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THE STATE OF AFGHANISTAN
AND PROSPECTS FOR THE FUTURE:
A DISCUSSION WITH GENERAL JOHN CAMPBELL

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Featured Speaker:

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Commander
Operation Resolute Support and United States Forces-Afghanistan

Discussants:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you for coming out on this warm August day. I'm Mike O'Hanlon from the Foreign Policy program. I'm here with my colleague, Vanda Felbab-Brown. And on behalf of all of us at Brookings, including our new vice president for Foreign Policy, Bruce Jones, we'd like to welcome you, but especially welcome Matt Sherman and General John Campbell to Brookings today to talk about Afghanistan.

As you know, the United States remains in Afghanistan with about ~~ten thousand~~ 10,000 uniform personnel as well as some very brave and dedicated civilians ~~(inaudible)~~ to add. And this is an operation that's now nearing roughly its 14th year, although it's been renamed and it's now Operation Resolute Support. It's an operation that is now only 10 percent the size that it had been at peak, so about 10,000 Americans and a few thousand more NATO troops.

Just by way of a couple of points of background and we'll quickly get to General Campbell and Matt Sherman, who you really came to hear, of course. But in this particular fighting season I think you're aware that Afghans are doing most of the fighting. In fact, if you want to try to quantify it they're probably doing 98 percent of the fighting. And one way to look at that is not just the numbers of troops where they have 330,000 or so between army and police and NATO has 13- or 14,000, but in casualties. They are fighting extremely hard. Their casualty levels -- I don't want to make a virtue of them -- they're too high. We'd like to see them lower. But this is at a time when American fatalities in Afghanistan this year number in the single digits, perhaps four.

Now, one wants to knock on wood saying that. Obviously it could change. But this is a dramatic reduction in the American role in the war even though it's still quite important.

As you probably are also aware, the current plan of President Obama is

to reduce American forces starting again next spring and perhaps to move towards a very small training and embassy mission by the end of 2016, although some of these details remain subject to reconsideration perhaps.

So what I'd like to do now and the way we're going to proceed for about the next hour, we have until about 4:10, General Campbell is being very generous with his schedule. He's just in town for a few days and we're very lucky to have him and very grateful. So we've got about 60 minutes of time.

I want to ~~remain~~ remind you a little bit about the distinguished bios of these two gentlemen, but then quickly ask a couple of questions of General Campbell, a couple of Matt, Vanda's going to pose a question, and then we'll go to all of you for some discussion.

General John Campbell is a 1979 grad of West Point, comes from a military family, has --

GENERAL CAMPBELL: Stop right there, that's the best [part](#).

MR. O'HANLON: That's the best part. (Laughter) And it's continued in subsequent generations, as well. He's now on his third tour in Afghanistan. His first was as a colonel, a reminder of how long we've been at this, but also the kind of expertise we now have at the senior officer level and the kind of perspective they have across all different levels of command.

He was in Regional Command East in 2010/2011. That's the part of Afghanistan that, as you know, suffers the greatest violence along with Regional Command South. He was reminding me earlier that in that period of time we lost almost 250 Americans in that year in that sector alone. So there's clearly been dramatic change, again, in the U.S. role in-country.

He was also a deputy chief of staff for the U.S. Army and has had a

number of other positions, including serving in Iraq.

Matt Sherman has also been at this for a very long time, one of the most durable and resilient and remarkably gifted and committed American civilians to work in these wars. He's spent a number of years in Iraq, a number of years in Afghanistan. I remember a conversation with Matt once when he told me that one of his favorite books about these wars was called *The Forever War* by Dexter Filkins of *The New York Times* and now *The New Yorker*, and that was about five years ago and it had already been a forever war for Matt at that time, but he's kept at it and he's now the political advisor to General Campbell.

And so we're thrilled to have you both. And before I get into my questions, ask you to all please join me in welcoming them to Brookings. (Applause)

GENERAL CAMPBELL: Well, first off, thanks, everybody, for taking time to be here and show interest in Afghanistan. We're not in the headlines like we used to be. And I'd like to really take some time here today to talk about Afghanistan and how I see it, and I look forward to your questions.

I thought about, you know, 5 to 10 minutes remarks and kind of lay out where we're at, but I really would like to go to dialogue and, Mike, where you're at.

I see David back there in the back. There's a seat for you right here all the way in the front. Otherwise, I'm going to ask you a question, David. Come on up.

MR. O'HANLON: Secretary Sedney, long career on this issue.

GENERAL CAMPBELL: And came over just a little while ago to see us. This is my third tour in Afghanistan. I'm going on a year right now. Every time I've been there the Afghan Security Forces continue to get better and better. They have challenges, they have issues that we've identified in the past as we've worked on close air support, as we've worked on intelligence, as we've worked on logistics, the Special

Operating Forces. But, again, I see them continue to progress and continue to be very, very resilient.

Mike talked about the number of casualties this year, and it has been a very, very tough fighting season for all of Afghanistan, both from a military side and also the number of civilians casualties has gone up, as well. And I attribute most of those ~~70-~~ 70-plus percent is what the U.N. said; I put it at over 90 percent of the civilian casualties -- are caused by the Taliban and other insurgents out there. And we can't ever forget that sacrifice from the Afghan people.

I have a very good opportunity to see the Afghan Security Forces from all different levels, as a colonel and then as a major general and now as a general. My key leader engagements or my battlefield circulation used to be out to COPs and FOBs to see our soldiers as they interacted with Afghan soldiers and police. But today I spend a lot of time inside of Kabul working with the ministry, with the minister of defense, minister of interior, NDS, which is the intel-arm, and then the national security advisor, Mr. Atmar, President Ghani, and Dr. Abdullah. And I'm very honored to have that opportunity.

Again, I think they continue to progress. They have challenges. This fighting season has been very tough on casualties, as talked about, but I think there's a lot of reasons for that. And part of it is we don't have 80,000+ coalition forces out there in the battlefield. They don't have the same type of close air support that we provided in years past. You have Pakistan that has done quite well over the last year plus infighting inside of Pakistan, driving people into Afghanistan.

And, again, the Afghans are figuring this out and they don't have the same type of support from us. We're at the ministry level, we're at the corps level, and the only place tactically we stay involved in with the Special Forces, which is probably the best in the region, the Afghan Special Forces.

So I look forward to taking your questions on and talking about Afghanistan. It is near and dear to me. It has been for a very long time and, again, I'd like to tell you a little bit about them as we go through the question and answers.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. So let me ask you a couple of questions about more specifics on the military dynamics and momentum. But before I do, actually, you were talking about this earlier with me and I thought I'd give you a chance just to remind Americans how in your eyes why this is important, why Afghanistan is important to our security.

And I know it's complex. It sometimes seems indirect or remote. But I know you've thought a lot about it and I wondered if you could share some thoughts with us.

GENERAL CAMPBELL: [Yeah, a](#)Absolutely. Thanks. Well, you know, I wear two hats. I have a U.S. Forces Afghanistan hat and I have a NATO hat. And under the NATO hat it really is a train, advise, and assist, and continue to kind of codify or solidify the gains we've had over the last 14 years for the Afghan Security Forces.

From the U.S. side, the same thing, I train, advise, and assist, but also a CT mission. And the reason we went to Afghanistan in the first place back in 2001 is to make sure that weren't going to be safe havens that insurgents would be able to plan to hit our homeland. I do feel that we have done a great job, both from a conventional perspective and our Special Operating Forces and from the Afghan Security Forces, as well, to make sure that we haven't had another 9-11.

And we have to continue to build the capacity of the Afghan Security Forces in the region. They want to be a regional partner. They now have a president and a CE that are committed to the international [community, that](#)~~community that~~ are committed to the Afghan Security Forces. President Ghani is a commander in chief and

every single day he is concerned about their welfare. He visits their hospitals, he visits their training. He stays tied in the security quite well.

So, you know, for me it really is about solidifying the last 14 years of gains that they've made, to ensure that we have a stable Afghanistan for Central Asia and that area, which I think really cuts down on the opportunities for insurgents to plant something and come to the homeland. I think anybody that's been to Afghanistan understands that there are people out there that continue to want to change our way of life, and to do that sometimes we have to play this away game. And doing that in Afghanistan, I think, of the last 14 years has prevented us from having another 9-11. And, you know, we're very, very blessed to have great men and women that continue to, every single day, put their lives on the line.

We have kind of a sweet spot right now, about 98, 100, 10,000 U.S., 13- to 14,000 with NATO. You talked about casualties. We've actually only had one loss from a U.S. soldier. It was a green-on-blue incident. We've had one DLA -- Defense Logistics Agency -- civilian that was killed at Bagram by a rocket attack, and then we had three contractors that were working with our aviation folks. So that's really it since the 1st of January. But that's not by happenstance. We work that very hard every single day to mitigate and look at force protection.

But, again, I'm really honored to have the privilege to lead men and women that continue to think about Afghanistan and be part of something larger than themselves.

MR. O'HANLON: Now, of course, Mullah Omar, we just learned, the longstanding leader of the Taliban, appears to have died two years ago or so. That's causing a lot of changes in the ranks, at least in the Taliban ranks. And I know Matt's going to talk about that a little later perhaps, as well.

But I wanted to ask, you know, again about military trends and dynamics. How strong is the Taliban right now and how is the fight going? How would you explain what's going on in 2015, besides the point you've already made that this is a big transition year, where the Afghans are overwhelmingly doing it on their own? But besides that, how else should we think about the trends, the battlefield dynamics in this calendar year?

GENERAL CAMPBELL: I think, again, a very, very tough fighting season. I would really tell you that it started last year and so it's kind of been a continuous fighting season. Usually when we talk in terms of a fighting season, it's about 1 April to about 1 October. But I think we've seen from very last summer, through the fall, we had some political instability, the fighting continued through the winter, it continued.

And really the Afghan Security Forces started what we would call the fighting season on their own. They didn't wait for the Taliban to initiate this. And they had a multi-corps operation in Helmand, probably in the February/March timeframe, where they took three corps: the 215th in Helmand, the 205th out of Kandahar, and the 207th in Herat. They worked together. They took about three or four weeks of planning. They brought all the commanders together. They back-briefed it. I went into Helmand and took that back-brief along with the senior Afghan police and army. And it actually was a very, very complex plan that they wanted to take and initiate the fighting season first, and they did that.

They followed that up in Zabul, Ghazni, with another multi-corps operation. Then we had about a month and a half where we had a little bit of a lull, and that was really caused by the insurgents, the Taliban, going up to the north, and we haven't seen this kind of fighting in the north. And, again, not great levels, but it just takes, you know, a few Taliban to really threaten a district center. You have the people

that call out to Kabul, that call the ~~governors, that~~ governors that call back to the central government, we need some help.

And it really caused the Afghan Security Forces to start moving some of their people up to the North, Badakhshan, Kunduz, and Faryab were probably the three large areas. So it stretched the Afghan Security Forces at a time that they were trying to focus on another area. But I think over time, they worked through that.

We had some issues originally with leadership and having a corps commander up in the 209th, and we went without one for about two and a half months. So there was a little bit of timeframe that they didn't have the right leadership that they needed. Once they moved a corps commander up there, an experienced corps commander by the name of Major General Abid, who had been down in the South, they moved to the North. Once he got an opportunity to get on the ground to gather his forces, I think he made a difference up in the North.

But, again, we've seen fighting all around Afghanistan. You talked about the South and the East and we've always seen that over the last 13, 14 years. But the difference this year has been up in the North and where they've stretched the Afghan Security Forces.

But I have seen them react to that. And, again, when they do cross-pillar coordination, when they have the police, the army, and the intel forces work together, they can't be beat. And I tell the Afghan Security Forces that the Taliban don't have D-30 Howitzers, it doesn't have PC-12 ISR, it doesn't have Mi-35s, Mi-17s, MD-530 helicopters. It doesn't have up-armored Humvees. So it really gets down to me for leadership and having the confidence to take it to the enemy.

There's no way that Taliban, even despite this very tough fighting season, even despite the casualties that they're taking, that the Taliban can overthrow

the Afghan government. That's not going to happen.

They'll continue to have attacks throughout the country. They'll continue to try to come into Kabul and do what they call HPAs, or high-profile attacks. And they'll continue to try to take a magnetic IED and put in on a bus to cause, again, civilian casualties. For every magnetic IED that goes off, the 9 or 10 that the Afghan Security Forces stop, you know, we don't hear about that, but that's a good thing.

And the number of times that the Afghan Security Forces have stopped attacks on my headquarters and other places throughout Kabul is really quite remarkable. Again, but what makes the news is the suicide attack vests, the magnetic IED on a bus. And, again, one or two people, very low risk for the Taliban, to come into a city with upwards of 5-five million people, really, really tough to stop all of those. But, you know, I'm really a glass half full kind of guy and I do think they continue to make progress and will continue to work the systems and processes to build an Afghan army and a police that they can sustain down the road.

MR. O'HANLON: So if I could follow up on that, thank you very much for that, I'm trying also just to continue to complete the picture in my own mind and maybe others, as well, about the overall state of security in the country today. And it strikes me, I know one of the things you've done is you've downsized and now you're commanding Resolute Support. You used to command the entire original mission, the Security Assistance Force. And one of the things you've done is give the Afghans greater responsibility for planning, as you just described, but also for analysis, so we don't produce as many documents saying how we think the security picture looks for our own Congress or our own public. And that, I think, makes it harder sometimes for people to get a feel.

My sense, and please correct me, and I'll just, but my sense is that the

cities, the big cities, remain pretty good, especially by the standards that we think of as a wartime zone. And the ring road, in most areas, the big, you know, circumference road around many of the populated regions and the main agricultural zones, the main travel zones, is also as secure probably as it's ever been in the modern era, the last six, eight years. But I'd like to hear you describe it.

You know, I could be wrong and I'm sure the audience cares more about how you would explain the nuances. So is that a general picture that's right or not?

GENERAL CAMPBELL: I think that's a good general picture, Mike. I think that the cities, the ring route which provides most of the areas for the enemy to attack major convoys, either a coalition or Afghan Security Forces, that's not happening like it was just a year ago. But where they're having the problems, again, are these remote district centers that represent the government. And if the Taliban take over a district center that shows a loss of confidence in the government and the people that live in that district center or around that district center will understand that, you know, they don't have the right security.

Now, a year ago, if they took a district center, then it might be two, three, four, maybe a week or two before the Afghan Security Forces had the capability to take that back. Today what you see is as soon as one of those district centers is taken over, that within hours most of the time the Afghan Security Forces are taking that back. So they have the ability now, they have the capability to react much quicker, to move forces all around the country to go back and take over those district centers. So I think that's a sign of progress as they move forward.

Again, they have technology. They have the people. They have the training. I think the difference this fighting season is getting the right leadership in place, holding those leaders accountable for the welfare of the soldiers and police, and then,

you know, building the morale of those folks as they continue to take the offensive. They're very defensive in nature. Eighty percent of the Afghan Security Forces are on checkpoints. And when you're on a checkpoint you're very vulnerable to attacks. And so that's where they're taking a lot of their losses on these small checkpoints.

For instance, Afghan local police were designed to be the guardians of a village. They're selected by the elders of a village. They're supposed to guard that village. But they've employed in five kilometers, 10 kilometers outside of that village without mutually reinforcing support and, therefore, the Taliban see these soft targets and they take over a checkpoint. And they roll that up, four or five people, they roll up the next one, they roll up the next one. So they're learning that as they go on the offense, when they do these planned operations, actually the number of casualties are much, much less because they've planned them out, they've planned for their CASEVAC, their MEDEVAC. And when they're maneuverable and they're not just sitting in static positions, they're not a target for the Taliban.

So President Ghani's working that very hard. The senior leadership is working that very hard. It's kind of been in their DNA to be on checkpoints, so the senior leadership is working that very hard to get them off that. And I think we'll see continued progress in that during through the rest of the fighting season.

MR. O'HANLON: Just to remind folks, I think last year it was estimated that about 5,000 Afghans gave their lives, army and police, in defense of their nation. And this year the pace is a little higher for the same point of the year.

But I know one of your other concerns with the Afghan forces is that a lot of people go AWOL. They don't complete their tour of service. Are you finding that -- before I move on to the last question for you about, you know, the future of the Afghan Security Forces, how would you describe the current situation where they're losing

people through AWOL or attrition?

GENERAL CAMPBELL: Yeah, I think attrition's been a big issue. We've done a deep dive on it and worked with both the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Interior to really focus on what we can do to help them. As we've looked at it, they lose probably in the neighborhood of 4,000 per month, and a lot of that you would think is battlefield casualties and that's the greatest majority. That is not the case. The biggest case is folks that go AWOL, absent without leave. And it really goes back down to leadership.

And we've done a deep dive and said why are they leaving? It's because you have young soldiers or police that have been fighting in Helmand for two or three years, they haven't had a break. They're maybe not getting the right food that they deserve. They haven't had an opportunity to train.

And so when it gets down to leadership of taking care of soldiers and police, something that we take for granted in all of our services back here, and all of our non-commissioned officers and our junior officers do that very well, they don't have the same thing in Afghanistan, neither the army nor the police. They're growing it, but they're not there yet.

So when you're fighting all the time, when you need to take a break and you have no other way, then you go back home and you don't come back. And that's really been the biggest issue, and so we're working on leadership.

We're working on ways to retain people. When they enlist in the Afghan army -- and, again, this is an all-volunteer force. A lot of times we forget about that, but this is an all-volunteer force. And you have somebody that enlists for three years and they want to what we would call re-enlist, they call it re-contracting, they've been doing it only for five years. So you take a young soldier that's been at it for three years, he doesn't want to re-enlist or re-contract for five years. He may want to do it for another

year or two years, but they haven't allowed them to do that. Now they're doing that.

And, oh, by the way, they have money to provide bonuses to soldiers or police that do re-contract, so they're starting to apply some of the tools they've had for years that they've just, you know, lost sight of. And I think that's going to grow and maintain the army at a little bit higher levels than they've had, and I think that's a good thing.

But it really goes down to leadership and really finding out some common things about taking care of soldiers, taking care of police. Once they do that, I think the soldiers will stay. Because, you know, one of the senior Afghans told me they don't need advisors to talk to them about patriotism or fighting. They got that down pat. And we know that they've been fighting for many, many years, so they just need the right leadership to show them what right looks like, to stay in the army, to stay in the police. And I think they're making some of those adjustments now.

MR. O'HANLON: Just a final footnote on that, I know some people have said that the loss rates through casualties and AWOL are unsustainable in the Afghan forces. Obviously, they're higher than you would like, but would you describe them as unsustainable or is that not the best adjective?

GENERAL CAMPBELL: No, I think, again, any casualty is a shame and we have to take stock in that. We have to always -- you know, we can never forget about the sacrifice or the martyrs of the police and the army. We can't forget about the wounded warriors that they have. They're starting to incorporate Wounded Warrior programs like we have in the United States into the Afghan army, and then, hopefully, in the police. I think that's going to be a good thing as we go forward.

I think, again, that if they get rid of the attrition piece of it and they work very hard on recruiting for the whole year -- because what they do now is they don't

recruit during the fighting season. Again, April through about October, they don't worry about recruiting. And the U.S. Army, we look at recruiting all year long, and so we're trying to have them do that.

And we're also trying to make them accountable, so a corps commander, you know, he has to have a goal to recruit "X"-amount of people. Same thing with the police. And so they're starting to put those measures into place. And I think once they do that, again, any that they lose by battlefield losses, any that they lose by going AWOL is not good, but I think they'll overcome this based on recruiting and retention.

MR. O'HANLON: So last question for you before I pose a couple to Matt and then bring in Vanda and then the audience. When you look ahead to the next 18 months, and we look ahead as the United States to our future role in Afghanistan, obviously we're hoping that the Congress will continue to appropriate funds for the Afghan Security Forces and economic development over many years into the future because the Afghans don't yet have a sustainable economic based to pay for all those costs on their own.

Beyond that there's the military dimension. And we're thinking, I believe, about two different priorities for us. One is our counterterrorism needs: to what extent we want the ability to have American drones, American commandos, American intelligence in Afghanistan or South Asia into the longer-term future.

The other question is what kind of support does the Afghan army and police still need or what might they need even potentially beyond the timeframe that's now projected? What criteria are you going to be examining to evaluate that progress?

I mean, you've talked about airpower in other sessions. You've talked about intelligence. You've talked about MEDEVAC. I know there are a few things on your minds. Could you just give a couple of examples?

GENERAL CAMPBELL: Yes, great, thank you. Again, many of the gaps it seems, the challenges that they've had, you know, we identified years ago. And these are things that Joe Dunford before me, John Allen before him, all identified that it's going to take a long time to build. Logistics, for example, in the U.S. Army is a very, very tough thing. Logistics in the terrain that you have in Afghanistan just quadruples ~~just~~ how complex, how hard that is, so logistics.

Intelligence, being able to take all these different sources from MOI, MOD, from their intel agency NDS, trying to figure out, you know, what that really means. That took us many years to do. And so those areas that we identified, we'll continue to work on those and that's where we're really putting the priority on our advisors.

Our advisors today are really our weapons systems. This fight has changed over the years, so where we had privates and sergeants and lieutenants and captains that were in the fight every single day, you know, I have advisors now. And I have advisors that are senior advisors, generals, senior SES civilians, senior civilians that are experts in planning, programming, budgeting, those kinds of things; that are experts in transparency, accountability, oversight, rule of law, sustainability, intelligence, strategic communications. Those are areas that we continue to work on very, very hard.

And we have metrics in every one of those that we measure. Every single week I get an update on essential functions as we look at it. And over time we'll come to a point where we're going to say that's the best we can do or they're not going to get any farther than that or I have six months left, I need to reprioritize and move advisors to something that's going to be more important in the long run.

So I'm continually assessing the Afghan Security Forces, both the police and the army, as we go forward.

Again, I do think, for the long haul, intelligence, aviation for sure are

areas, it just takes a long time. It takes two to three years to grow a pilot; two to three years to grow maintainers. We started probably late on growing their air force. So we're going to be there for a while to continue to work hard on the air force.

And sustainment is another area. We built a lot of, you know, for lack of a better term, wrench-turners, mechanics, to work on their weapons systems or vehicles. But what we didn't do well is we didn't build kind of middle management. Who's going to take time to build, you know, what I call our senior noncommissioned officers really to get in there, to keep the maintenance going? So those areas we'll continue to look at. And, again, I assess those every week as we move forward and we make adjustments based on input I get from the Afghans and what's important to them.

And I think as we go forward we're really looking at what it means, you know, post-2016 from a U.S. perspective on CT, as you talked about. And then, also, more importantly, building an Afghan capability, a CT capability for the region. President Ghani has said he wants to be a regional player in CT, so we look at that, as well.

The last thing I'd mention is, you know, NATO has come on strong, as well, to say, hey, what role can we play after Resolute Support? And so the defense ministerials and the foreign ministerials here the last couple months, we brought all together the SecState equivalents, the SecDef equivalents, and all the countries who come out loud and strong, saying they want to continue to contribute to the future of Afghanistan.

And the way they've gone about that is we did a needs assessment with MOI and MOD and said, you know, what do they need two years from now, in what areas? Leadership is an area they've all talked about. Again, maintenance, aviation, intelligence. So I think you'll see NATO come on board as we continue to work through that, to continue to apply different countries' resources to continue to build on the

capability of the Afghan Security Forces.

MR. O'HANLON: So NATO partners are willing to stay a little longer even than currently planned, if need be, at least a number of them?

GENERAL CAMPBELL: Yes, I think NATO, quite frankly, is waiting to see where the U.S. is going to go. And I think, again, every day we're assessing that.

I owe back my senior leadership at the end of the fighting season an assessment of where we are and where I think we go in the future. And I think based on that we'll make some decisions on where we are in 2016 and beyond.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you very much, General.

Matt, a question about the Afghan government and then I want to ask, one, about the region and wrap up there and go to Vanda. We, of course, hear various reports about how well President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Dr. Abdullah are doing, not only in their relations with each other, but bringing along their broader political movements and forming a cabinet. We hear a lot of reports about how long it's taken for the cabinet to be formed. I guess we're still waiting on formal codification of some of the positions at this point.

Could you just explain whatever you think are the most important highlights for this audience to understand? But the broad question is how well are they doing? Are they starting to make headway or is it just an exercise in sort of capping these tensions that are so severe they could explode into even conflict or a civil war at any given time?

MR. SHERMAN: No, I think the National Unity Government, its construct, is the best construct, the best political construct in order to deal with the deep challenges that Afghanistan has to face right now. And what's important to recognize is that this is a very unique arrangement that's been made that hasn't happened in the past

in Afghanistan. And the need to kind of put it in context, a wider context, of where we were a year ago and how did we then end up in this arrangement that we have right now.²

A year ago, we still had President Karzai as president, who had been president and leader since 2002. And every five years there's an election that's held in Afghanistan, and they had one in April of 2014. President Karzai wasn't allowed to stand as president, so you had a whole new crop of candidates who were standing up. In fact, you had 26 candidates declare and running themselves for president. So right when we think there might be a lot of candidates here in America running for president, Afghanistan had even more of them.

But at the end of the day, you had eight candidates running for the election in April of 2014. And in order to win the candidacy you had to reach over 50 percent, but no candidate was able to reach that threshold, so the top two candidates -- the first one was Abdullah with about 40 percent of the vote, if I'm not mistaken -- and Ghani with a lower percentage, forced to a runoff election. And that runoff election happened about two months afterwards in June, which was then contested because of how some of the -- it switched from Abdullah being on top to Ghani being on top. And so there was a wide recount that happened for a number of months. And so you didn't have an arrangement in place until September, and that arrangement was brokered by Secretary Kerry in the United States in order to try to bring both leaders together, in order to kind of help govern the country together.

And this was a very, very unique thing. Because, again, as I said before, you just had President Karzai at the helm and now you had this unique arrangement where Ghani was president and Dr. Abdullah being the chief executive who would handle day-to-day operations, and his position would be established through a presidential

decreed, not codified in the Constitution.

And so this is very, very different. But what's fascinating to see is how both leaders have a very different approach to common approaches/problems, but how their strengths actually have a real tendency to complement one another if they're able to work together on these issues.

And what's most fortunate is that both Abdullah and Ghani are generally on the same page when it comes to broad-based policies. So when it comes to security, they agree. When it comes to regional relations, they agree. When it comes to women's rights, they agree. When it comes to reconciliation, they have a broad understanding that they need to move forward. And those are key things and that should n't be taken lightly with regards to some of the earlier challenges that we had previously, and so they do that.

Now, where are the challenges that they face? They face difficulties with regards to personnel agreements. And this has kind of led to a prolonged time in order to name a cabinet. Again, it's important to put it in a wider historical context. Even when President Karzai was president, it took him many months in order to put his cabinet together. But, again, under the current government, it's a bit more unique.

Now, where are the benefits that come from this? While it does take greater time in order to kind of come to an agreement on an individual and then have them go through parliament, once that agreement is made, that agreement is much stronger because both of them are able to reach it and also deal with their own constituencies, who fundamentally disagree on some issues on political dynamics, but if they're able to reach it, it actually strengthens the bond of the decisions they have.

Now, we haven't been able to kind of -- we've been able to have an entire cabinet formed except for the minister of defense. And it was a real surprise that

he was not able to pass Parliament a few weeks ago. It's good that he's still serving in an acting capacity. But what's also important is to look at some of the other senior government positions with regards to governors and things of that such. And more than two-thirds of the governors have been placed and they're looking now at other subnational leadership.

And what's important, I think, to kind of keep in the back of your mind is that the more time that evolves with this National Unity Government in place, the stronger the bond is. They have a greater vested interest in working through some of the day-to-day problems they have than kind of throwing that away. And while there are challenges that they face, while there are others who are outside the government saying things need to be changed, I think they do recognize that. They definitely hear them. But I don't think it's at the point where anyone wants to bring this down. There's too much of a vested interest in this. They know that they -- the whole country recognizes the value of the international community in Afghanistan's future, and they want to be able to work through those things together.

GENERAL CAMPBELL: If I can just add very quickly.

MR. O'HANLON: Please.

GENERAL CAMPBELL: You know, for probably the last three or four months, Matt and I have heard on many occasions, you know, next week the National Unity Government will fail. It will fail. And they continue moving forward.

And I think, as Matt said, over time, they continue to understand the strengths and weaknesses of each other. And when they're together I actually think both President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah complement each other and they work very well. And, again, on all the national-level strategic issues there's no daylight between them, and it's about picking people as they have to satisfy the different groups who've helped get where

they are is where they come into issue, and I think they're working very hard at that.

I think everybody understands or knows that President Ghani had to get some medical treatment done on his foot and he went to Germany, and I talked to both him and Dr. Abdullah before they left. And really, over the last several days, you know, they've been talking every single day. Yesterday, they did a secure-level video teleconference from Germany back to Afghanistan, President Ghani, Dr. Abdullah, and talked about the issues at hand.

So, again, I think, you know, between them, they understand how important this is. They know this is a very tough fighting season. They know that the National Unity Government is the way to go. Eighty-plus percent of the people in Afghanistan have said National Unity Government is our only way forward.

I've talked to many senior leaders, both on the military side and the civilian side, and what they will tell you is there are people out there trying to do things to keep the National Unity Government from moving forward, but, at the same time, they understand how important it is, and I think they're not going to let that happen. So, again, I feel very good about the future of the National Unity Government and its continued support.

MR. SHERMAN: And it's their, also, appreciation, both Ghani and Abdullah and their teams around them, of the international community. I think that rang so clear when both of them came here to Washington in March, when Ghani addressed Congress, with both of them making all the rounds on the Hill, meeting senior U.S. leadership, and really kind of expressing their appreciation for all the sacrifices that America has given. And to be able to kind of work together in a partnerships is something that really can't be spoken about enough.

MR. O'HANLON: Before I ask you about the broader region and maybe

to mention anything about the peace talks, as well, and recognizing that Ambassador McKinley and the AID team aren't here joining us, so you don't want to get too far into this, is there anything that one could say Ghani and Abdullah have begun to deliver for the benefit of the Afghan people? Obviously making a government work and continuing the fight and preserving security in the big cities and ring road area, that's already a lot, so I don't want to be unrealistic. It's only been, as you say, 9 months, 10 months now, 11, but still.

Is there anything else that you would point to by way of continued modest growth in the economy, any kind of development program that's got their signature on it, anything else that's sort of a good, hopeful, early sign of where this government's going in Afghanistan?

MR. SHERMAN: I would -- the economic issues are something they view as top priority. And I would say it's right ~~no~~on par with security, and they both go hand-in-hand, as you know, Mike.

What's very interesting to see is how they both engage the region in a very robust way on economic issues. To the north, Dr. Abdullah, given the relationships he has there, has really been pushing forward on those things. With regards to the east, Ghani and his relationship, even within the ~~(inaudible)~~areas where Dr. Abdullah is strong, as well, to be able to bring economic growth particularly in the West, opening up trade routes with Pakistan that haven't been established in the past.

The Iran Accord actually presents some opportunities for Afghanistan in order to have greater trade with regards to sanctions issues of possibly being ~~listed~~lifted. And so they see this kind of opportunity that's there and they're being -- Afghanistan being a central hub that can really serve as a great benefit to all in the region. I mean, Afghanistan is going through a lot of rebalancing right now and it sees its role as being

critical in terms of being a source of stability as opposed to instability. And at the root of that is economic growth.

MR. O'HANLON: And they're still in the 5 to 8 percent per year GDP growth category or range, ballpark, is that fair? I mean, they've done pretty well. Obviously they started from a very low base when we were in 2001/2002. But they've done reasonably well and some of that was propped up by all of the influx of our dollars and so forth. I remember when I was in Afghanistan in the 2011/'12/'13 timeframe, people were really always scared about this year and what would happen to the economy. Have they been able to sort of keep it chugging along even as we've reduced our presence and the number of American dollars flowing in?

MR. SHERMAN: I think it's a challenge that they know that they have to address. And, again, this gets back to another area where they know they have to address it together. This is something that they can't fight on given the scale and the importance it has.

Our withdrawal from the country in terms of the forced numbers has really kind of left a bit of an economic gap, but it's something that they're like, okay, we know we need to do this and we need to kind of be able to reach out to the region.

He's also kind of -- what's fascinating to see is how Ghani is not only reaching out to the immediate region, but also the wider region of trying to be able to promote Afghan first and to be able to kind of see, listen, even when it comes to Saudi Arabia, when it comes to the Emirates, when it comes to China and some of the energy matters, it really is a key point that he emphasizes time and time and time again. We saw it just a few weeks ago, when Ghani was at the BRICS summit in Moscow. And so he knows that, you know, if there's ever going to be long-term stability with Afghanistan, it's going to rest at their economic [base](#).

MR. O'HANLON: So last question from me which is about the region. You've been mentioning the economic dimensions of key relationships already. And, General, you mentioned earlier some of the interplay with the conflict in Pakistan and Pakistan's own security efforts.

[Anything. s](#)Starting with you, Matt, but then, General, I'm sure you'll want to comment, too. Anything else of note in the region of late with regard to China's role in the peace talks, Pakistan's role in the peace talks, anything else that we should understand that you think is particularly salient right now?

MR. SHERMAN: Yes. I've been [in](#) Afghanistan for over five years and everyone says, you know, last year was most critical for A, B, and C. But I must candidly say, this past year has been fundamentally different than others. I know that sounds like a broken record, but it is, and let me explain why.

I think there have been a number of strategic shifts that have happened in Afghanistan and the wider region that I think a lot of folks couldn't have predicted; that they present both great promise and great peril to the region. And this is why there's this readjustment that's going on. Let me just explain a few of them.

I think that there are issues with regards to Pakistan. We've all been reading about this in the press. Ghani has really kind of pushed forward with [China](#) trying to be able to kind of have the undeclared state of hostilities, which his words, not mine, of trying to kind of have a thaw and to be able to have a fundamental shift within, so that there can be greater economic growth, there can be an address with regards to security issues, there can be other sorts of mutual, military cooperation.

A year ago, we didn't know whether the U.S. would still be in the region either. The BSA had not been signed, so the BSA was signed.

A year ago, less than a year ago, you had this horrific attack in Pakistan

that some of you may recall, Peshawar, on December 16th of 2014. And where about 142 people were killed in a school, 135 of them children. It was very graphic.

And in many ways, the way it was described to me, and I can see the reason why, it was Pakistan's 9-11, which really kind of woke them up with regards to their own security issues and their own borders that have to be addressed.

You've seen Pakistan take on many of the security challenges within their own country with regards to these North Waziristan operations that are going on that General Campbell alluded to, which is something that we've been encouraging them to do for a while and they haven't, but now they have. And, of course, there's secondary effects with that with regards to Afghanistan, which has pushed insurgents over into Afghanistan, which is another reason why the security situation has picked up at times.

What you're also seeing is with regards to greater reach-out to the northern "stans," not only on security cooperation, but also economic cooperation. You're seeing advancement with regards to the peace initiative, things that we didn't necessarily anticipate would kind of take the momentum that they did.

So there's all these things that are happening that are truly strategic in nature. The region right now is really in flux and I really do think that we have a great strategic opportunity in front of us in order to help to be able to make sure that Afghanistan doesn't return to the threats of the past because there's such change, but also there's a lot of promise that's there.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Anything you want to say at this point, General?

GENERAL CAMPBELL: No, I think we've been in transition the entire time I've been there. And from a government perspective, from a security force perspective, and from a regional perspective, the changes that we've had based on both

President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah being a commander in chief, looking at a wider regional perspective, engaging with Pakistan, General Raheel, I think we had not -- we did not see that with President Karzai, at least the last several years. And it is an attempt really to make sure that people understand, you know, you can't talk about Afghanistan unless you talk about Pakistan.

And President Ghani understood that piece and really went out of his way and expended a lot of political capital to do that. And I think originally he did not see a lot of return from that and took a lot of kickback from the population in Afghanistan. And I think now, as we continue to move forward, I think people will say that what he did in reaching out and putting demands on Pakistan to drive the Taliban to the peace process I think is going to be a good thing.

It's going to take a long time. We shouldn't kid ourselves that, you know, it's going to happen overnight. The incident with Mullah Omar and finding out that he's been dead for two and a half years I think is going to change the dynamic a little bit. There's going to be fracturing inside the Taliban. It's going to drive some to the peace table quicker. It potentially could drive some others to ISIL or Daesh quicker. And so I think we still have to work through that.

But as Matt said, I really do think this is a strategic opportunity to have a country in that part of the world that wants to be part of the international community, that has a senior -- has a leadership that wants to move forward, but they're going to continue to need our support. They can't do it without the international community. Thankfully, we have 42 countries that are still tied into Resolute Support, that continue to either provide people or money. And I think, for me, the international donor piece and making sure people understand that what they do contribute to Afghanistan is making a difference every single day and will continue to do that in the future is going to be very, very

important. And, you know, I look forward to working very hard with the Afghans to continue to push that.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Now I'm going to ask Vanda to speak. For those of you who don't know Vanda, she's been doing field research and writing on Afghanistan for at least a decade. And her book, *Afghanistan:- Aspiration and Ambivalence*, is one of the very best books on the subject. So I'd like to turn things over to you and please.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, thank you very much, gentlemen, for coming, for your analysis, and, most of all, for your commitment.

You spoke, both of you, of the importance of the National Unity Government and not just the particular creature, the arrangement that ~~can came~~ out of the contested election, but more broadly of the commitment of Afghan politicians to progress of the country. But coming to the government itself, much as it might be solidifying in some ways, there is also an end handing over, which is the Loya Jirga that is supposed to either endorse or dissolve this extra-constitutional arrangement.

And prior to that and very much tied to the Loya Jirga are the parliamentary elections, which were supposed to take place this year. They'll likely ~~now not~~, are now delayed. Could you give us your reflection of what kind of preparation is being made for the parliamentary elections and the Loya Jirga? What are the politics of that and, also, the impact on the security forces, if we see, for example, a very contested Loya Jirga? And particularly if that happens in 2016, yet another year of transition potentially U.S. withdrawal or change for the diminishment of U.S. role, question of NATO, Resolute Support, the timing of that, and if preparations that the Afghans are putting in place, security preparation, political thinking of the juxtaposition of these pressures again coming together at the same time.

MR. SHERMAN: If I could just raise two points on that. Parliament's on recess, as you know, and I think there'll be a lot of discussions as soon as they return in order to address that more directly with regards to particularly the parliamentary elections.

What will be interesting from my viewpoint is how then they'll actually be carried out from a security perspective, just as you were saying. Because that, too, will be fundamentally different from in the past. In the past, the coalition has been there in order to help provide a lot of airlifts assistance. And while the Afghans have their own airlift, it certainly isn't, in comparison, the same amount as in the past. And so being able to time that with regards to the weather, with regards to the fight that they're taking on themselves, is going to be a real test for them. And I think as we all kind of do our own analysis on this stuff, I think that'll be a real milestone on them being able to stand up and being able to do that, both from a political perspective and also from a security perspective.

With regards to securing, though, the Loya Jirga, where I've been impressed is how they're -- if they're given a specific event in order to kind of lock down in some ways, like when we went through the Loya Jirga for the BSA last year, I mean, that was a very safe event. I was greatly impressed with that. And they literally flooded the zone and were able to kind of make sure that there was nothing that would threaten that from a security perspective. And I definitely don't think that would be a problem from the ANSF being able to perform.

How it works out politically, I wouldn't want to kind of guess on that. I mean, what I have seen over the past year has constantly, you know, surprised me in terms of the twists and turns that are associated with these sorts of events. And I think right now it's definitely on everybody's mind. The date hasn't been set. Of course, that

will be a political calculation on all sides. But what I'll be looking at, just because of the vantage that I'm at working with the military on this, is how the security forces perform, prepare themselves for it, and be able to execute those things.

GENERAL CAMPBELL: Yes, I don't think they can even talk about it till they figure out the election reform. And they just announced here the last couple weeks the Election Reform Committee, Dr. Abdullah has taken that on. They had their first meeting about two weeks ago. And I think they're going to work toward, for the next several weeks, what that reform means. When Parliament comes back in they'll talk to the Parliament and then they'll decide the dates. It's probably going to be in '16, either in the spring or after the fighting season based on the security. And I think they'll make those decisions during the next month or so.

I think from a security perspective, you know, if it's before the fighting season or after the fighting season, the '16, we still have several months before that. Again, as Matt said, once the Afghan Security Forces, if it's a specific event, they have no issue really doing the detailed planning to get ready to do something like that and I think they'll do well. But I think they've got to get through election reform before they get anywhere on that, before they have the election, so.

MR. O'HANLON: Let me start taking two at a time and then we'll turn to you gentlemen again.

GENERAL CAMPBELL: Okay.

MR. O'HANLON: So right here in the second and first rows.

MS. McKELVEY: My names Tara McKelvey. I work for the BBC. And I'd like you tell us a little bit more about Mullah Omar. You mentioned that, I'd like to hear more.

And also, you talked about Afghanistan's near and dear to you. I'm

wondering, looking back, what you're most proud of. You said there's been no 9-11, but is there anything more specific about your experience there that you remember as your legacy?

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, Tara. And then David, please.

~~SPEAKER~~SECRETARY SEDNEY: Thank you, Michael. And, again, General Campbell and Matt, thank you very much for your courage and your service to our country. I really admire both of you.

My questions aim to be a little tough and maybe hard and maybe --

MR. SHERMAN: Is it true or false? (Laughter)

~~SPEAKER~~SECRETARY SEDNEY: Definitely not. About over three years ago, then chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mullen, told Congress that the Haqqani network was a strategic asset in many ways of the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, Pakistan's intelligence organization. Since then Pakistan, and to me it's quite clear, has been complicit in keeping the death of Mullah Omar secret for over two years, leading to, I think, more deaths of Afghans and Americans during that two-plus-year period.

I speak a lot on Afghanistan and the question I get asked all the time is how can we trust Pakistan? So my question to you is the same one I get asked by audiences when I speak to them: How can we trust Pakistan? Is Pakistan with us or against us in Afghanistan?

Now I have a second question related to that. In his recent book, Mike Morell, the former deputy director of the CIA, said that the U.S. intelligence agency, the CIA, essentially missed the boat on calling on the rise of Daesh, the Islamic State. Our intelligence agencies I think pretty clearly missed the death of Mullah Omar. General Flynn, the former head of DIA, said our intelligence system needs to be reworked.

Are you satisfied that you're getting the right kind of intelligence? Does our intelligence system need to be reworked to stop missing these big things?

MR. O'HANLON: So I'll let you guys divvy up as you wish.

GENERAL CAMPBELL: Yes, I got to remember all four of those.

(Laughter) Let me start with an easy one first, you know, what it's meant to me.

And again, as Mike said, I went there in 2002/2003 as a colonel. I went back as a major general and now as a general. My son's a sergeant in the Army. He's been there twice. You know, I've lost many friends in Afghanistan, as in Iraq, as well.

But what I think has impressed me the most is really working with the Afghan Security Forces, the men and women that continue to understand how important their role is to bring about change in Afghanistan, and they have no qualms about putting their life on the line to do that. Again, I said it's all-volunteer force. And to see these young men and women for very little pay under very, very harsh conditions continue to move forward every single day for the good of Afghanistan, to see them get an award, to see them get a little certificate, to stand up in front of a crowd and yell out, you know, "for Afghanistan," I mean, just, you know, makes you get goose bumps.

And they're very giving people. They take care of me and my men and women. When we've had green-on-blue attacks, you know, they've gone after that very hard to make sure we can learn everything we can to get after that. They understand the sacrifice that our men and women have endured. They understand the sacrifice our families have gone through. So when you work with a partner that is like that, you don't want to fail. You want to make sure that everything you do that you can put your best effort toward. And so that's the way it is with the senior leadership and that's the way it is with the Afghan police and army I've dealt with on three different tours and on many trips there.

And again, I'm honored to have the opportunity to continue to serve in Afghanistan. And I think that people ask me all the time is it worth it? You know, is the sacrifice that we've had worth it? And I have to look, you know, parents in the eyes and tell them that their son or daughter's paid the ultimate sacrifice and I have to be able to tell them that it was worth it. And I do believe in my heart that it has been worth it, that we have made a difference, and that, you know, we'll continue to make a difference.

And when you talk about the definition of hope and what that means to the Afghan people, it's about what our men and women here in the United States and many other countries have done for the last 14 years. So they understand that and I think if you ask any Afghan on the street whether or not they wanted to have a continued presence by the coalition forces, overwhelmingly you would find out that that is very, very positive unlike what you may hear in other countries. In Afghanistan they understand the sacrifice, they want us there.

On Mullah Omar what I'd tell you is that, you know, I think for many, many years there's been speculation about whether he was dead or alive, but sort of that myth out there, his presence, they were able to keep alive through Mansoor and other folks out there. And as Matt had talked about at another engagement we had that the Taliban are really in smaller groups, the way that they operate all they had to have was this notion that they had a spiritual leader, a commander that was out there that kept them moving.

And now I think what you're going to see is knowing that he's been dead and knowing that he's been dead for several years, since about April of 2013, that's going to cause people to think, the Taliban fighters, you know, what have I been doing this for? And I think there's opportunity there for both Afghanistan to really push this and to bring in brother and sister Afghans as part of the peace process. And there's an opportunity

for Pakistan to also help and move forward to facilitate bringing the Taliban to the table.

David, you brought up how can we trust Pakistan? Again, I have a very good relationship with General Raheel. I try to talk to him every week. I go over there about once a month. I was there 10 days ago talking to him and most of my conversation is about mil-to-mil. How can we bring the Afghan Security Forces and the Pakistan military security forces together to fight a common enemy that doesn't know, you know, this border, this Durand Line that separates these two countries?

And I think in General Raheel, and now in President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah, you have two leadership teams that understand that, you know, it's not business as usual and to get after this common enemy they're going to have work together. There's years and years of mistrust. And if you go talk to almost any Afghan Security Force the first thing they'll say is, hey, you know, Pakistan's been harboring these guys and been over killing my brothers and sisters. But they also understand that they have to have peace with Pakistan before they move, and I think that's where President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah are trying to push forward.

The Haqqani piece I think is very, very difficult. Haqqani, we've always said, has been probably the number one threat to coalition forces and I would say Afghan forces, as well. And there's no doubt in my mind that Pakistan over the years has probably not done enough to be able to help us get after the Haqqani threat. And I had a very good one-on-one discussion with General Raheel when I was over the 10 days and we focused on Haqqani and what I thought they could do to really help us out.

That's going to take time. I think as they look at it they have a lot of other issues they've got to deal with inside of Pakistan and they don't want Haqqani to turn on them. And so they have to look at that issue as they work through it.

But I think you're going to see a concerted effort by Pakistan to continue

to drive the Taliban to the peace table, to really drive down the violence level over the next couple of months. President Ghani's been very, very strong with General Raheel on giving him certain edicts out there to say you need to do this to show us that you really mean what you say this time, and it's not like it was last year or the year before.

Again, I think that's going to take time. Have I seen any measurable changes in Pakistan against Haqqani? Up front I'd tell you no because I'm still worried about the threat that Haqqani brings to Kabul. And, you know, they are the folks that work (inaudible), that work suicide vests, and, you know, will continue to keep the pressure on Pakistan, and I think, you know, we'll get after it.

MR. O'HANLON: You want to comment?

SECRETARY SEDNEYSPEAKER: (inaudible) And on intelligence?

GENERAL CAMPBELL: Yes, you know, Mike Flynn's a good friend of mine. We grew up together. I'm not going to comment on his comments. What I would tell you is that I think over the years we've learned a great deal. And from a conventional perspective in all of our services, joint, and from an interagency perspective, you know, what we do and how we operate today is light years where we were 13, 14 years ago. And our intelligence services are the best in the entire world. Do they have challenges? Yes, but I would stack that up against any in the world.

And the cooperation that we have between the military and the interagency to include all of our intel community, we don't agree on everything and they'll -- you know, quite frankly, I think they have a view that is glass half empty all the time and maybe glass half empty with a lot of holes in it. You know, I'll argue about that. And if you go back and look at years and years' worth of intel reports, Afghanistan should have been done a couple years ago.

But that's okay. They look at it very hard. We work together on

assessments as we move forward. We're never going to agree 100 percent, but I would not want to be in Afghanistan without the intelligence team that we have that provides indications, early warning, and that relationship that helps us mitigate the force protection issues that I have every single day.

MR. O'HANLON: Anything you want to add, Matt?

MR. SHERMAN: Just with regards to what I've taken away from these eight and a half years. The most valuable thing to me has been the camaraderie, both with military colleagues, with civilian colleagues, with Afghans and Iraqis. It's something that will always be deep to me and the sense of purpose that it gives and things of that such.

With regards to Mullah Omar, you know, what's important is that all sides continue to try to push towards peace. And I think that's the real drive that will continue. And, you know, these are the sorts of things that -- these challenges, these curveballs that come up are the sorts of things that kind of come up, and the issue is whether you're able to remain focused on the end state. And I do think that all of the primary players are focused on that end state of being able to reduce violence and bring about peace.

And that's the key thing in order to keep in mind with this because it gets back to the point I alluded to with regards to how -- at least President Ghani is trying to deal with the problems of Pakistan, and these are problems that have gone on for 30+ years. Again, ending that undeclared state of hostility, knowing that this is not going to be something that you're going to achieve in a few weeks, a few months, or maybe even a few years. This is something that I think is going to take many, many years and it's going to take not only just dealing with the Taliban, which is, of course, what gets the headlines, but it's dealing with all the host of other issues that they have to address. And that's kind of a much more important comprehensive matter that I know that President Ghani's

dedicated to. I know that Chief Executive Abdullah's dedicated to. And you're given those sense of indications to a degree from Pakistan, as well.

And while the trust may not be there to what we all may wish, the issue is whether you're able to identify certain mutual interests in order to build momentum. And I think they are working towards identifying those so that you can build some momentum, so that you're able to get through these inevitable challenges or curveballs that may come up, and to be able to achieve that end goal that everybody's eyeing.

GENERAL CAMPBELL: If you don't pick that guy back there he's going to hurt himself, right?

MR. O'HANLON: Yes, it's true, exactly. So we have time for two more rounds of questions. And what I'm going to really ask is that each person only ask one question so we have time to get through two more rounds.

So I'm going to start here with the third row, the two gentlemen in the third row. One question each, please. Then we'll have a final round.

MR. IMBRIE: Thank you, Michael. I'm Will Imbrie. I'm representing the International Stability Operations Association, 50-some companies who provide services to DOD, State, and USAID, including in Afghanistan.

As you draw down U.S. uniform troops in Afghanistan will you be turning more to contractors to fill some of those gaps in training, maintenance, et cetera?

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. And then here.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. General, good to see you. (inaudible), I'm a journalist in Washington with India Global and Asia (inaudible).

My question is that after this deal or so-called peace deal with the Taliban are concerned they have in the past been painted as terrorists and they have killed hundreds of thousands of innocent people. And they had a deep root in Pakistan

and Afghanistan, of course. So what is the future of this deal?

And finally, what role do you think this triangle -- India, Pakistan, and China -- will play? Because India had invested billions of dollars in the future of Afghanistan. Thank you, sir.

GENERAL CAMPBELL: On the contractor question, I think over time, you know, what we've tried to do is in areas that we couldn't have military, we needed contractors, both in Iraq and Afghanistan. We built it up to a point where we were very, very dependent upon contractors to do many of the skill sets that we couldn't afford to have soldiers or airmen or Marines or sailors do. And so that number has continued to rise.

I think over the last couple of years what we've tried to do in Afghanistan is as we've retrograded out equipment and people, we've tried to strike a balance of both military and contractors. And I think as we move forward we'll continue to have that balance as we move forward. And there's many critical areas that contractors provide -- base support, force protection, on and on -- that we could not do our mission without them. So we'll continue to have contractors on the battlefield. I think what we have to do is just balance that and really make sure as we move forward that we try to look inside of Afghanistan and have more Afghanistan folks pick up many of those jobs out there, so we build that capacity inside of Afghanistan --

MR. O'HANLON: Matt? Go ahead, please, General, either way.

GENERAL CAMPBELL: -- [In regards to the \(inaudible\)](#) peace process..

MR. SHERMAN: No, with regards to the peace process one, the role that China, India, and others play in it, again, they all have a vested interest in there being peace in Afghanistan, be it economic interests, be it political interests, be it just regional stability interests. And that's what I think why they're playing a role in this. As

we all know, China played an observer role in the talks in early July in Murree. And I think being able to do that provides greater impetus behind the collective effort.

India has invested a lot of money out West in Afghanistan, and I suspect they don't want to have those investments come under security threats. And so, again, it's finding those common interests among all sides in order to kind of achieve desired ends is what needs to be focused on. And there'll be all these things that kind of happen on the side that kind of take your eye off the ball and stuff like that.

The question is whether there's still that political resolve, particularly in Afghanistan and with the Taliban in order to achieve that. And the fact that you're able to have those talks happen in Murree in early July, the first time that you had Afghanistan and the Taliban sit down to address this long-term problem that's plagued them both, is not something to be cast away. It's something significant. And it's going to be a long process, but I think it's something that's worth the effort that all sides are contributing towards.

MR. O'HANLON: Anything you want to add on that, General?

GENERAL CAMPBELL: No, I think Matt's right. I think it's going to take time. I think, you know, I'm happy that Pakistan, India, China, Russia, all the countries are taking an interest and understand from a regional perspective that it's going to take everybody working together and a stable, stronger Afghanistan is a good thing in the region there. So if it take India working, Pakistan working, China working, I mean, I'm all for that. I think the important piece that we've always said is this has to be Afghan-led, and President Ghani has taken that on and will continue to move that forward.

MR. O'HANLON: One quick footnote on that. Do you see any indications that the Taliban, who one always assumed that they were going to look to this year and next year as their opportunity because you had downsized so much, are there

any indications they're becoming at least somehow discouraged because even though they're killing a lot of Afghan soldiers and police, they're actually not taking a lot of territory? Maybe I'm oversimplifying, but I'm wondering if there's any such indication that they are actually finding the going a little tougher than they expected.

GENERAL CAMPBELL: Yes, I think, you know, we talk numbers, and, again, Afghan numbers and reporting of the number of Taliban or insurgents that have been killed is probably three or four times higher than it was last year. So the Afghan Security Forces take casualties, but, again, they've inflicted a lot of casualties, as well.

I think we do see signs of fracturing in the battlefield from leadership, from lack of supplies, lack of money. They're competing against ISIL or Daesh now in parts of Afghanistan, where Daesh is paying more money to people to come in to Daesh, to take away from the Taliban. So I think they have some significant issues.

And now they found out, if you're a Taliban fighter fighting out in Helmand and you found out the guy that you've been following for the last two years, or you thought you were, that was the spiritual head of your movement has been dead for two and a half years, somebody's been playing you here, why do you continue to fight? And so I think there's an opportunity for both sides here to come together, and I think Afghanistan will take that opportunity.

And I think that the Taliban have to work -- you know, they're tired of fighting. They're tired of the last 14 years. They want to get on with their lives. And I think the only way they're going to do that, because the Afghan government is not going to fall to the Taliban and they realize that now, they've got to come to the peace process.

And so they're not taking territory. They're not meeting any of their strategic-level goals that they set out. They're going to take a district center, but they're going to lose it. They're going to take another district center, but they're going to lose it.

So they're not going to gain terrain that, you know, you talked about the cities, the ring road, they're not going to gain any territory that means a great deal or has value to Afghanistan.

And, again, I think the president from the very first day he took over office, in his inauguration speech, he reached out to the Taliban and said you are brothers and sisters of Afghanistan. You need to come to the peace process. We have to have a political solution. I am opening this up to you.

So, hopefully, this will speed that up. But, again, I think you're going to have folks out there, potentially like Haqqani, that are going to be irreconcilable, that want to continue to fight the fight, and they'll have to deal with them a different way.

MR. O'HANLON: Before the last round, it sounds like you're saying, if I'm hearing you right, that if the Taliban had made any net gains at all this year it's 1 or 2 or 3 percent of the country and population base at most. I don't want to convey a false precision, but I think people have the impression here that it could be a large chunk of the country that's at risk in a way that hadn't been before. I hear you saying that it's a very small percentage.

GENERAL CAMPBELL: Yes, I think it's very small. I couldn't put a percentage on it, but, you know, they're not holding terrain. They're not gaining more terrain. They are taking a district center here or there. They're losing it within 24 hours, within 48 hours. They've lost the support of the people. You know, every poll or survey we take shows the Taliban approval rating is less than 5 percent, I think. So, you know, they don't have the approval of the Afghan people.

They're tired. I mean, the Afghan people are tired of this. They want to move on. They want the same things we want: they want jobs, they want a roof over their heads for their kids, they want their kids to go to school. And that's something

underneath the Taliban they couldn't have. So they don't want the Taliban to come back. And, again, I don't see the Taliban coming back with the National Unity Government.

MR. O'HANLON: So we'll take two more questions. And I think we'll go to the gentleman here and then three rows back, the woman in the red shirt. No, I'm sorry, up front and then the woman with the red shirt.

MR. SCHNEIDER: Mark Schneider, International Crisis Group. General, good to see you again.

Let me push a little bit harder on that question. This year, since January, you've had the highest rate of attacks from the Taliban since 2001. And while it's clear that they haven't been able to take cities, they have been able to essentially threaten a lot more cities outside their normal area of operation. And so they've managed, if you will, to sustain themselves over time and, obviously, the ANSF, as well. But the ANSF, as you said, is stretched thin.

So my question really is, are they going to be able to continue to maintain their ability to provide security unless we maintain our level of support, both in terms of air support, logistics, et cetera, not just through the end of next year, but beyond? And isn't that the only way to get the Taliban to come to the peace table when they see that they're not going to achieve their objectives militarily?

MR. O'HANLON: Then the last question and we'll wrap up. Thank you, Mark.

MS. GROSS: I'm Nasrim Gross. I am a woman's rights activist in Afghanistan. General, thank you so much for being so active with the National Unity Government. I see you almost weekly with either one of them, with either President Ghani or Dr. Abdullah.

You made a remark about the fact that we are getting involved with

Wounded Warriors in Afghanistan and bringing some help to the wounded soldiers. In my work I have seen some impact of not the wounded warrior, but just the returnees to their families. As you know, Afghans marry very young, so most of these soldiers have wives and daughters and sisters, and when they return a lot of the problems happen at home. Is the Wounded Warrior project, will it have an emotional counseling part, not for the wounded warrior, but for the rest of the soldiers? Thank you.

GENERAL CAMPBELL: Thanks for the question. On the first one, again, I think, you know, from a sustainment piece on the Afghan side, the security forces, they're doing, as Mike said, 98, 99 percent of this on their own this fighting season on providing train, advise, and assist at the corps level, at the ministerial level, and tactical TA at some of the Special Operating Force level. So they have this. And they have this at a time when it's been very, very tough and I think they continue to progress.

I don't think that -- I think the Taliban are starting to realize, and I think they realized even before this fighting season, that they needed to do something spectacular this fighting season in order to make a statement to say, hey, we are relevant. But, again, they're not making the gains that they talked about. Are they having high-profile attacks? Yes. And those are very cheap. One or two people with a suicide vest running into a place that houses NGOs, I mean, that's very, very hard to stop.

But I think, again, the Afghan Security Forces continue to improve. The people need to continue to stand up to fight this. The people need to continue to stand up and identify somebody in a village that doesn't belong there. And as they do that and they partner with the Afghan Security Forces, then I don't think they'll be beat.

You mentioned cities. I talk more in terms of villages, you know, their checkpoints, small district centers that are in the middle of nowhere. The only place city-wise that they've even come close is up in Kunduz. And even then, the district center

that was to the west was probably a good 10 kilometers. And the reporting that was going out there which made it sound like Kunduz was going to fall in the next 24 hours, as I talked to the senior leadership, as we took a look through the different sensors that we have, you know, I didn't see that same picture.

So we probably -- well, we and, more importantly, the Afghan -- the way that they get their messaging out probably needs some improvement and we've talked to them about that, and said you really need to get the right message out because when you don't do that, the Taliban have a much better, you know, propaganda machine, just like ISIL does, and they get the message out first. They don't have to tell the truth. And then, all of a sudden, it balloons and it starts picking up steam and, all of a sudden, the whole country's going to fall, the National Unity Government is going to fall. And, again, I haven't seen that.

If you're on the ground in Kunduz and your house is under attack or you lost a loved one, then, of course, you know, you're going to have a completely different outlook on life and a feeling that the government's not supporting you. But from a strategic level that I look at it from, the Taliban are not winning. The Taliban are not making the gains that they need to get. And the Afghan Security Forces, although very, very tough, continue to make progress, and I think they're resilient. And with continued progress and the right leadership and holding people accountable, then I don't think that they'll have issues against the Taliban down the road.

On the Wounded Warriors, ma'am, I would tell you we're in really the nascent stages of trying to build that program. I think it's a great idea of what you talked about, of bringing that emotional piece to the families. We've sent back senior Afghan leaders -- sergeants, majors -- back to the United States to view how we do our programs from all the different services. They've taken those ideas back to Afghanistan. Again,

we're just starting to figure out how to do that everywhere from providing martyr payments to families that lose a loved one to providing health care for, you know, wounded warriors and making sure they get the right care.

They're working very hard on their procedures to take care of people. And I talked about this earlier about not having seven or eight people in the back of a pickup truck driving around and get hit by an IED and you lose all of them. Wear your body armor. Wear your headgear. All you soldiers and police carrying a tourniquet just like U.S. soldiers do. Learning about combat lifesavers and how that works. We're working all those at the same time. And I think as we continue to do that you'll see that the Afghan died of wounds ratio will continue to go down, just like ours did in Iraq and it did in Afghanistan over the years.

They've got a lot of work to do, but I think just that they're talking about taking care of martyred families, they're talking about taking care of Wounded Warrior families, I think that's a good thing. And I think the international community, the UK is stepping up there, the U.S. is stepping up there, and I hope to see other countries step up, as well.

MR. O'HANLON: Matt, any final words from you?

MR. SHERMAN: I'm fine.

MR. O'HANLON: Please join me in thanking these two. (Applause)

[Fantastic.](#)

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