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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good morning, everyone. Happy New Year and welcome to Brookings. I'm Mike O'Hanlon with the Center on 21st Century Security and Intelligence here, and my colleagues, Vanda Felbab-Brown and Che Bolden are also in that center. We all want to join you and welcome our co-panelists, Ann Vaughan and Jason Cone for this discussion today on stability and human security in Afghanistan as we begin a new year, an important year, as they all are, in Afghanistan.

We want to bring a number of different perspectives to this conversation today. We're going to begin with opening comments from each of the panelists. There will be different angles and different approaches, I'm sure, for each. We're going to look forward to your comments and questions in the second half of the 90 minutes.

Previously, we will have discussed the broad state of Afghanistan today, its overall political and military prognosis and trajectory. We will talk about the Afghan people and their well-being, human security, and how the conflict as well as everything else going on there is affecting them. That will be a second main theme.

A third, obviously overlapping theme as well, will be the very important role of non-governmental organizations or NGOs. Again, we are honored here today to have Ann Vaughan and Jason Cone.

Ann Vaughan, if I could say a brief word about each of them, is Policy and Advocacy Director at Mercy Corps. She has worked in this capacity now for some time. She also is a former Peace Corps volunteer in Nicaragua. She worked on Capitol Hill. She's worked with the Friends Committee on National Legislation, a longtime advocate for those in difficult circumstances around the world, and Mercy Corps, of course, is famous for this.

One of the topics I know she will address will be the overall state of the

Afghan people and specifically a lot of the concerns about refugee flows and internally displaced persons.

Jason Cone is the Communications Director for Doctors Without Borders. You all know that Doctors Without Borders also does incredibly important and courageous work around the world, and was really the victim of a terrible tragedy, the most famous tragedy and probably the worst single tragedy of the entire fall of 2015 in Afghanistan, certainly in terms of a tragedy that we all would have liked to have seen avoided, and that was caused by mistakes made by the U.S. military and the Afghan security forces. We are going to discuss that specific issue as well.

Vanda and I are very honored to have our colleague, Che Bolden, joining us here. Let me say a word about him as well and his role in this conversation. He is an active duty Marine Corps Officer with considerable experience in the broader Middle East conflict zones in previous assignments. We're pleased to have him here at Brookings this year. In a sense, it's a year of mid-career education, sabbatical, research, and writing for him, but he draws on this great repository in his own mind and his background of various issues that get to the heart of what happened in Kunduz, the basic question of how do you use military power in as safe a way as possible in a difficult combat environment.

He has experience not only as a pilot but as an individual who helped coordinate and run unmanned aerial systems operations in these conflicts, with a background as well in foreign area operations.

He has a sophisticated understanding of the way in which military operations affect the populations in which they take place.

Vanda is the author of "Aspiration and Ambivalence." When we had an event last year at Brookings, one of our co-panelists described that in words that I would

fully concur with, as "the single best book on the Afghanistan conflict of recent years."

She also wrote her first book called "Shooting Up," which was the nexus of counternarcotics, counterinsurgency, and criminality, and the way in which these kinds of issues and concerns affected conflict zones in places like Afghanistan.

She's done a great deal of field research in a very brave and very forward leading way in Afghanistan and other countries, and therefore, has certainly wrestled with the question of human security, as well as the broader issue of the trends in governance, in armed operations, and in politics in Afghanistan as well.

I'm just going to say one more brief word here of introduction and then pass things off to Vanda. The order we're going to proceed in is Vanda will try to give us a little bit of a lay of the land on Afghanistan today. She was there most recently in the fall. She had an extensive visit in different parts of the country. I had a much shorter visit in December myself. I'm just going to try to guide the conversation, maybe occasionally interject in response to questions.

We're going to start with Vanda. Then we will go to Ann Vaughan, who as I mentioned has a broad concern about the well-being of the Afghan people and what Mercy Corps has been doing here to address the concerns.

Jason Cone will then speak about again, whatever topics he wishes to, but certainly I know the Kunduz tragedy will be paramount on his mind, as it should be for all of us.

Che Bolden will be able to react to that as well as give a broader interpretation of how things stand himself from the U.S. military point of view.

I'm just going to add one final word here, basically to summarize my take on Afghanistan today, which is that there is reason for hope despite it all. I think we're going to hear a lot of reasons to be very worried, a lot of policies that have to change, a

lot of bad things that have been happening, and a lot of reasons to believe this country is very fragile and perhaps even on the precipice of being able to hold it altogether.

I will just note two things that give me some reason for hopefulness, and I'm going to just frame this as -- not, I hope, as Pollyannaish, happy talk -- just a way to remember there are some things to hold on to here.

One thing is for every military set-back we have seen in 2015, we often saw at least some countervailing happier resolution or some degree of cause for hope that the Afghan forces in particular, the Afghan Army and Police, have if nothing else resilience and a willingness to keep trying at this conflict.

They often need help. They're not as far along as they should be. There is still corruption in the ranks. There is still an overly excessive tendency to focus on checkpoint manning rather than offensive operations. There are a lot of problems.

If we look at the case of Kunduz, for all the tragedies that transpired there with the Taliban took over Afghanistan's fifth largest city in the fall, it was largely Afghan forces that took it back within a couple of weeks.

To me, that's some reason for hope. A second reason for hope is the Afghan people themselves. The Asia Foundation does wonderful work. Each year they put out a survey. That survey this year, this past fall, showed a lot of concern among the Afghan people, that they had seen deterioration in their own personal security, much greater fear about their well-being than they had in previous years, and that was all very bad news and very sobering.

They also expressed high confidence in their own army and police, and they expressed, believe it or not, a certain happiness. We have a colleague here, Carol Graham, who studies happiness, and has long pointed out the Afghan people have something about them that's resilience. Maybe "happiness" is a little strong. Certainly,

there is a degree of innate optimism that remains, and that was apparent in the polls as well.

So without further ado and now to proceed again with our three main themes of the overall course of politics and military operations in Afghanistan, the well-being of the Afghan people, and the role of NGOs in that overall effort, let me please turn things over to Vanda.

MS. FALBAB-BROWN: Thank you very much, Mike. Good morning to you all, Happy New Year. It's wonderful to see you here to focus on Afghanistan where so much U.S. and domestic attention, political attention, is devoted to other areas. Afghanistan remains a crucial country, one in which we have made a commitment and where we also raise tremendous hope among the Afghan people. It is very important not to forget that war.

We are still at war and the Afghan people are increasingly in the more intense war that has many indicators that will become even more intense in 2016.

I was enormously pleased to hear Ben Rhodes commenting on President Obama's top 10 foreign policy priorities to include Afghanistan. Ten priorities are many, of course, but Russia was mentioned among them, so focusing and highlighting Afghanistan and resurrecting some very serious international and U.S. thinking about where the country is heading is very important. Thank you all very much for coming.

When I was in Afghanistan, Mike, in September and October, I was asking the Afghan people what makes you happy, what makes you the happiest, what is the good story. One of the answers I got quite frequently was well, we still have our humor. That perhaps indicates the resilience of the Afghan people.

Even that humor is increasingly challenged, and one of the most distressing aspects of 2015 is the tremendous brain drain. We often said that the hope

for Afghanistan, the solution to the country's problems is the young generation that will act differently, that will be committed to the country.

We will perhaps hear from Ann some more about how that aspect of hope is now a challenge or not. After all, Afghan refugees were among the fifth largest group of refugees coming to Europe, at least 70,000 of them, and many precisely, the young people that were to be the hope of the country.

2015 was a very difficult year along every single dimension, security, economics, and political, as I mentioned. 2016 has already kicked off in a really difficult way. Over the past day, we have seen news of the attack on the Indian Consulate in Mazar. The battle is still ongoing.

What is significant about that is that it's clearly designed to derail and end any hope of resurrecting peace talks with the Taliban and the regional peace talks involving Pakistan, China, Afghanistan, and other actors.

I am personally not very hopeful that the talks will get off the ground any time soon, but nonetheless, it is significant that the whiff of the talks being on again immediately result in spoilers trying to undermine it.

The day before, Le Jardin, which is one of the restaurants in Kabul, was attacked. Although the number of casualties was not particularly high, that attack, too, is significant because it is yet another move by the Taliban to really isolate the international community from the Afghan people, to eliminate public and private spaces in which the exchange of deeper understanding, the neutral commitment, could be resurrected.

More and more, the only access, the only communication is in official government buildings, with all the limitations this presents, so there are a few restaurants left, in Kabul, very, very few. Le Jardin was one where I was at in the fall.

The fact that they are increasingly being hit is clearly focused on the

psychological dimension of the war, and perhaps we will hear from Ann and Jason on also, and soon after the suicide bomber near the Kabul Airport, again, apparently no casualties, but nonetheless, 2016 is off with a bang and not a good bang.

What happened broadly last year? Well, the official assessment is that the Taliban controls or has an influence in at least one-third of the country. That number might well be an understatement.

The casualties of the Afghan security forces have gone up significantly, at least 26 percent in 2014, to 7,000 dead and 12,000 injured. Already in 2014 and prior in 2013, the sense was that the level of casualties was not sustainable.

Now we are actually seeing recruitment keeps outpacing the attrition, whether it is from casualties or from many soldiers and policemen going AWOL. One reason why that is happening is, of course, because the economy is in a critical situation. There is no job generation. The only employment available for many is participating in the security forces.

That dynamic has its limitation. At some point, a family will calculate that losing a son to poor medivac, poor logistics, continuing inadequate air support, big loss and job in intelligence capacity, that risking the son is simply not worth it and trying to get out to Europe but also to neighboring countries might be the better solution. The attrition rate while being still compensated for by recruitment is nonetheless very bad and needs to be addressed.

The Kunduz Taliban victory, the Taliban pounce, was months in the making. It was not simply they went down in like September/early October, there was months' preview of the challenges that the province had, and of course, years and years of political build up.

I focus on Kunduz because it's significant. It's really very much about the

political dysfunction that characterizes the country, the exclusionary politics, ethnic and tribal competition often resulting in abuse.

Kunduz for a long time was the snake pit of Afghanistan politics, and it is not surprising that the Taliban was ultimately so successful in the province.

They only had the provincial capital for two weeks, but they did not expect to hold the provincial capital. They were utterly surprised by how well they did in the province. One of the reasons that compounded the difficulties of the government was, of course, the proliferation of the Afghan local police, the officially sanctioned militia, and many other militias that have been involved in power abuse and problematic exclusionary politics in the province.

Interestingly enough, the Taliban for months before Kunduz went down was able to recruit its own version of the Afghan local police in Kunduz, and it was a key factor for both why they got the city and held it so long, but it was also a key factor in how abusive the Taliban behavior was despite the orders from Mullah Mansour, precisely because just like the government cannot control the ALP and other militias, so cannot the Taliban. We are seeing a big proliferation of militias lately in Nangarhar in the response to ISIS.

I want to express my appreciation of the U.S. Government, U.S. military determination not to expand the ALP beyond the currently authorized 30,000, despite huge pressure from the Afghan government to double the size and perhaps even more, which is meant both as a military Band-Aid but also political patronage and appeasement of the power brokers that challenge the government. We have not seen much of a winter lull at all and Helmand has been steadily pounded.

The situation in Helmand has hardly been good despite the fact there are at least 18,000 Afghan soldiers and policemen stationed. In 2016, we can expect that

Kandahar will come under significant pressure; already in 2015, the Taliban was making a lot of maneuvers around the province preparing for a push on Kandahar.

That said, not everything is easy for the Taliban, either. The movement is facing its greatest internal challenges than it has over the past decade, and arguably, even longer than that. The transition from Mullah Omar to Mullah Mansour has not been smooth, has resulted in factionalization of the group, and although Mansour has been able to neutralize some of the key opponents, like Mullah Dadullah, it has come with many costs. Zakir has come out against him. The transition is challenging and we are seeing fragmentation.

In fact, the rise of ISIS in Afghanistan in places like Zabul and Nangarhar and Herat has enabled that factionalization. For the first time, the political cost for disgruntled Taliban leaders are much lower as a result of ISIS.

ISIS is a serious challenge in Nangarhar; the politics both of the government, local government officials, the power brokers, and the Taliban are fascinating. I'll put it aside. Perhaps we can get into it in the Q&A.

I want to focus my last two minutes on speaking about the politics, which I will say are really at the core of Afghanistan's troubles. The Taliban will continue pushing, but the country will not heal itself if it cannot get beyond fractious political in-fighting, all focused on personal power grabs and focus on governance.

Indeed, the year was one of coup-plotting and efforts to undermine already the dysfunctional/non-functional so-called government of national unity, with much of the fight not simply between the two leading men, President Ashraf Ghani and CEO, Abdullah Abdullah, but crucially of the power brokers on the side lines or beyond the two men.

Unfortunately, instead of whatever little winter lull there is being used to

focus on governance, to make some push in improving some of the key deficiencies in the military, to make some push on cleaning up perhaps the bad criminality in politics in Jalalabad, the government is instead stuck with the political in-fighting and the in-fighting with other power brokers.

President Ghani announced that in 2016, the parliamentary and district elections delayed for over a year will take place. We will see. Perhaps so. They will be once again contested, exploded, and they will once again consume much of the political energy.

Perhaps even more problematic, 2016 is also supposed to be the year where the so-called Loya Jirga takes place to adjudicate both major constitutional reform involving the relationship between the CEO and the President, as well as broader electoral reform. Perhaps, according to some, such as CEO Abdullah Abdullah, moving the country to a parliamentary system.

The Loya Jirga will be once again very contested, very challenged, and it is already slowly being manipulated by important power brokers, including former President Karzai as a power grab.

I think what we can easily see in 2016 is a continuing dire economic situation, outflows of people, major Taliban push, and the political system stuck in in-fighting, basic survival and power grabs, instead of focusing on the crucial inescapable national interest in governance in the country.

That leaves the international community in a very difficult situation. Clearly, we want to help Afghanistan. The United States should continue assisting militarily and assisting politically. We also need to demand far greater accountability and far greater focus from Afghan politicians on governing the country as opposed to tearing it to pieces.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, Vanda. Great framing. Now, I'm going to turn things over to Ann Vaughan, Director of Policy and Advocacy at Mercy Corps.

MS. VAUGHAN: Hi, good morning, everyone, Happy New Year. Michael and Vanda, thanks so much, and to Brookings, for hosting this event and continuing to put focus and attention on Afghanistan.

Mercy Corps is a global development and humanitarian organization. We operate in over 40 countries. We have been in Afghanistan since 1986, over 30 years now. We're working with Afghans to help improve their lives through a wide range of community based agricultural and economic development programs.

Over the last few years, we have reached 2.5 or so million Afghans in trying to help them improve their livelihoods and security, including food security.

We work in the north, east and south of Afghanistan, including Kandahar, Helmand, and Kunduz. We use what is called the community acceptance model of security and community mobilization implementation approach, which is development speak for we work closely with communities to make sure we are hearing their needs and working on projects that they think will improve their lives.

It is also working with communities' security, to help ensure that we are able to be safe working in some rather difficult and challenging environments.

I agree a lot with Vanda's assessment of what's going on on the security front. It's definitely weighing on the minds and hearts of Afghans. The economy, just to put a little more focus on that, has taken a downward turn over the last couple of years in Afghanistan. Jobs and unemployment have -- jobs have decreased and unemployment has increased pretty significantly.

It's increasing the drive for Afghans to make a very difficult decision, to decide if they want to stay in Afghanistan or travel to Europe or other locations. Some of

this stems from a lot of the levels of numbers of millions of Afghans that are living below the poverty line, and then the thought and feelings that the economy isn't getting better with security being so difficult, the investment climate is pretty difficult in Afghanistan right now.

We're seeing this mass, another wave of human migration of Afghans. Until last year, 2014, actually, Afghans were the largest global refugee population at about 2.6 million people. The Syrian refugee crisis has now put Syria in the lead of number of refugees around the world, but that's still about 10 percent of Afghan's population are refugees. There are about 50,000 Afghan refugees that were in Europe last year, which I think is close to the second or third number of displaced people that have moved to Europe from other countries.

One of the things that we would like to focus on, it's not just refugees, it's not just the people that are on the doors of Europe that are part of the problem. One of our Afghan staff made a very poignant point, that it's the rich people that can move to Europe, which we don't normally think of refugees as being wealthy, but most of these that are going to Europe are not, but relative to those that are in Afghanistan and have become what's called "internally displaced," or an "IDP," the situation of IDPs in Afghanistan is very difficult.

You have some of the highest unemployment rates. Children are not in school when they have been displaced and have to move from one area to another. We are looking at about 1 in 30 Afghans is now internally displaced, or about 940,000 people.

Most of that displacement is caused by conflict, but as you know, Afghanistan is a country prone to natural disasters. We will see spikes in both conflict related displacements as well as when there are natural disaster hits. People are forced to flee to other parts of the country.

Just sort of an example of this, in the increase in IDPs, we have a vocational and training program in Kandahar, and we are seeing -- it is supposed to help refugees from Pakistan who are returning to Afghanistan, help them get back on their feet again, but we are seeing even more need and more IDPs knocking on the door and saying we need help, we need jobs.

We are also seeing more applicants for these positions that have higher literacy levels than average. Literacy levels in southern Afghanistan are high in the first place. It speaks to the situation of the economy when you have folks who have gotten levels of education that are coming back and trying to get vocational training in a secure job in this sort of increasing pressure cooker that Afghans are feeling with where they have less job opportunities, and they don't see hope for a lot of job opportunities.

While we see this massive flow of Afghans both externally and then also internally, it sounds like a humanitarian crisis, and that is what's on the front page of the newspapers all the time, screaming about humanitarian crisis.

We as an NGO that's been on the ground for a long time and other NGOs, I think, would agree, we're actually looking at a long term development crisis. One of the reasons people are leaving is that they don't see there are development -- there are possibilities within their communities, and specifically with IDPs, we see a lot of rural internally displaced people moving from rural areas into urban centers, and something we will see probably over the next decade or so in Afghanistan is this real change shift to urbanization, including large pockets of poverty within urban centers where we have folks fleeing from the countryside trying to find and make a living and make a wage within cities.

We would argue and push in Afghanistan and donor capitals around the world for more sustainable solutions for all of Afghans, because you need to increase the

full level of development in Afghanistan, but also specifically for displaced Afghanistan's, and we need to pay more attention, not less, on the systemic problems which is making Afghanistan an unattractive place for young people to live, grow up, and work.

Some of the underlying issues, even if we had security fixed 100 percent tomorrow, knock on wood, if security was fixed, we would still face three major developmental challenges that need to be addressed for Afghans to be able to have development and further prosperity.

That would be addressing one, working on addressing the depletion of the natural resource base. Droughts in Afghanistan are increasing. There is land erosion, bad land management, that is making it harder for people to stay on their farms and work and earn a living and feed their families.

I would recommend for folks interested in this and climate change issues, the Jarawa put forth to the Paris climate talks a summary of what the different challenges they are facing in Afghanistan in the long term, looking at again the droughts, and how do we start doing sustainable development in some of the more agricultural areas of the country, so addressing the depletion of the natural resource base, and also recognizing that the Afghan population is going to double by 2030.

We have a youth bulge. We have high unemployment, and need to think about creative ways to get jobs and deal with the food insecurity that's going to increase with the growing number of Afghans.

Lastly, something that if you talk to your average Afghan will come up in conversation pretty quickly, is the frustration and annoyance with your chronic energy problems that hamstring both economic development but that just make life more difficult on a daily basis for Afghans.

It's like depending on if you're in rural or urban areas, but in the rural

areas, it's some of the worse saturation of electricity in the world, which certainly makes it hard to study if you're a child at night, trying to go to school.

Something that Mercy Corps and other NGOs are looking at is how do we address these underlying issues, how can we support Afghans and their goals and quests to try to improve their country and develop further.

We spend a lot of time working on technical and vocational training. We had a program in Helmand that trained over 22,000 men and women, that are now working in Kandahar in a similar program.

It's something important because I know we will get a question at some point about why are we throwing more money in Afghanistan, it is a black hole pit of money, but if we do development right, if we get this right, and we go back to basically development best practices, working with communities, and not just throwing money at a problem, but looking at the sustainability of our interventions.

So, what that basically means is you can charge a little bit for people participating in technical and vocational training, pay a little bit of sort of your dues, to try to keep these technical training centers open past when donor dollars are there.

You want to work closely with the government and ministry to make sure you have the right curriculum. Most important, and something we would advocate strongly for, is we need to be taking more of a market based approach to our interventions.

Don't just train somebody, be it handicrafts or weaving, it is what are the market needs. You go out and you do a market assessment and say hey, there aren't enough cell phone repair folks. Everyone in Afghanistan have cell phones. How do we fix that?

Do we train folks in motorcycle repair activities? You go out and make

sure there's a gap in employment in these areas and then you train to fill that gap so people can actually have a job and they don't have the expectation going in spending their time and money training and coming out on the other end without a job. That would be even more frustrating.

Looking at that sort of market based assessment is extremely important. What this means for real Afghans and people working and benefitting from these programs is we had one female beneficiary who came from the west of Afghanistan about four years ago, and she's gone through our training program in Kandahar.

Within just a couple of months, is now back, having a living wage and able to support her family. She's actually bringing in more money sometimes than her husband, which is kind of exciting and be able to support her family. She doesn't want to return back to where she is, so she's been basically resettled. You can do that through smart economic development activities.

Looking at the energy sector, again, very marginal access to electricity in the rural areas. One of the reasons that Mercy Corps -- we would encourage others to pay attention to the energy sector -- economic development and electricity are intertwined.

There has been a whole lot of talk about pipelines and things along those lines that are developing broader grid systems in Afghanistan, but we are just real pleased that the Afghan government, I think it was in October or November, adopted an Afghanistan renewable energy policy, which calls for by 2032, 95 percent of its energy to come from renewable sources.

That's an exciting policy environment to have a push for innovative programming and create more job opportunities and help get people plugged up to electricity.

We have actually started working with Bost University in Helmand, which we selected through a competitive process. We have partnered with them to pilot what is called the "PV system," and to reduce the reliance on diesel energy. While the price of gas is low here, it's still incredibly expensive if you're only making $4.00 a day to spend $1.00 a day fueling be it your house or the university.

With the savings avoided from having to spend all that money on diesel fuel costs, the university is going to pay back their costs to Mercy Corps, where we can go and help invest and do similar projects and create sort of a virtuous loop and cycle of investment.

While the investment opportunity in Afghanistan may not be on the top of your favorite Wall Street banker, there is some openness and could be some interesting opportunities for sort of social impact investing, to help increase both the livelihoods and development goals for Afghans.

Again, I'm sure we will get a question on why throw good money after bad. I think to remember in Afghanistan and from the NGO perspective and from having been there for several decades, we recognize that with the dumping of billions of dollars into development programs, there have been a lot of mistakes.

One thing our team has looked at and seen over the last few years is people need to get their roles straight. There is a role for the government. There is a role for the private sector that needs to be fostered, and then there is a role for NGOs to help what is called "reach the last mile," help the most vulnerable, help those that are suffering from PTSD.

We talk a lot about Syrians and the Lost Generation, Syrians with post-traumatic stress. Afghans have been at war now for decades, and that toll is a pretty serious toll on people's psyches. Where can NGOs play a role in sort of supporting that.

How do we help build up the capacity of other service providers to make sure we can have a sustainable transition.

Ten years from now, we are not all still sitting here and talking about the under-development of Afghanistan, but we have seen some actual strides being made toward more sustainable development, and not have to have Afghans make the very difficult choice of deciding if they want to stay in their country with no job and insecurity, or having to migrate, which can be a dangerous trip.

Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, Ann. I know we all join you in thanking your colleagues and all the folks that work for Mercy Corps and all the different NGOs who have been so dedicated in Afghanistan, not the least, Doctors Without Borders, and Jason Cone is going to speak next. He's the Executive Director of Doctors Without Borders in the United States. Jason, over to you.

MR. CONE: Thanks, Mike. Thanks for having us for this event. Doctors Without Borders, we work in about 70 countries, worldwide, we are an international medical humanitarian organization.

We have worked in Afghanistan starting in 1980 through 2004. In 2004, five of our staff were assassinated in the Badghis province, and we left the country for five years, returning in 2009.

I think as many of you know, one of our trauma hospitals in Kunduz province was bombed by U.S. forces on October 3. That led to the death of 42 of our staff and patients. At the time of the bombing, we had shared our coordinates with U.S. NATO and Afghan forces, the GPS coordinates. We had also worked in that hospital for four years and it was a well-known structure.

General Campbell after the U.S. investigation into the bombing

acknowledged that we in fact were on the "No Strike List" in the U.S. military system.

This panel comes at sort of a good time where we are obviously incredibly concerned about the deteriorating security situation for which Vanda has talked a lot about. We continue to operate hospitals in Helmand, specifically in Lashkar Gah, as well as in Kabul and Khost. Those facilities treat about 16,000 people, among admitting people, and about 2,700 deliveries of newborns.

As we have heard from Vanda, the security situation obviously deteriorated quite significantly. In Kunduz at the time of the bombing in the hospital, we had treated over 100 war wounded in that facility. The situation remains to be quite difficult, obviously, in Helmand province, where we have teams in Lashkar Gah, working in a hospital there as well.

I think what we have seen, and I think what has been outlined quite clearly by Vanda, is this growing deterioration over the last two years in terms of security in many of the contested areas, and this increased conflict has only heightened the lack of public services, in particular, health services to populations in rural areas, particularly those in those contested areas I was just talking about.

In 2014, as sort of the draw down had begun, we had actually issued an access to health care survey that had been conducted in a number of provinces where we were working. I think having been in touch with my teams, the feeling is the figures from those surveys remain relevant today, if not the situation is actually quite worse.

That survey revealed that in fact 1 in 5 of the patients we interviewed had a family member or close friend who had died due to lack of access to health care. You had people who were unable to reach health care and who were dying as a result.

For those who reached our hospitals in the four locations that I mentioned, 40 percent of those patients faced real challenges in terms of fighting, land

mines, check points, being harassed, on their journey to reach the hospital.

The patients' testimonies also exposed the wide gap between the health care services that existed on paper and those that actually were functioning in the areas that they were, and I think some of those findings have been reinforced by the Special Inspector General for the Afghan reconstruction where he found there had been hospitals that have been developed over the years for which the GPS coordinates for those facilities didn't match anywhere, in fact, some of them weren't even in Afghanistan.

One of the three main barriers that we found that resulted in the death of some of these patients were really lack of money and the high costs, particularly to get access to both private and public health structures. The long distances that people had to travel, and obviously, the impact of the armed conflict that is ongoing in the country.

A lot of the patients actually bypass their closest public health facility during a recent illness because they really didn't have the confidence that facility had the supplies that were needed. That could have been based on past experience in those facilities.

For those who managed to reach a health facility, various obstacles had to be overcome, and the main obstacle for one of two of our patients was related to the conflict.

I think it just illustrates and we can see this again in places like Helmand and Kunduz where the situation has obviously deteriorated that much more.

With the bombings of our facilities and the destruction of our hospital in Kunduz, we see there, there is no access to trauma care. They will have to go to places like Mazar-i-Sharif, which is further away, there is about 300,000 people in that population who have lost access to health care.

It remains to be seen what happens in the coming weeks with the

intense fighting in Helmand province. We know a lot of the area has been taken over by armed opposition groups, and we know how difficult it has been to provide health services in those areas, not just for MSF, but for other organizations as well.

As I alluded to, cost remains to be a huge barrier for patients. Two in five people have been forced to borrow money or sell goods to obtain health care during a recent illness, is a finding of the survey. That is about 44 percent of the patients. Just overall finding sort of quality of care in these facilities has been quite challenging. As I said, those have been reinforced by other studies as well.

We're in a situation, I think, here, particularly in the last couple of months, as I think has been outlined as well by Vanda, and you see the chronic issues that Ann talked about from an economic standpoint, in the context of escalating violence and multiplication of armed groups. It is not just the Taliban but other groups that are involved. There has been heavy fighting obviously between government and international forces.

It is all the more important that humanitarian organizations, I think, provide impartial assistance and armed groups respect the basic rules of war. I think there has been a lot of challenges with respect to the blending of both humanitarian aid and development programs since the real intervention started after 2001, after some of the engagements there, this sort of blending of efforts that are meant to stabilize the country, so to speak, and support the Afghan government comes in many ways at a cost of providing assistance to people in areas that are not controlled by the government. Those services are not trusted in any way by the opposition forces.

As I alluded to, with the bombing of our hospital in Kunduz, we have serious concerns about the use of force by coalition forces in Afghanistan, and for that matter, coalitions that are operating in places like Yemen and Syria as well, in terms of

what decisions and what processes are being followed to distinguish between civilian and military targets.

I think there is an expanded footprint of unconventional forces, special forces, in many different places, both in Afghanistan and elsewhere. There will be, I think, questions and challenges for humanitarian organizations operating in areas that are front lines, in terms of the rules of engagement that are applied in those areas, particularly when they are calling in air strikes.

That's an ongoing concern for us, not just in Kunduz. We have those similar concerns, I think, as well in Lashkar Gah as the fighting intensifies in and around the city.

I think it's critical, and we have said this a lot since the bombing, it's critical for all armed groups to understand that treating the wounded is not protecting material support to the enemy. This is a responsibility of health care workers under the laws of war, and it must be respected by all parties of the conflict.

That is Basics 101 of the Geneva Conventions, under international humanitarian laws, medical facilities retain a protected status, as long as they are exclusively devoted to the care of the wounded and the sick.

Those laws of war, they bind both sides. They make it responsible that armed groups have to respect the sanctity of those facilities and not enter them with weapons, something that we enforce, not just in our facilities in Afghanistan but around the world, and it also makes it incumbent upon the health care workers in those facilities to make sure they treat everyone based on need and based on their medical needs alone, not because of their political or religious affiliation.

I think the deteriorating security conditions in many parts of the country just underscores the need again for humanitarian organizations to get back to basics in

terms of reinforcing impartial and independent access to care.

It's going to be very important in the coming year if not years. This is not only important for their security on the ground. I know it's incredibly important for our teams' security on the ground, but also for the capacity to provide assistance and care across front lines, not only in government controlled areas, but in other parts of the country.

It's really critical as we see in the next year the ability to access victims of the conflict that we know will be found not just in those capitals where are sort of islands of assistance that we see in Afghanistan, but also across the front lines where they are armed opposition and other forces in heavy fighting. Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: Jason, thank you very much. Che, I'm going to turn things over to you now. I know there is a lot to respond to. Just to set the context, of course, we have had this terrible tragedy, and General Campbell has taken responsibility, and clearly, there is an ongoing investigation as well.

We also have a situation where U.S. and NATO military personnel have been trying perhaps harder than in any previous war in history to be careful in the use of force. It actually was a controversy at the time when General McChrystal stepped down and General Petraeus replaced him, as to whether McChrystal, who was a famous special operations warrior of great renown, but people questioned whether he had put too many restrictions on the use of force by NATO personnel, not obviously in the context of a hospital, but in the context of when they could fire at a location where Taliban were suspected.

How do you look at the overall conflict both from a tactical perspective of Kunduz and what might have happened there, and these kinds of tradeoff's, but also more broadly, the state of the war in Afghanistan?

MR. BOLDEN: Thanks, Mike. First, good morning to everybody. I have to thank Jason because I think he may have felt sorry for me because all the discussion prior to this was development and things outside the military, and otherwise, my purpose would be pointless.

I also have to say first off, I'm a Fellow here. I'm not representing anybody in the Department of Defense or in any other capacity other than I'm an active duty officer. These thoughts are mine. I have had free license to kind of think intellectually, which is also a bit of a misnomer because I'm a Marine. (Laughter)

With respect to some of these issues that have been brought up, Afghanistan represents a lot of different challenges, particularly from a military perspective, but it's not unlike a lot of other areas that we operate in today across the spectrum because the challenge of the ungoverned spaces makes it very difficult to apply the laws of armed conflicts, to apply the Geneva Conventions, when you have a set of challenges that don't necessarily fit the conventional, you know, state on state actor type of scenario that we are familiar with throughout history.

In cases like the Kunduz strike, I can tell you from my firsthand experience that a) it's very, very unfortunate, and our thoughts and prayers go out to those who were victims of that, but I can also say it was almost unequivocally not intentional, without being an apologist for what happened, as air crew, as trained air crew in the United States Armed Forces, one of the first things we consider is that collateral damage is going to happen.

Again, not being an apologist, I can also tell you that a lot of people refer to the "fog of war," but I'll just say the "fog of chaos," and going back to ungoverned space.

When things are very ill-defined, it's very difficult in the spur of the

moment to decide to act in a manner that is going to have such finality.

As an example, when I was in Afghanistan -- and my information is dated because I was there in 2010 -- I had dual responsibilities. One, being a planner, and the other being combat air crew on a limited basis. The one strike that I participated in in 2010 took about two and a half hours.

For people that think some of these things happen, you know, without thought or without preparation, I will tell you that you are mistaken or misguided, and there is more information out there.

In this particular case, it was looking for one individual, and the information that was coming in was from a variety of different sources and disparate places. You have to decide as to what information is correct and accurate and what information is incorrect.

I won't go into Kunduz, because I don't know enough about it other than what I've read on the Internet, but I will say that General Campbell has probably spoken the most directly and said it was a mistake and there were errors, both human and mechanical.

Again, it goes back to when you're relying on human beings to make decisions like this, depending on who you talk to or who you deal with, we're beings of organization. We don't thrive well in chaos. When there is a lack of clarity as to what's happening, it makes it very difficult to make the right decision sometimes.

The situation in Afghanistan, I can say I'm kind of ambivalent, and not to be cruel or callous about it. I don't really know what to expect. A question was asked of me earlier, you know, do I feel good about Afghanistan, do I feel bad about Afghanistan. I don't feel either because it's a chaotic situation, and there has to be some type of order that comes out of that chaos.

The combination of having non-governmental organizations and the international community showing an interest in Afghanistan is promising. The problem with that is there has to be some type of a buy-in from Afghanistan.

In situations where you have the Afghan national security forces and the Afghan national police responsible for providing stability and security, you kind of have to question how much buy-in the Afghan people are going to have. If they don't feel safe, then they're not going to buy into these things, and they will take the services that are provided by various non-governmental organizations at face value. It's here today, it could be gone tomorrow.

That doesn't provide them any impetus whatsoever to provide information when someone who is there under otherwise nefarious circumstances is in their midst. You find things that happen where you have potentially a bad strike. All that information is just not known.

Hopefully, I kind of demonstrated with the one strike that I participated in that all the information isn't available until after the fact. So, one of the things that I feel is incumbent upon any military organization when they go into a scenario of ungoverned space is they need to find out who's out there and who's doing the work.

Until I was a mid-level officer, I knew very little about non-governmental organizations. My job was learn now to fly an F-18 and fly it well, or learn how to fly an unmanned aircraft and fly it well.

It hasn't been since I've been more or less a staff officer that I started to learn about the vitality and the presence of some of these organizations and what they represent.

I guess one of the things I'll close with before we get into some more questions is everybody needs to kind of remember that in a place of ungoverned space,

stability and security is probably the first thing you need to think about, and that's not always a military solution. It is also not the responsibility of the non-governmental organizations to do so. It's the responsibility of the people of the place and what they desire in their future.

Before I get into the rambling aspects of it, I guess I'll ask a question back to some of the other participants. When you go into an ungoverned space like that, how often do you put at the top of your priority list to coordinate with those that provide stability and security to hopefully avoid instances like the Kunduz strike, or operations or times where Mercy Corps is not able to go someplace because it's just not a safe situation?

Is there an active dialogue with some of those that provide for those services?

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, Che. Jason, Ann, and Vanda, I'm going to give each of you a chance to respond if you wish to Che's very interesting and provocative question, and anything else you have heard.

I'm not going to try to play any other role at the moment as moderator, just give each person a chance to make a brief response, and then we are going to go to all of you, we will have a little more than half an hour for your questions.

Maybe I will start with Ann and just work down, please.

MS. VAUGHAN: Sure, thanks. Thank you for that, appreciate it. I would just like to stress that one of the concerns that we have in operating in ungoverned spaces, as you said, is any perception that working at all with military or security forces that can put our staff and our beneficiaries at risk. We have to be very careful about any sort of open dialogue.

I was with USAID in Afghanistan in Kandahar City from 2011 to 2012.

We would always sort of push back on military, no, you cannot roll up to a school, it puts that school at risk because then there's a target on the back of that school.

To answer your question, there are actually a set of guidelines. I think they are actually called Guidelines for engagement between security forces and non-governmental organizations.

They were set and blessed by DoD, State Department, and InterAction, the umbrella NGO organization, that lays out instead of as someone working in Kandahar City, I'm not going to call or show up at a military base but work through a chain of command so that I am not in any way colluding with security forces, because that puts my staff and my beneficiaries and my mission at risk.

That set of guidelines has been something we as the international NGO community has leaned heavily on. It's a bit old. It's from 2006 or 2008, I want to say, and took a long time to put together, but it is an invaluable sort of pamphlet to make sure that we are not further put at risk by looking like we are engaging with members of the military on either side. Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: Jason?

MR. CONE: I think about half of our programs are inactive due to conflict zones, and a big central part of our security and risk management is being directly in touch with combatants and explaining the reasons why we are there.

In the case of Kunduz, when the fighting started earlier that week, and in the last week of September we re-shared the coordinates of our facilities, kind of reiterated that we were remaining an active civilian hospital in those situations.

I think the challenge is we are seeing more and more kind of coalition forces with a multiplicity of different forces, sometimes either non-state actors or state actors, with different chains of command, different planes flying in different places. We

see this in Syria. We see this in Yemen with the Saudi led coalition. Two of our facilities were bombed since October there in the area.

It is a huge concern of this so-called sort of ungoverned spaces and how to retain the safety of humanitarian organizations on the front line, and in particular, obviously, the patients. The vast majority of our staff working in these areas are Afghans, and they are taking incredible risks to do this work, and they lost their lives in the case of Kunduz, but continue to work on the front lines. I know at Mercy Corps, you guys still have people in Kunduz today.

I think it is the constant challenge of security and management of the risks. I would say you joke about sort of being a Marine, but we engage a lot with U.S. forces and different academies, and probably would like to do more of that, to kind of have those debates. I think there are very strong intellectual and ethical debates about the use of force in the context of the current wars of today, the Geneva Conventions.

I think that is a real question we have about sort of what rules are being applied. I think they pertain not just to U.S. forces but forces around the world in terms of are those conventions still being adhered to in the context we are living in today, with the kinds of conflicts that we have.

It's important for humanitarian organizations, it is important for medical facilities to know whether those rules still apply. One of the challenges that we face as much as General Campbell has been very aggressive in the investigation of this incident is that today and probably for until we know otherwise, we don't know what rules of engagement have been changed or what have been broken, as in this case.

It leaves us with a lot of questions, but also the desire for direct dialogue to have those discussions because they are essential not just to Afghanistan but basically everywhere else that humanitarian organizations are operating in today in conflict.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Vanda?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: (Inaudible)

MR. BOLDEN: A couple of things that came out of that. For those of you that are familiar with General Petraeus, he likes to use this term "pentathlete." So, the military a lot of times nowadays is finding itself in these spaces that we didn't sign up for, if you will, but was out of necessity.

I have contemporaries that have been mayors of cities in a variety of different places. I'm not a city governance type of person. What that leads me to say is one of the things, Ann, that you had mentioned is you tried very hard not to give the appearance of colluding with security forces.

First off, security forces are not always military, but secondly, by virtue of necessity, it may be that anybody who is interested in helping some place like Afghanistan or any other ungoverned spaces, as I call it, has to start to learn and become somewhat of a pentathlete as well, in that the singular focus of your organization may not be enough.

In a place like Afghanistan or some of the other places where we are, there is a need for people to understand that stability and security is not someone else's responsibility.

The only thing I would leave you with in that regard is the association may not always be a bad one because if whoever you are trying to serve is in need, their greatest need may seem to be health care or resources, but in reality and a lot of times, it's that security and stability that can be provided by someone with their help.

It might be that your organizations might need to start thinking about branching out from the one singular mission of what it is they are there to provide.

MR. O'HANLON: We have a lot on the table. I'm looking forward to your

thoughts. What I'd like to request is please wait for me to call on you, wait for a microphone, identify yourself, ask just one question. If you wish, you can target it towards one of the panelists. That would be helpful where possible, but not essential.

I'll begin with two questions at a time, and the two gentlemen here in rows three and four, and then we will respond as a group.

MR. HAYWARD: My name is Fred Hayward. I work for the University of Massachusetts. I've been working in Afghanistan for the last seven years with the Ministry of Higher Education.

I want to pick up on the point -- it's part a point and part a question -- about buy-in. I think one of the things you see in the press all the time is the failure of Afghans to buy in. I think that's not the case. I've been working with the Ministry of Higher Education in Afghanistan for the last seven years.

It's one of the few success stories, but probably unfortunately, it hasn't gotten much press, but higher education has really been transformed in the last five years, and that's because people have bought in to making changes in higher education, have put their lives on the line and been threatened in the process of doing that, and have gone about their duty in 30 years of war.

Forty percent of the students are suffering from clinical levels of post-traumatic stress disorder or other mental health. Nonetheless, the system has transformed.

I think it's important, and I think you see this, to understand there are an awful lot of Afghans every day who are putting their lives on the line to make the system better, and although the problems of corruption and chaos are tremendous, on the other hand, none of the kinds of improvements that happen, moving in higher education, for example, from a system where it was the old boys network on who got hired and who got

promoted, to a system in which it is now based on how good you are.

Similarly, accreditation has been put in place and a number of other things. These are the things that don't make the press because they're not exciting, but they have been phenomenal transformations in higher education in Afghanistan in the last eight years.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Not a question but still a worthy comment.

MR. SERAJ: Happy New Year to you. My name is Abdul Seraj. I'm the President of the National Coalition for the Tribes of Afghanistan. I'm an Afghan-American. I have worked in Afghanistan for the last 14 years.

I first start with you, Mr. Boden. I first would like to pay my condolences to the 2,000 plus lives that have been lost in Afghanistan from my heart and from the hearts of my tribes. I would like to extend that sympathy to you and to the government.

You always put stability and then security. In Afghanistan, it is the reverse, security then stability. The question that our people and the tribes I represent ask and are very concerned about is what happened to the friendship between Afghanistan and the United States of America.

Why is the United States of America, after pushing the government to sign the BSA agreement, is not doing anything to protect Afghanistan against outside invasion of the country. Afghanistan is not at war with Iran. Afghanistan is not at war with Pakistan. Afghanistan is not at war with anybody. There is a war, that is, a battle, that's being fought by foreign forces, by foreign individuals, by foreign terrorists in Afghanistan, using Afghanistan as a battlefield. This is what is driving the people of Afghanistan out of Afghanistan.

I want to thank you for your sacrifices, Ms. Vaughan. I work with the

people, every single tribe in Afghanistan. My grandfather ruled Afghanistan, 36 wives, 62 children, and I'm related to every tribe. (Laughter)

I say this, my question is why is the United States not doing more to stop Pakistan from interfering in Afghanistan?

MR. O'HANLON: I'm going to take one more question since the first was more of a comment.

MR. GLOOK: Thank you. My name is Peter Glook. As I listened to everybody's comments, I kept thinking to myself what you're saying about Afghanistan in terms of political corruption or dysfunctional government, economic under development, lack of security, lack of local buy-in, you could be saying the same thing about Iraq.

So, my question is this, what does that tell us, that is in the United States, about the very limited capacity of an outside government to affect meaningful change in these societies? Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Vanda, do you want to begin with the Pakistan question, if you wish, and then we can go to others for the second question.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Sure. I'd like to respond a little bit to the second one as well on the comparison of Afghanistan and Iraq. I do think there are meaningful differences, and that is one of the reasons why the United States should persevere.

I was very pleased by the President's decision not to reduce troops. I welcome the German decision to in fact increase the number of troops. Nonetheless, both countries highlight -- both Iraq and Afghanistan -- highlight precisely the difficulties of effecting changes in governance and political mindset.

Here is where it links also to the question of Pakistan. Afghanistan or Afghan's favorite explanation/excuse for all the country's problems are Pakistan. There is no doubt that Pakistan has been supporting and continues to support both the Haqqani

network and the Taliban.

However, much of the reason why the different armed groups, including the Taliban, have so much traction is because of misgovernance by Afghan power brokers and politicians.

The United States, the international community more broadly, has been very ineffective in demanding accountability. The past year is a prime example of a country in dire need, a lot of things going badly. Once again, the international community has not been able to refocus Afghan politicians, not just the government, but many on the outside, focus on governance or else your country is going under. The political in-fighting has gone on.

I think that involves making some tough decisions of cutting some aid that will be meaningful. We also talk about setting red lines, whether it's in development or in the political processes, and when the red lines are violated over and over, okay, next time, we really mean it, it's time that we start meaning it now. It's for the good of the Afghan people.

Now, the reason we are able to say that Afghanistan and Pakistan are different -- I'm sorry -- that Afghanistan and Iraq are different is as Mike said at the beginning, there is buy-in into the Afghan Army and Afghan Police than Iraq. Both countries suffer from factionalization problems, much is the reason why Kunduz went down, because of corruption and political patronage and ethnic politics in appointments of middle level officers in the province that have gone on for a number of years prior to the fall of this year.

Nonetheless, there is more of a sense of cohesion, more of a sense of buy-in, much more of a wherewithal to fight, and we need to appreciate that and help the Afghan military and the Afghan people to maintain that wherewithal.

With respect to Pakistan, Pakistan has been the most difficult foreign policy nut for the United States to crack over the past decade. The U.S. Government has gone through many efforts to cajole, talk, appease, pressure Pakistan into behaving different in Afghanistan. It has failed to do so both because Pakistan interests in Afghanistan continue to be different than ours because of their expectations of what will happen in Afghanistan are different than ours, but because also of Pakistan's inability.

We need to continue working with Pakistan, both because of our other interests, far more important interests than Afghanistan, but also crucially because of Afghanistan.

We will not be able to radically alter Pakistan's behavior, and we need to accept that and Afghanistan needs to accept that. I think President Ghani did accept it and was very courageous in putting on the table a tremendous amount of his political capital, much of it was burned in ashes by the continuing Haqqani attacks, in reaching out to Pakistan.

At the end of the day, knowing that Pakistan will continue to be difficult and more than Cold War between Iran and Saudi Arabia, those start impacting Afghanistan perniciously more and more, Afghanistan's politicians need to focus on governance in Afghanistan and not look abroad for an excuse it for all of their problems.

MR. BOLDEN: I've been educated in various places, and one of the things that taught us about the power of analogies, and they're really bad, because you can take an analogy and you can make it work for whatever you want. The problem with that is no two places are the same.

To compare Iraq and Afghanistan, very much like Vanda said, it's a difficult correlation, so I would just caution against that.

Sir, to your point, I can't speak to policy. I'm a tool of policy. I'm not a

policy maker. However, as Vanda was pointing at, one of the issues that I see from both my perspective then and now is you have to have a cohesive effort of governance in order to make a stand against something like infiltration in that manner.

You mentioned, and I'm falling into this mirror imaging trap myself, but you mentioned that you represent a number of different tribes. Well, the number of different tribes have different interests. Afghanistan as a nation --

MR. SERAJ: No, sir. I don't agree with you.

MR. BOLDEN: Okay.

MR. SERAJ: There isn't a single problem between any tribe in Afghanistan.

MR. BOLDEN: I didn't say there was a problem between the tribes.

MR. SERAJ: Afghanistan has been in existence for 5,000 years.

MR. O'HANLON: Sir, I'm going to end this because for one thing, there's no microphone, so the audience at home is going to be frustrated. Why don't we now move to Jason and Ann on this. I want to have time for a few more rounds. Anything you want to do by way of comparison, especially with Iraq and Afghanistan? I know you operate in a number of areas.

MR. CONE: Yes. I would hazard to make comparisons. I do know we have similarly problems of real lack of assistance in Iraq, particularly in the areas affected by the fighting and the Islamic State controlled areas. In terms of lack of assistance where it's most needed, sure, there's a parallel there, but I would not enter in terms of comparing the political situations.

MS. VAUGHAN: On Iraq and Afghanistan, I just wanted to highlight we are actually putting out a study tomorrow on some research we have done inside Iraq, and it also looks at how civil society -- the importance of civil society in improving Iraqi's

feelings of working with the government, and that civil society can play an important conflict resolution role that is important to look at, our investments in civil society in Iraq have just gone down dramatically. There is a need to keep supporting civil society, both in Afghanistan and in Iraq.

On Afghanistan, we put out a report a year ago February called "Youth and Consequences" that looked at what was driving youth to violence. One of the biggest findings we found was that a lot of it was governance grievances, why isn't the government behaving or responding to the needs of what I as a youth feel is important.

So, focusing on those things makes sense for the governments to be looking at and paying more attention to youth, especially displaced youth, but youth throughout Afghanistan.

Not exactly a parallel, but just some research we have done, pretty heavy quantitative and qualitative research, that governments should be looking at what the youth are saying and feeling, and a lot of times it does relate back to gaps in governance.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay. Let's take a second round. This time, I think I'll begin further back, just to make sure I don't overlook folks in the distant parts of the room. I see a hand about two rows from the very end, we will begin there, and then we will come up two rows ahead of that.

QUESTIONER: Thank you, thank you to the panel. My question is why are we appeasing Pakistan? What benefit do we get from Pakistan? I'm biased, my support is for my brother from Afghanistan. I'm from Balochistan.

QUESTIONER: I think we have to all take cognizance of the fact of what is the real reason for the instability, the basic root cause for the instability in Afghanistan before we can really understand and appreciate and seek to approach a solution that it

would be really sustainable in the future?

MR. O'HANLON: I'm going to take a quick crack at the first question and see who wants to respond to that as well as the second, partly because Vanda and Che already did a good job on the Pakistan question, so I'm just going to add to their wisdom.

I think that if you look at where we are in 2016 -- I'm going to frame it in the following way: we have a different set of options that we could think about developing for the next American President because our dependence on Pakistan for logistics to access Afghanistan is not quite what it was.

I'm not going to necessarily go quite as far as the two questioners and be quite as critical of Pakistan, but I share a lot of your concerns. I do think the next American President may be in a position to basically offer a tougher kind of relationship, a less generous relationship, if we don't get more help, and perhaps go for a higher standard of cooperation if we do.

Options like a free trade agreement could be part of the mix if Pakistan were to make an important decision to try to cooperate with us more.

I hear Vanda's point. We better be realistic. That is a concern that perhaps will deflate the aspiration for a better relationship. The next President of the United States could try to frame this in different terms than we were able to in much of the last 15 years.

The last point I will make and in fairness to Pakistan, there have at least been baby steps towards trying to put pressure on some of the extremist groups in the western part of their own country.

Now, in many cases this is for reasons that have nothing to do with Afghanistan, that have not made any improvement or maybe a worsening in the short term in the situation in Afghanistan, some of the groups have moved over the border as

they come under pressure, and I think Vanda is right, there still is active collaboration and communication with the Haqqani network, between Pakistan's government and the Haqqani network, in particular.

Overall, I think the questioners have a valid concern. I would just suggest that the next American President can think about this relationship in maybe fundamentally different terms than the last two were able to.

That's my take. Others may want to chime in on either of these questions.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: I'll add more comments on Pakistan. From a national interest assessment, even global interest assessment, Pakistan is a far more important country than Afghanistan. Pakistan is a country with nuclear weapons. Pakistan and India is the space where a nuclear war could break out more likely than anywhere else.

Pakistan is a fragile country, deeply internally challenged by chronic misgovernance, corruption, and importantly, extremist groups that various Pakistani governments fostered for a long time, but are a tiger that the government no longer controls.

The United States cannot afford to push Pakistan to the brink. Pakistan is both cognizant of that, and has often played the politics with respect to Afghanistan of you push us to the brink, we will collapse, it could be really awful for you. They are absolutely right, it would be really awful to everyone.

Pakistan has had great power of the weak, perhaps making the United States to yield too quickly at times. The U.S. could get tougher but getting tougher will come at a tremendous cost. Even though the logistics issues of access to Afghanistan will be less acute, perhaps eventually undone in the future, the broader issue of who is

strategically more important, what is the fundamental significance of Pakistan -- sorry, Afghanistan wishes it was their significance, but it's not, it's Pakistan will not go away.

This is the reality that Afghanistan needs to work with. There will be limits to how much Pakistan will alter its behavior, how much it can be controlled. Afghan's need to look at themselves and ask themselves, we are living in a very difficult neighborhood with many problematic neighbors, none more problematic than Pakistan, what can we do for ourselves. How can we engage the international community as opposed to dream continually and throw under the rock the internal problems with Pakistan as the sole explanation for problems.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Che, any comments?

MR. BOLDEN: (Inaudible)

MS. AMED: Hi, Nina Amed. I have a question. Their neighborhood is about to get worse, right, because of the Iran/Saudi conflict. That is going to mean more displaced people, more people in need.

How do we protect the humanitarian space, and how can the U.S. set an example, because they are at the forefront of all these conflicts militarily? If they in a sense have to uphold the moral standard, we have seen when Saudi bombed Yemen and the Russians in Syria, they haven't really been careful about avoiding hospitals, and maybe this all happened after Kunduz, how do we protect keeping access to vulnerable populations by the NGOs safe and secure?

QUESTIONER: Hi. I guess time and time again over the last decade and a half, we have seen a lot of the U.S.'s and the coalition's efforts to partner with communities, partner militarily with a lot of local communities, rebuffed because of Pashtunwali and the nature of them rejecting a lot of foreign intervention and foreign partnerships.

I wanted to know how that has transformed recently, what the U.S. is doing to sort of try to partner with Pashtun groups, et cetera, effectively, and whether that still continues to be a limiting factor for development as well as military partnerships.

MR. O'HANLON: Why don't we start with Ann and work down.

MS. VAUGHAN: Sure. Thanks for that question. I think it's really important and something we will need to look closely at in 2016. First, the U.S. setting by example, and as Jason was saying, respecting international humanitarian law, too.

Something in how we go about delivering our assistance I think is really important. USAID right now is requiring in Afghanistan something called "partner vetting system," that many of the NGOs have serious concerns with because we think it hurts our security, so don't work with USAID right now. That is Mercy Corps and many of the other large NGOs.

Changing that policy to make sure we are still able to operate securely in the communities and maintain the trust and faith of the communities we work in we think is incredibly important. It would be a good change of policy to see USAID reverse that in 2016.

QUESTIONER: (Inaudible)

MS. VAUGHAN: Sure. The partner vetting system requires NGOs -- would like NGOs to take all the partners we work with and share that information about partners that we work with with the U.S. government. We do a lot of vetting ourselves to make sure we are working with trusted partners, but sharing that information with the U.S. Government could make us look like we're collaborating with different parts of the U.S. Government that we definitely do not and do not want to collaborate with.

We said no to USAID funding that requires this type of vetting, because we need to keep this humanitarian imperative that Jason talked about pure so we are

able to access populations in good faith.

MR. CONE: I think the U.S. has definitely taken some important steps in the wake of Kunduz. One is accepting responsibility for the strikes, something for which the Saudis and the Russians haven't really done so far, committing to an investigation, albeit really an internal investigation and not allowing for independent international scrutiny to that investigation, I think that would have taken things to another level with respect to Kunduz.

I think fundamentally when it comes to breaches of international humanitarian law and the Geneva Conventions, the way to investigate those shouldn't be necessarily limited to the perpetrators of those incidents but should be held to outside scrutiny.

I think we are in an environment in which we have no illusions about the dangers that humanitarian workers and medical workers face in the field. The vast majority of those who are affected are national health workers in places like Syria that have been directly targeted, and it has become part of the strategy of the war effort and has been for really since the war started in Syria by the government, and now we see many facilities also being struck either directly or intentionally or otherwise during the coalition bombings, both in Syria and in Yemen.

I think we have real concerns and it's going to require a lot of dialogue with the different groups involved, whether they are governments also pushing back on non-state actors to ensure they respect the sanctity of medical facilities, that they don't militarize them.

On the flip side of that, it requires medical groups like my organization to sort of announce when that actually happens. We can't just sit quietly when our facilities are potentially used for military advantage.

The nature of war changes many people of professing but in fact those rules are really meant to simplify the action in areas of conflicts which is to ensure as much as possible we limit the impact on civilians and those who are staying on the front lines to assist them. That includes wounded combatants who then should be provided assistance as well, and that is something that is mutually beneficial to all involved on the front line. It's been contested, quite obviously, in Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen, and other places around the world, but it remains something that we think is a viable framework that needs to work, and is beneficial.

If we are going to have any sense of humanity in the midst of war, it's important that particularly states like the U.S. Government and others really reinforce those principles.

MR. O'HALON: Thank you. Vanda or Che?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: The issues of vetting partners is a complex one. Very important and very difficult in war, and getting the right calibration has been a major challenge, not just in Afghanistan and Iraq, but also in Somalia.

One other aspect is the one that Ann talked about, disclosing who the partners are, problematic and controversial decision.

We have often partnered with very problematic actors in places like Afghanistan. We have embraced some of the most vicious abusive power brokers because they promised to kill the Taliban. We made the tradeoff that they kill the Taliban in the short term but in the long term as a result of their misgovernance, they generate a lot of opposition among the population toward their rule.

Sometimes the brutal power brokers may be effective and bring stability for one, but often that stability undermines governance and in the long term poor governance undermines stability.

We have embraced a partner who turned out to be stealing large amounts of U.S. aid going both to Pakistan and Afghanistan, demanding that we curtail as much of the corruption, as much of the siphoning of money is absolutely appropriate, very difficult to do in an extremely opaque environment where often the amount of interaction we have with local actors is insufficient, and our ability to really understand the motives and actual behavior as opposed to the rewards might be quite limited.

You might remember the huge controversy over the Taliban taxing essentially anything that moves in Afghanistan, economic activity, including NATO trucks. Most of the vetting impetus for expanding all possible vetting was driven by U.S. political response to the fiasco, that the Taliban was making as much money for a while out of taxing NATO trucks as they were out of opium poppy.

It was obviously very problematic, but the response then should not necessarily be to demand vetting that paralyzes jobs that need to be done, including economic jobs.

Somalia is another example where the Obama administration insistence on no material support to al-Shabaab, being defined that Shabaab could not make any money, tax any truck including of foreign aid some years ago, severely compounded the famine and cost many lives until the Obama Administration walked away after international NGOs decided if we cannot operate, many, many more hundreds of thousands of people will die as a result of the policy.

We need to understand that we need to demand accountability from our partners, but we should not become prisoners of demanding such restrictive rules that we have no capacity to do anything anymore.

MR. O'HANLON: Che, any thoughts?

MR. BOLDEN: I'll try to go in order. The first one is opinion to answer

yours, the other one is with a couple of facts.

The first one is protecting NGOs, I think in places like Doctors Without Borders, Red Cross, Red Crescent, they were all established when we had conventional or civilized warfare. You know, we had laws of war, if you will.

When you have one of the combatants that don't abide by those laws of war, that requires a change on our part. I think in the NGOs' case, if they don't want to have an affiliation, they have a hard choice to make, going unprotected or affiliated with those that can protect you. That's an opinion.

To the other piece about partnering or deciding on who to partner with, there are a couple of things that we do in the Department of Defense. I mentioned about pentathlete that General Petraeus talks about, the first is the overarching, we have this thing called language regional expertise and culture-- I won't throw the acronyms out but you can figure it out on your own.

That is where we are focusing money, time and effort on educating military folks on the different aspects of going into different areas around the world. We put some money against it. We can always put more money against it but that's up for Congress to decide.

We have theater secure cooperation, and that involves bilateral and multilateral exercises trying to perform both formal and informal vetting of who is a good partner.

Then you get into security force assistance, which is what we tried to do in Afghanistan and to a lesser extent in Iraq as well and other places, and the last is the foreign internal defense. These are all things that we try to empower. Special Operations Command has a term "by, through and with," where they try to put the indigenous force front and center to make it their fight or it's their responsibility to provide

security and stability in that case.

Those are the four lines of effort that I am familiar with that kind of goes to the answer to your question. I hope that kind of hit it.

MR. O'HANLON: I think we're going to have to go down our row here with final comments. We only have about five minutes left. I'm acutely aware that CPAN is probably getting ready to cover the Redskins' victory parade. Many of you are probably seeking to spontaneously participate.

Again, thanks to all of you for starting your new year on these very important topics that really reflect a lot of patience and commitment from you as well. This war has been going on so long and we are all so concerned about the well-being of the Afghan people, and the effects on our own security. I just wanted to thank you for being here.

Let me now turn to each of the panelists for maybe a minute or so wrap up individually on whatever is still on the table.

MS. VAUGHAN: Sure. Great. Thanks again to Michael and to Brookings for putting this event on, and just one major takeaway, continued support and partnership with the Afghan people. I think that is very needed, and the Afghan people are looking for a new year where you don't have to pick up and leave your homeland behind to go and look for a better life, so continue their national support for that would be extremely appreciated.

We have to be doing development and looking at the root causes of some of the structural systemic reasons. There is just so much poverty in Afghanistan. There are relatively low costs and smart ways in going about doing that, including, just to quickly comment on Che's comment, many of the NGOs, we do not have arms, we do not roll around with guns and armed actors. We depend on our relationships with

communities for our security and will continue to operate that way and partnership with the Afghan people for the next couple of decades. Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Jason?

MR. CONE: As an organization that's been around for 40 plus years working in conflict, we're not naïve to the dynamics that are there and the dangers that are incumbent in working in those areas.

I think that it is important we don't sort of set expectations based on the behavior of certain groups that don't respect the laws of war. For us, I think part of our dialogue is reinforcing first and foremost the fact that we are going to treat anybody as a medical organization. That is something that has been recognized. It is very much recognized by the U.S. Government, and something that is reiterated very strongly.

In fact, when General Campbell said they would never intentionally strike a hospital or a protected facility, that is an important statement, I think.

When the battle broke out in Kunduz and the Taliban took control, several of their commanders came to the gate of our hospital. They didn't enter the hospital. They allowed us to continue working. That is through, I think, a dialogue that happens with different armed groups that is required and the community as well, as I think Ann was pointing out, that is required to operate in these areas, and will continue to be.

It is based on some sense of trust, albeit with take it at face value when you are dealing with very difficult, violent individuals, but it has to be on the basis of that, and we have to continue to work that, and I think in Afghanistan specifically, as the situation continues to deteriorate in many parts of the country, it's going to require NGOs and particularly medical workers and others to really step back from the sort of stabilization efforts that are there and keep things separate in order to maintain that

respect and that neutrality and impartiality that's required of health workers operating in conflict zones.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Vanda?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: I have been a supporter of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan for many years. I believe many of these efforts need to be improved, need to become smarter, there is much accountability and many different decisions that the United States, the international coalitions, and non-state actors need to do in how they operate.

There are many crises coming in Afghanistan in 2016, and I think we should anticipate them better, think about them. Think about how if a Loya Jirga ever takes place would rock the boat.

I am often asked by my friends including family members how I can continue supporting the effort in Afghanistan despite the blood and significant deterioration and very little prospect that things will radically improve.

It's a tough answer to give. It's the commitment that we have made is not sufficient. We need to remember we still have a vital interest in the country, including the rise of terrorism once again, ISIS and al-Qaeda presence in Afghanistan, but also commitment that we have made to the Afghan people. But just sunk costs are not enough to keep going.

At some point, a president will have to make a judgment call, and I very much hope that the Afghan politicians and the Afghan people will enable the president to make the call, the U.S. President, the call to be to continue engagement. It will improve governance and refocus political in-fighting over spoils onto actually key national interests and the interest of the Afghan people.

I cannot guarantee in policy improvements that I can suggest and have

been suggesting in recent pieces that that solution will come about. However, if we just decide to call it a day in Afghanistan, we will get anti-favor.

MR. O'HANLON: Che?

MR. BOLDEN: I'll close with two things. The first is I recognize, to my Afghan friends, it may come across as being somewhat offensive when I call Afghanistan "ungoverned space." I just have to kind of call it what it is, the effects of what happens in Kabul doesn't reach Lashkar Gah or Kajaki. That is why I used that term.

When I look at the problems that are facing us in Afghanistan and other places of those ungoverned spaces, one of the things I guess I would leave you with is there are many elements of national power, the military being just one, and I think we rely too heavily on the ability of our military to be able to go and solve some of these relatively intractable problems, and I would encourage everyone to think about organizations like Doctors Without Borders and Mercy Corps and Red Cross and Red Crescent, other NGOs that can do a lot of really good things in the vein of other elements of national power, where we as the military are not the first choice, and more important, we're probably the last choice.

MR. O'HANLON: I'm just going to add one final word as we wrap up, which is as I look down this panel and recognize the sacrifices and contributions of these four and also the organizations they represent, I want to say a final word of hopefulness.

As bad as things have been in Afghanistan, the degree of managing and containing the humanitarian travesty has been remarkable.

Che, I don't mean to disagree with your earlier point about the origins of the Red Cross and when war was civilized, but frankly, when a lot of these organizations grew up, war was far worse, and was handled in a far less humane way than the U.S. Marine Corps or Mercy Corps and others have been handling recent conflicts.

If you just look at the numbers of casualties in these conflicts, they are way too high, but they are so much lower than in most of the brutal wars of history. It is because of the kinds of efforts that your organizations, everybody on this panel looking down to my left, and many others in this room have been carrying out.

I'm sorry to get on my soap box and give a positive sermonate, but I'm impressed by the sacrifice, and as this event was partly motivated by Doctors Without Borders asking to speak about Kunduz, and we know they lost 14 of their staff in a terrible tragedy, I just want to reach out and salute, as I'm sure many of you do as well, the sacrifices of so many who have been working and who have given some enduring hope to this forlorn land, a land that is a lot better off than it had been.

Anyway, thank you for being here today and please join me in thanking the panelists. (Applause)

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