of the preparations for the election, that kind of clarity would be very helpful, I think, to the Afghan people. It would continue to fly in the face of the Taliban narrative which is a narrative of abandonment, and as long as we are able, through Joe Dunford's efforts to maintain the equilibrium of those five areas, and he's able to deploy that force which will come after 2014, I think we can provide the amount of time necessary and the stability necessary for that first peaceful transition from this election, from one government to another, to let it get up on its feet with that kind of a stable security platform to permit that transition to be complete.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic.

Well, let's go to all of you. Please wait for a microphone. I'm going to take two questions at a time. I'd request that you identify yourselves, and also, if you could, make your questions specific and mention who you'd like to at least begin the answer to it. And we'll start up here in the front row with the two gentlemen here. Starting with Gary and work back.

MR. MITCHELL: Thanks very much. I'm Garrett Mitchell, and I write the Mitchell Report.

And I want to come back to the question about the Taliban. And you've already told us that it is clear that they will hope to be as disruptive as possible in the election process itself. The question that I have goes beyond that, which is do they make the assumption that no matter how disruptive they might be, at some point there will be a new president and a new government? Or do they think they can muddle it enough that that doesn't happen or it takes forever to happen? And if so, what would be the most likely post-election, post-government formation strategy that the Taliban could engage in that would help them achieve their goal of destabilization and reentering in a forceful way the governance in Afghanistan?

MR. O'HANLON: And before we have answers let's go to the second

question, too, please.

SPEAKER: Thank you. I'll (inaudible) from DynCorp International.

Ron, you questioned this today and in your op ed last weekend, in previous discussions and writings, that we risk if we try to hold Afghanistan to Suisse-level standards in elections and in corruption in various things. You made an interesting argument that Karzai used corruption effectively to tie the country together. How do you see, you know, what we would call fraud or corruption in the elections, how is that going to affect the pros and the cons of how the election is going to play out?

MR. O'HANLON: So start with Ambassador Neumann and work down if we could.

MR. NEUMANN: The problem with good questions is then you have to answer them.

The new government, whoever is formed, is going to have a really tough operation. Whoever is president, he's going to be trying to put together a government with very hungry supporters. None of the three leading candidates have such a strong base that they can simply push people aside and take other people. And all of the three said to us a couple weeks ago, and I think believe that they, if elected, will have to reach out beyond their own coalition of supporters and put together a broader government in order for stability.

In terms of corruption, that doesn't tell you that you're going to have some rapid change no matter who's elected and no matter what they say now because they are going to be putting in place a network of supports over whom they have lose control and where they have to do a lot of balancing. It's not very likely that you will see a lot of balancing at one point and tipping that balance by whacking people for corruption at the same time. If the leader is more skillful in building his own powerbase, he may selectively go after people over time. I think we shouldn't expect rapid change in governance. I think all three know they have to have better governance to pull people behind them. There's a tension between what they're going to have to do in cabinet

formation and what they're going to have to do in governance, and I don't think we know how that's going to work. I think in policy terms it'll be important that we are close to whoever that person is and that we're talking to them about what we can do to help them manage that very difficult tension so that it improves governance rather than standing up a long American drawn up list of the miracles that we think should instantly be enacted when a person takes office.

Garrett, in terms of your question, I don't think any of us actually know what the Taliban are thinking. I think their main issue now is to discredit the new government. Right now their approach has been Karzai is this foreign puppet. The Shah Shuja referring to the 19<sup>th</sup> century government, Amir of Afghanistan restored to his throne by the British. He has no legitimacy. We are the legitimate government of Afghanistan. Their goal is to maintain that situation. An election which has few people, few adherents, few people who vote, badly contested by fraud see it's another foreign made-up election, has no real legitimacy. The more the next government is legitimated by the election and by how people accept it, the more the Taliban will be placed in the position of having a difficult discussion within their own ranks as well as between them and the Afghan people. But one, I have no idea how they will come out on that discussion, and two, there is a long history of power growing out of a gun in Afghanistan, so it doesn't mean that people are instantly going to say, well, that's the will of the people.

MR. O'HANLON: General Allen?

GENERAL ALLEN: As Ambassador Neumann said, you know, I don't know what any particular Taliban is thinking about the issue. I think their sense is their strategy needs to be disruptive. I don't think that they believe that they can on the whole they can stop this election from being undertaken and the formation of the government that will follow. I think in terms of the outcome of the election and early international endorsement of the candidate once the dust has settled and the smoke has cleared, which hopefully will be relatively quickly after the candidate has been determined, relatively quick endorsement of that candidate and the formation of the government and a

long-term commitment to Afghanistan is essential. We have to do that. Again, the Taliban have been able to stay in the field and recruit based on a sense that the West was going to depart and that they would ultimately be successful after our departure and the collapse of the corrupt government in Kabul.

I don't know who the candidate will be that is elected, but that candidate, if one of the very first things that individual does after inauguration is to sign the BSA, that would be a tremendous blow both to the Taliban narrative but also an endorsement to the Afghan people and to the West that that president is intent on maintaining the kind of relationship that's necessary, not just for the ANSF but to create the kind of stable platform for the long-term investment into Afghanistan that's really necessary.

So I think it's really important that that candidate right now be thinking about what first several actions that individual is going to take to try to repair the damage that has been done with the rhetoric from the palace over the last several months, and one of the most important things that can occur would be a public signing of the bilateral security agreement as quickly as possible after the election is over, which would be reciprocated by the unambiguous declaration of support by the West for that president and that government and Afghanistan over the long term. That's going to put the Taliban narrative in trouble, and we'll see where that goes.

MR. O'HANLON: Najib?

MR. SHARIFI: Well, I pretty much agree with what Ambassador Neumann and General Allen said. I just want to make it very simple.

A successful and legitimate government after the elections will significantly weaken the position of the return of the Taliban and create actually an existential crisis to the whole philosophy of their existence, you know, because it will show, it will prove that people want this system, want to go and elect their own leaders, so why are you guys being pushy with their violence? So it will create huge trouble for the Taliban. And again, in addition to that is the BSA because as long as the Taliban remains hopeful for victory, they will not make peace. Why would they make peace? So

that's why there's such a big need for having the BSA signed and having strong, clear, and consistent commitment from the international community, mainly the United States, because that will again reduce the hopes of the Taliban for any potential victory.

The future government has to be a broad-based coalition government. It will not necessarily have the Taliban in the first place, but again, what we need to do is we need to go to peace and negotiations under the Taliban with a position of strength. Because if we go to them in the position of weakness, even if there is reconciliation, even if there is negotiations, we have to make a lot of concessions, and we are not at this stage considering the amount of sacrifice that we have paid for the achievements, for the shared achievements of both the American people and the Afghan people. We can't afford to make concessions on the achievements that we have gained.

Well, again, I pray for a smooth transition and a legitimate government in the future. And once we achieve that, I'm pretty confident that Afghanistan will step on the path towards long-term stability and peace.

MR. O'HANLON: A couple of quick details as we go to round two, and we'll start in the back with round two. There was, I think, a woman in the next -- yes. But before, let me just say very quickly, all three major candidates, and I believe all eight remaining candidates, endorse this bilateral security agreement which is the enabling legal document as I'm sure most of you know, that would allow American forces to remain in Afghanistan after the ISAF mission formally and legally ends at the end of this year. And, of course, that may seem like a technicality except you'll all recall as well that it was the failure to obtain a similar kind of arrangement with Iraq that led to the departure of American forces there in 2011. So just to remind you of that backdrop.

Okay. If we could -- oh, by the way, I should also say Ashraf Ghani in some sense, just to add Ron's emphasize that we shouldn't necessarily take these positions at face value, and that's a very good point, Ashraf Ghani sometimes sounds the most emphatic in combatting corruption and his World Bank and economist background give that some potential credence. Abdullah Abdullah may have the most specific

agenda for political reform because he wants direct election of governors who currently in all of Afghanistan's 34 provinces are appointed, like almost everyone else in Afghanistan by the president. And he would also like to see reform of the Senate. So those are just some of the ideas that are there if you listen to the agendas. But again, it's hard to say how much those would translate into governance agendas.

If we could please go -- yes. Right there. We'll take two questions.

SPEAKER: I'm (inaudible) from the Norwegian Broadcasting Corporation. I'm one of the few I think western journalists who have actually been embedded with ANA, albeit for a short while. And one of the things they are very concerned about is the lack of Air Force. So my question goes to Allen.

How will they be able to compensate for the lack of their own Air Force and what kind of consequences will that have actually for the ability to fight Taliban, apart from less wounded will be brought home? That's my main question.

And also, if I can ask to Neumann, which of the two leading candidates is best suited to avoid federalization of power in Afghanistan after the election?

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. And I think there was another question in that same general area, if I'm not mistaken? No? Okay. We'll go over here to the side before asking our panelists to answer.

COLONEL BURGESS: Well, sir, I'm Colonel Josh Burgess from the U.S. Air Force. I'm currently a national defense fellow at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy. And I had the honor of serving under General Allen as an Afghan hand and anti-corruption advisor in Afghanistan for one year.

GENERAL ALLEN: That's why you're exhausted it would appear.

COLONEL BURGESS: Absolutely. Yes, sir. I've had time to recover just a little bit.

My question principally for Ambassador Neumann and Dr. Sharifi regards by nature the discussion today has focused essentially on what's happening inside of Afghanistan, but I think it's well known that there's a bit of a neo-great game



environment that is being played out amongst regional great powers, principally Iran, Pakistan, and India. I'm wondering how those relationships and what they're doing inside the country might impact the transitions that are going to take place and what we might be able to do to help minimize those impacts. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: So this time why don't we start with General Allen and then go Najib and Ron.

GENERAL ALLEN: Sure. It's a great question on the Afghan Air Force. The build on the Afghan Air Force isn't going to be complete until about 2016, and so obviously, we'll continue to provide support right to the end of the ISAF mission. We'll continue to provide advisory support to the emerging Afghan Air Force in the period of time thereafter. Plus, we'll have our own assets there that will support our advisory forces.

Your point about the medevac is a very important point. We never anticipated that the Afghan Air Force would be organized or equipped to conduct the same kind of medevacs that our forces were used to every single day, but we spent a great deal of time working hard to work with the Ministry of Public Health, working with the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior, to optimize all of the resources across the country. For example, rather than the helicopter medevac, which we all became very used to, we explicitly built the medevac process where a large number of armored vehicles had been procured specifically for the Afghan forces so that someone who is medevaced on the ground will find, first of all, that his Afghan Army buddy is well trained in casualty care, buddy care. So at the point of wounding, the Afghans have some capacity to provide some care right on the spot. And the medevac process begins by moving that casualty to an armored vehicle which would move it to a casualty collection point where either we take advantage of the local clinics that will be improved over time through the Ministry of Public Health, or field hospitals which were purchased specifically for the Afghan National Army to be forward deployed when operations are occurring in the field at the core level. So the point is we're just not pulling out our medevac

helicopters, and your question is a really important one. We went to a great deal of trouble working with the surgeons general of the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defense, and the Deputy Minister of Public Health to optimize all of the resources necessary to take advantage of every capability we can short of the helicopter medevac. There will still be helicopters that will be doing medevac but fewer than you're used to seeing.

We've got more work to do on the Afghan Air Force. I think you're aware that we have a turbo prop ground attack aircraft that's coming in. Through a series of contractual issues, that aircraft is delayed. In the meantime, the intent was to use some of the transport helicopters to up-gun those to be a gunship variant so they could take the place of that turbo prop aircraft until that ultimately enters the force.

It's also worth noting that right now the production of pilots in the Afghan Air Force, there aren't enough pilots to fly every airplane that they have right now, so the process of producing pilots needs also to continue unabated. There are a lot of Afghan pilots who are drawing pay who are Soviet-era pilots and are not flying their airplanes. So in the conversations I had with President Karzai, and I suspect General Dunford has as well, as we clear that element of the population out of the ranks holding up the excess of the younger Afghan officers who are quite exceptionally well qualified pilots, to get them into uniform, get them into training, and get them into the cockpit, that process is going to take a while. And so we've got a gap. We've got a gap between the end of '14 and '16 when the whole Air Force comes online. But we'll do whatever we can at this point to advise them as best we can.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

Najib?

MR. SHARIFI: Well, I'm glad to hear the information from General Allen. I think not having the Air Force in place was one of the biggest complaints of the people in Afghanistan, particularly our generals in the Army and our president. So I'm glad that there are activities going on in that regard.

With regards to federalization, we don't have any -- none of the

candidates are advocating for federalization of the country. It's not on their agenda. The only difference that we have is in the agenda and platform of Dr. Abdullah, and he wants to change the presidential system to a parliamentary system. So this is the only biggest change in the platforms that we have. All the others advocate for continuation of the current presidential systems.

With regards to your question, Josh, I think the equations in the region are changing. Well, there is one good acceptance that's coming into existence among our neighbors finally after 13 years. Well, I'm not pretty confident, but I feel this is shaping up. Stability in Afghanistan is stability in their countries, you know, and I believe Pakistan is coming to the realization that they not only failed to help our policy of diffusing violence to secure our foreign policy interests, but it also hurt themselves, you know, very badly. And the region has a lot to offer. If there is economic cooperation and intereconomic integration because we have Central Asia with huge natural resources and we have South Asia with huge human resources, and between we have Afghanistan. So if there is a stable Afghanistan, the entire region will benefit from it because they're interdependent on each other.

But what has happened with Russia and Ukraine, I think that will affect the policies in the larger picture. I must say that further increases the need for the United States to have military presence in Afghanistan. And since the people of Afghanistan have been badly hurt throughout history from its neighbors, they proved actually the (inaudible) that was organized for BAC, they proved the entire region, in a region where anti-American sentiment is systematically being propagated by the government, not only by the circles but also by the governments, Afghanistan is the only country which proved to be an ally to the United States. I don't want to talk about what the president is saying, and I don't think we should -- it's not a good idea to give him much importance, you know, because the more importance we give to his rhetoric, you know, the more his objectives will be realized because he wants to gain more attention in the time that he's leaving. So we should stay cool about it because what the United States has is the people of

Afghanistan are important. The criteria for calculation needs to be the people of Afghanistan rather than one person.

And one other point that I would like to make, that I wanted to make earlier about the future government is even if you have disputes in the elections, because everybody understands that the Taliban are the biggest enemies of all of them, they will not take it that far that it will create a deadlock or instability because any deadlock will benefit -- the only group that will benefit from any deadlock will be the Taliban. All other groups, it's a lose-lose situation for all other political groups that we have in Afghanistan. Again, the only group that will take advantage from that is the Taliban. All of them understand, so that's why they'll make their best attempts to create a coalition government so that we put the real enemies of Afghanistan at bay.

MR. O'HANLON: And now we'll go to the ambassador for what will have to be the last word on our session today.

MR. NEUMANN: I'm sure many of you, like me, have been in enough sessions to greet with great suspicion anybody who opens by saying I don't have much to say on this but. But in view of the time, I will genuinely try.

On the regional, what you have right now is everybody playing to some extent. Pakistan playing to more. I hope my friend Najib is correct. I hear more discussion in Pakistan. I don't see much change in the actual policy, which frankly, is very destabilizing to Afghanistan. And in the long term, I think destabilizing to Pakistan, but that's not their view.

Also, in the long term, Afghanistan needs a kind of regional neutrality where it's not a partisan between Pakistan and Iran, Pakistan and India. I think that can only come though when there is a government in Afghanistan that is strong enough to maintain basic internal order. Without that, you have a contest for power among Afghans which inevitably draws in foreign support. Whatever people agree to on paper will not be sustained. So it's a long-term vision, but not a short-term practicality. I agree with Najib. I don't think there was any candidate who is looking to federalism. There's a lot of

discussion of that for years, more by foreigners than by Afghans often, because everybody understands you have a system which is centralized on paper and incapable of carrying out decentralization with which it is vested.

The problem is that decentralization in the present circumstances would be simply to decentralize to the warlords and powerbrokers who are in effect the problem of the government already. There is no inchoate political mass ready to take up regional governance; nor does tribalism have the same strength that it had 30 years ago before all the troubles. Tribes are broken, and you're seeing that in this election. There's enormous splitting within groups even.

There is this discussion of a parliamentary system. This has been ongoing for a long time. It's very vague. Nobody explains really what they have in mind. A parliamentary system without formed parties with party discipline probably would mean even less stability than you have now because a prime minister dependent on that parliament would have to renegotiate his mandate. Actually, I should say he would have to repurchase his mandate on a virtually weekly basis. And that is a recipe for disaster. But what Dr. Abdullah means by that I don't know. He might mean something akin to what King Zaira Shad had which was an appointed prime minister who could be dismissed by the president rather than by the parliament. That isn't really a parliamentary system. What it means is that you have a kind of chief executive authority who's responsible for running the government and who can become the lightning rod that you dispose of when he has incurred too much popular displeasure. Then you could start with somebody else. That's possible but that's a long way down the pike.

Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Well, we all wish, I know, the Afghan people a successful election Saturday, and please join me in thanking the panelists.

(Applause)

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