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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good morning, everyone. And welcome to Brookings. I'm Mike O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy Program, and we are here today to discuss Afghanistan, as you know. In one sense it's still a hopeful time of year, the Redskins haven't lost their first game yet, and the Nationals are still in First place, and so we are hopeful.

On the other hand, 15 years into the Afghanistan Mission, and 15 years after 9/11 we know that there is an ongoing, very difficult struggle throughout the broader Middle East, and certainly not least, within Afghanistan itself. And we are glad that you came to join us in this discussion.

I know there are a couple of words of introduction I want to say before introducing the panelists. By the way, the basic approach we'll take here is to have a broad question frame by me to each of them, then get a few basic ideas on the table. We talk amidst ourselves for a bit, and then about halfway through we'll go to you for your questions.

First, I know we all, not just on the panel, but in the room, want to commemorate and mourn the victims of 9/11, the families, the soldiers and marines and sailors, and everyone else in the intelligence community elsewhere who have worked so hard, often at great sacrifice sometimes being heard along the way. Their families, their communities, just a day and a moment to reflect and to honor them, since we are, again, approaching 9/11, and I know this is on all of our minds.

Second, and in the same vein of commemorating a big event, I want to thank my colleague Gail Chalef, who has been our Communications Director in the Foreign Policy Program for almost decade is leaving Brookings after today, and we collected a few of the little statistics that give some small indication to the extent you can

ever use metrics whether encountering insurgency or in think-tankdom to assess progress.

In her time at Brookings, on her watch, the monthly Web hits for Foreign Policy Program have more than tripled. She has organized, or helped to organize some 1,500 events, like this one, and she has supervised and orchestrated some 5,000 television or radio spots by her various scholars over that period of time. And she's going off to work on the important issue of refugees in the future.

And we greatly respect her commitment to public policy and to her fellow human being, and what she's done for all of us. I want to thank her and her team that have worked with her so closely over the years; a big day for us at Brookings, so thank you for giving me a chance to mention that. Now let me, please -- (Applause)

As you know, we have outstanding talent on this panel, and I just want to say a brief word about each of my colleagues. It's really a treat to be able to not only honor Gail, but to recognize who we've got up here. Just to my left, Vanda Felbab-Brown, one of the most diligent and intrepid and brilliant field researchers that I've ever met, and been going to Afghanistan for, I think, over a decade now, going back to her dissertation days.

Wrote a book called Shooting Up, which talked Afghanistan, and as one of the main case studies, and the nexus between counterinsurgency and counternarcotics strategies, which of course remains a big issue there to this day, continues to travel often to Afghanistan, and wrote one of the best books on the subject, Aspiration and Ambivalence, which I recommend to anyone who hasn't yet read it. Really gets out a lot of the difficult period of the last 15 years, in the U.S.-led mission there.

And speaking of that mission, next to her is General John Allen who, as

you know, is a Brookings Senior Fellow. He was the Commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan from the summer of 2011 into the winter of 2013, a 19-month stretch which was crucial. Before I get back to that and say one or two more words about that tenure, however, I want to let you all know that this is a lifelong Marine who did a lot of other things in the Marine Corps, beginning with helping create the fabled Infantry Officer Course at Quantico, which is really the signature event for training officers in infantry in the U.S. Marine Corps which did not exist in the current form prior to his role in that, I think as Major, back in the 1990s.

And then, okay, we know the Marines trusted him, the real impressive thing to me is that the Navy then trusted him, and they gave him -- admittedly he was a graduate of Annapolis himself -- but they gave him the job of Commandant of the Midshipmen, at the U.S. Naval Academy. The first time a Marine was ever asked to be responsible for sailors in that institution and that capacity, and that just tells you something about how much the Navy, like all of us, had high regard for General Allen.

He then spent his one-star appointment or period of time working on East Asia issues at the Pentagon in the early 2000s before deploying with the Marine style and by province, and being one of our two or three key Marines in the Anbar Awakening and the Surge.

And then from that point on, many other jobs in the Central Command theater, including being David Petraeus' Deputy, at Central Command, being the Acting Commander there for a while, and ultimately stepping down from government last fall in a civilian role, as the Coordinator for the President and Secretary Kerry in the campaign against ISIS.

And so, in Afghanistan, as many of you know, let me just say one word to situate in the debate, in Afghanistan he was there during the initial downsizing, and he

commented once or twice to his friend General Petraeus that, by comparison Petraeus had it easy, because he was there when the forces were coming up, and then as soon as they peaked, General Petraeus left, and General Allen was asked to start implementing the drawdown.

But the good news for today's discussion, for all of us, is that meant that General Allen was involved in transferring responsibility to the Afghanistan Security Forces, which of course is, in many ways, the main issue for security today, because that's the main fighting force at a time when the United States has downsized by 90 percent, and we are down to roughly 10,000 U.S. Military personnel in-country.

Bruce Riedel was asked by President Obama to coordinate the initial 2009 Policy Review on Afghanistan/Pakistan, a role that he played along with Richard Holbrooke and Michele Flournoy, and they produced the initial Obama thinking on what to do about the entire region. And that was after a number of years he had spent already at Brookings where he is also a Senior Fellow today.

He was a 30-year veteran of the CIA, also on secondment numerous times to the National Security Council, where he played a key role on things such as diffusing Indo-Pakistani crises in the late 1990s, among other roles. Also very involved in the Middle East Peace Process, which John Allen was his as well, and Bruce in his time here has written at least two very well received books related to the Pakistan question, one of them called Deadly Embrace, and the other, Avoiding Armageddon. So, that sets him up extremely well to help understand Pakistan's role in the ongoing Afghanistan theater.

Thank you for your indulgence, I wanted to do proper justice to framing the issues, to thanking colleagues and to setting the stage, and so now I'm finally going to pose questions. We'll start with General Allen, and then go to Vanda and Bruce. And

what I want to ask General Allen is just for his overall take on the security situation.

Before I give him the baton, I will also let you know that in a minute, I'm going to ask our newly-arrived Army Colonel. We have the very good fortune of having military, intelligence, Coast Guard fellows here each year, active duty officers who -- or analysts, who are going back to their agency, but are spending a year with us.

Colonel J.B. Vowell was the senior American mentoring and advising the Afghan 201st and 203rd Corps in the eastern part of the country until last fall. And he certainly stayed in very close touch with those corps headquarters since that time. So, he can give us a fairly real-time update, and I'll call on him at some point in the discussion, from the front row, to share his thoughts.

But first we'll get started. So, General Allen, again, thank you, for your service in what you did in Afghanistan, and I wondered, now looking back three years later, but I know you are tracking it, still, carefully on a day when there have been numerous acts of violence and explosions in Afghanistan just today. How you see the situation, the good and the bad and the ugly. How do you feel about the prognostication of the path going forward as well?

GEN. ALLEN: Well, it's great to be back on the panel here with you, Mike. This is a very important subject obviously coming up on the 15th Anniversary. I was the Deputy Commandant at the Naval Academy, then became the Commandant, surely; thereafter the day we were attacked on 9/11, so I remember it very well.

I remember being with those Midshipmen on that day as they were trying to figure out where life was going to take them. And I knew where was going to take them, and I knew where life was going to take me, 10 years later till the day I'll be commanding the war effort in there, in Afghanistan. And as I said before, that you can depart Afghanistan but you can never really leave it.

And so from that moment, when I took command in July of 2011 to today, it's been a special place to me, and as we come up on the 15th Anniversary here in a couple of days, I'll take a moment and recall all of our troops and the allied troops who perished in this, but very importantly to recall the sacrifices of the Afghan Forces, enormous sacrifice of the Afghan Forces, and the sacrifice of the Afghan civilians as well, in this conflict.

We said before on this stage and many other places that success, the long-term success of Afghanistan, whether it's a political success or an economic success, or whether it can join in credible ways the community of nations, is going to be a function of the security environment and the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces to provide that security over a long time.

We can go back and do the forensics and the postmortem, et cetera, on all of the recommendations that had made on numbers, and how those numbers ultimately were implemented, and where they are, and I will finish my remarks about where we are today with the numbers, because numbers don't really tell the story.

But we have, in the aftermath of the departure of ISAF, and the closing down of that mission, and the establishment of the NATO mission called Resolute Support, we've had about 13,000 NATO forces in theater, 95 or so -- 9,500 or so have been U.S. at this point for some period of time. Of that number about 2,800 or so are special operators and the rest are trainers and advisors.

Situation on the ground in Afghanistan has changed from time to time, and today there's a lot of debate about how you would articulate the situation on the ground, and I would definitely use the term challenging, the situation has in fact become more challenging, perhaps even worrisome in the last several months, over the last year, and it's not something which I think will be beyond the capacity of the Afghanistan Forces

to hold over time, and to deal with over time.

I've been very close to those forces for the better part of a year-and-a-half, having seen Afghan troops in combat, having seen many of their leaders lead their troops credibly, not just as a small unit level, but increasingly at the larger unit level, brigade-size operations, regular brigade size operations, I do, and I still have confidence of the Afghan National Security Forces can pull this out over time.

That said, we have seen the Taliban resurgence be problematic in the last year or so. The Taliban in the north have become a challenge. We had that brief moment in Kunduz, near humiliation, frankly, for the Afghan National Security Forces, but ultimately they were able to take back Kunduz, but not an insignificant human price, and of course we had the disaster of the friendly on the hospital there, for which we all, still, regret those casualties.

And we've also seen a resurgence in Afghan Taliban activity in the Helmand Province as well, a loss of a number of districts which has forced both the American Commander in conjunction with the Afghan leadership to put additional American forces on the ground in the Helmand Province to at least hold the district capital, Lashkar Gah. I do believe, however, that we'll see that negative trend reverse, largely because in fact the leadership in the 215th Corps, which is Corps that (inaudible) sits upon that particular area, Helmand, just west of Kandahar, has been replaced, and I think we are going to see some improvement there in the relatively near future. The previous Commander was largely incompetent.

But I think that the challenge that we face, going ahead, will be the stabilizing of our numbers for the long period of time to continue to effect the kinds of relationship that we need to have with the Afghans, not just in a training role, but an advisory role, to include, now, providing additional air support to the Afghan National

Security Forces, in particular the Afghan Army, in ways we were unable to do before.

That I think is going to be of a lot of assistance to us, to secure the environment, maintain control of the population centers, not to give up any more of the districts. At this point, a number of districts have gone into the hands of the Taliban, more than we would certainly want, but I do believe that over time, they will be able to take them back.

Let me talk briefly about the U.S. decision-making. You know, the numbers that we had originally recommended, and ultimately were put on the ground, varied by some extent -- to some extent. As I said, it's history. We went in with 9,500 or so, and another 3,000 or so, Non-U.S. NATO troops, that number was both probably too small and too short a period of time in terms of the initial obligation to those forces.

As late as June of this year, all of the former Afghan -- former American commanders in Afghanistan, and all the former American ambassadors to Afghanistan, wrote an open letter to the President asking that we cease all drawdown of American forces in Afghanistan until such time as the new President, after this election, can have the time to study the situation, to determine whether additional drawdown requirements should be met.

Whether we should stabilize for some period of time, whether we should even go up in numbers, and my conversation which continue with our allied partners, many of our allied partners who were still on the ground, it's about 40 U.S. and other partners on the ground today in resolute of war; whether in fact we need to go up in numbers over time.

But the bottom line for us was in June of this year, we asked that we stop the drawdown to permit the next president, whoever that’s going to be, who will own the outcome in Afghanistan, the opportunity to thoroughly study the relationship between the

security environment, the political environment and the economic environment, because they are inextricably linked.

Study the relationship between the three of those to determine whether the NATO commitment is satisfactory, both in numbers and in capabilities, and in timeline, to support the continued training and operational capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces over an extended period. And we'll see papers coming out of Brookings that continue to be a result of the combined efforts of the generals and the ambassadors and scholars who are attentive to this.

So, then security environment is essential as the platform for going forward both politically and economically, that security platform is definitely challenged today. I don't believe the Afghan National Security Forces are losing, but I do believe that a resurgent Taliban, believing that, in fact, we were going down to a number which could permit them to effect the tipping point with the Afghans, I believe that we gave foiled that plan.

And by staying at the number that we are today, which will be somewhere around 84- 8,500, and even with the next president conceivably going up in the number, or changing our capabilities mix, or increasing our fire power in support of the Afghan National Security Forces, I believe we'll hold what we've got, we'll change the momentum.

And as I always am, Mike, I'm pragmatic on the subject. I'm not optimistic or pessimistic, I'm pragmatic on the subject, and if we get our decision-making right, and the Afghans are sufficiently discriminating in who they permit to lead the various corps, and I think -- Colonel Vowell, where are you? There? Good to see you.

To our first -- To our third quarter, have always been pretty strong, they are in the east and in the northeast, that’s where the biggest fight is. That’s a pretty good

outfit. 205th Corps which is the Kandahar Region, has typically had a very strong Commander in the 215 Corps, which is the Helmand area and, if you will, the heart and soul of the Taliban, that has always been problematic, it's always been a tough fight.

Ashraf Ghani and Abdullah Abdullah have fired more than 70 general officers from the Afghan National Security Forces and the Police. That's a good start, but we've got a lot more to do, and until leadership and command, and Afghanistan truly is determined on meritocracy and not patronage, we are going to have this challenge, and it's not uncommon for that part of the world to have that challenge. We just need to recognize it, and we recognize it by stabilizing our numbers, stabilizing our appearance, assuring our capabilities are the best suited for needs of the Afghan National Security Forces, and I think we'll be okay. Thanks, Mike.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, General Allen. And Vanda, I know that I wanted to ask you about politics and economics, and I will in a second, but because the security situation is so paramount and it's on our minds today with the recent attacks, I want to just give you a second to comment on how you see things there as well. Because obviously a complex mosaic, there's a lot of good and a lot of bad, I just wanted to ask you to add your perspective.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, thank you, Mike; and good morning. I would underscore General Allen's comment that the security is challenging. I might add, very challenging. Probably most challenging that it has been any time since 2002; and certainly challenging from the perspective of the Afghan people, but also from the perspective of international civilians who operate in the country, and very much enable or assist in delivering governance as well as economic growth.

Afghanistan has become very permissive and difficult environment with few people who live in Kabul being able to travel out of Kabul, and that is not just the

internationals, but also Afghans. Just traveling between Jalalabad and Kabul is a major risk, going up north, and not just to Kunduz back to Baghlan had become essentially impermissible for many Afghans.

And so what we see today is a government that is in deep ways, and then core community that is in deep ways, cut out or cut off from large parts of the country. The level of civilian casualties is the greatest that it has ever been. Now none of this means that it cannot be reversed, but nonetheless the security situation deeply impinges, at this point, undermines or outright (inaudible) many elements of economic development, and many elements of government, and creates very much a state of siege and profound insecurity mentality in the country.

I've been communicating intensely with friends in Kabul over the past 24 hours, and it's been quite disturbing to see their reactions to the serious of attacks. They are not surprising, and my thoughts are very much with them. But just the level of going about everyday issues that has been at the core of challenges and problems for Afghans, many who aided us, is becoming a major issue for people in cities.

And of course those difficult security situations is not just about the Taliban, and (inaudible) Khorasan and parts of the country, but it's also very much about criminality and politics. Indeed, the very significant element of insecurity, hampering daily life, and something that the Taliban can plug into and exploit, is the level of kidnapping that’s going on in the country, and by many criminal networks, some deeply connected to powerful patronage networks and powerful politicians.

Both target internationals, but they very much target also Afghan businessman, and in fact what we are probably seeing is something that at one point happened in Colombia at the height of the crisis, when the numbers of people who were targeted for kidnapping, or the type of people targeted for kidnapping was going down

from simply very rich businessmen to White middle-class people would be vulnerable, and again confounded the weak sense of insecurity, and paralysis of everyday life.

So it's very important and very imperative that the government takes on these kidnapping networks, takes on the face of criminality, that is both an in for the Taliban, but those who crucially debilitates everyday life. And I started saying that this is, of course, our link to politics and we are at the moment of interesting and challenging situation in Afghanistan.

The initial configuration of the current Afghan Government with President Ghani and CEO Abdullah, was to last two years, and then they were asked to be a reconsideration of that arrangement. At various points and various formulations, President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah believe there would be parliamentary and district elections held, and perhaps some more longer-term resolution of the relationship.

That has not happened, there have not been parliamentary elections, there have not been district elections, and now that the reform has been stuck for over a year. And so there are now also saying that the government should come to an end, that there is no longer a space for Dr. Abdullah Abdullah in his CEO role. His view was that by now he would be appointed Prime Minister and the system would be changed to a parliamentary system.

That was not necessarily something that President Ghani ever bought into, so there were very different initial understandings of what would happen in the two years to start with, and they are now being compounded by many voices outside the government with Former President Karzai had been -- repeatedly called for loya jirga to give new legitimacy to the government that jirga would be unconstitutional and many feel would not be helpful to the political process.

So, we are in this state of watching for the next few weeks, how that

disagreement will be resolved, and whether the government will stay in this current constellation, or that there will be changes. Certainly that cannot there cannot a constitution on jirga held, and that will not be elections, probably for at least a -- at least half-a-year, likely more than that.

And meanwhile there are other politics in Kabul, and outside of Kabul. The relations between President Ghani and the government, and several governors, some of whom he tried to fire, but had not been able to accomplish that. Others on whose loyalties he crucially depends, but whether he has tensions and an uneasy relationship, and that some of these tensions gave way on Friday to actual firefight, between supporters of Vice President Dostum, and Northern Patrick Gup. And I raise that, because although it had no sort of lasting impact on the stability of the government or on how security develops in Afghanistan.

But at the same time, the firefight again stimulated in Afghanistan, a sense that this might be a preview of much deeper disintegration, and much deeper political unraveling of the country. And it raised fears and memories of the 1990s. And I believe that there is an opportunity in all these difficult elements for the Afghan Government and, in fact, for Afghan politicians, and Afghan people.

For too long, there was a sense among many Afghanistan politicians, that they can conduct governance by working the Ship of Spade as much as possible to milk greater political appointments and other forms of payoffs. And the politics can be about constant brinksmanship and crisis-making, but Afghanistan cannot afford that anymore. Politics has to be about governance, about governance that's accused people, and about governance that improves their lives.

And for a very long time, Afghan politicians would say, it can never disintegrate into the 1990s; it can never go back to the Civil War. Well, maybe the

firefighters' wakeup call that their mode of politics needs to fundamentally change, and that once the government gets out of the current crisis, whether this is later in this month, or in October, or even later than that, and there is a new government that this new government had an opportunity to work with other political powerbrokers, are the politicians, who actually start delivering governance in a more robust way, and less corrupt way, than has been the case so far.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. I'm tempted to ask you if you think the state of Afghan politics or better or worse than ours, but I'll leave that one. I'll come back to you in a little bit on some of those specific questions on my mind about Afghan politics and also the economy.

But I'll get Bruce here, engaged as well. And just to ask, Bruce, your take on, especially the Pakistan angle, anything you want to talk about of course, but I know that when you did your Policy Review for President Obama seven-and-a-half years ago, you had certain understanding of Pakistan, a lot of history dealing with it, probably certain assumptions about how things would evolve.

I'd be curious if things have gone more or less as you expected, and if not how does that change the calculus here? Or how much is the Pakistani role in this conflict the central determinant as some would allege how much is it more of a secondary factor?

MR. RIEDEL: Thank you, Mike. Thank you for organizing this, and it's a pleasure to be here with John and Vanda and all of you. I'm going to come to the specifics you mentioned, but let me start with, I think, a piece of good news which is going to be rare today.

When President Obama announced his strategy in March of 2009, he was very clear about what the top goal and priority of American policy in Afghanistan and

Pakistan was, and that was what we called the three Ds. To disrupt, dismantle and defeat al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan, in 2009 that meant primarily in Pakistan. The 2001 American intervention in Afghanistan essentially moved al-Qaeda from one side of the Durand Line to the other side of the Durand Line.

By 2008, 2009 the al-Qaeda core in Pakistan was robust, fully recovered from the 2001 intervention, and engaged in a global terrorist operation. Remember, in 2003 we had the Madrid attack, the deadliest terrorist attack in Western Europe since the beginning of the 9/11 era, we had the London attack in 2005, we foiled an attack by al-Qaeda in 2006 to simultaneously blow up seven jumbo jets over the Atlantic coming out of Heathrow, imagine what that would have done to the global economy in 2006.

We now know that in 2009 al-Qaeda was planning a massive attack on the New York City subway system, which was fortunately foiled, largely due to the National Security Agency. Al-Qaeda, in short, was the proper goal of the United States in 2009, seven-and-a-half-years later, al-Qaeda in Pakistan is not destroyed, but it has been substantially degraded and substantially put on the back foot.

It requires continued monitoring, it requires continued surveillance, but the situation today is much improved over what it was in 2008, 2009 when President Obama campaigned and went into office. I think there are significant lessons to learn, to be learned from that episode, one of them is that the United States has to be offensive as well as defensive, and how it thinks about the problems in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

I would characterize our strategy in Afghanistan for the last 15 years as largely defensive. We have been trying to shore up the Afghan Government, to shore up the Afghan National Security Forces, that's difficult to do when you basically seed through the opposition to the Afghan Taliban that they will have an open and permanent sanctuary next door in Pakistan.

The Afghan Taliban, for at least 14 of the last 15 years, has been able to operate not with impunity in Pakistan, but with the patronship of the Pakistani Army. This goes beyond simply providing a sanctuary and a safe haven for leadership of the Afghan Taliban and their families, this goes to active patronage and support. We know the Pakistani Army, in particular Pakistani Intelligent Services, actively engaged in training the Afghan Taliban and helping them fund their operations, and in planning attacks, including attacks inside Kabul.

I think we have to learn some lessons about this is the next President's job thinking about where to go forward. In May of this year President Obama authorized what has so far been a one-off, a drone operation against the Afghan Taliban leadership in particular in this case, the Head of the Afghan Taliban, Mullah Mansour, in Balochistan.

We've never had a drone operation before at least, a drone operation with the actual use of a missile in Balochistan before. That mission is very controversial, you will hear people on different sides say it killed the peace process, and you will hear people on other side say there was no peace process to kill, there was the terrorist to go after. I think it should become a model, I think the next President ought to consider this and look back on how we have progressed against al-Qaeda, and thinking about how we've progressed against Afghanistan -- the Afghan Taliban.

By that I mean we ought we ought to be thinking about carrying out operations like the operation against Mullah Mansour in Balochistan, and in other parts of Pakistan in the future. We do not need to have the tempo of operations that we had against al-Qaeda in Pakistan. We are not going to destroy the Afghan Taliban through drone operations, nor should we try to, but we should try to disrupt and to seriously dismantle the sanctuaries and the safe havens. In essence, we ought to take the safety out of the safe havens. I think that's one recommendation I would make to the next

president.

Second, there would also be an offensive operation and Mullah Mansour provides a good starting point for talking about that. Mullah Mansour's passport was recovered by the Pakistan press after he was killed in that drone operation. It was a Pakistani passport provided to him by the Pakistani Army, it was in a false name. Inside it showed that he had made 18 trips from Karachi to Dubai over the course of the last five years, and similar other trips to Manama in Bahrain, and probably to other Gulf States.

What was the purpose of 18 trips to Dubai? The Afghan Talibans told us, fundraising. He's going to Dubai for repeated moves for fundraising. Some of the fundraising is in drug smuggling, the biggest part of the fundraising, they are always been raising funds from sympathetic audiences in the Gulf States. I think we need to target that as well. I think we need an aggressive move by the Department of Treasury, working with our Gulf State partners to prevent that kind of fundraising from continuing in the future.

Again, we are not going to stop at 100 percent, we are not going to destroy the Afghan Taliban through that, but we should bring about a situation in which Afghan Taliban fundraising is as difficult to do today as al-Qaeda fundraising is difficult to do in Gulf States territory. We've have significant progress over 15 years, in persuading the Saudis, the UAE and others, to get out of the business of letting their private individuals support al-Qaeda.

We've had progress on the Islamic State and we need to do the same with the Afghan Taliban. We, of course, have other objectives and goals in Pakistan as well. One of the most important is to support the entrenchment of Pakistani democracy, and now I think I also would say that there's good news 7 years after, 15 years after September 11. Pakistan today has a thriving free press, it's not always a responsible

free press, but it's certainly a thriving free press.

I'm reminded of your question about whether their free press is as responsible as our free press, Mike, but we'll leave that question to others to think about. We've also seen in Pakistan in the last few years, the transition from one democratically-elected government to another democratically-elected government; that is a milestone in the history of Pakistan democracy which shouldn't be overlooked.

We've also seen Pakistan seriously address the problem of its own Taliban, the Pakistan Taliban, and go after it in a way which we've never seen before. Pakistan today is a unique country. It is a country that is a victim of terrorism, where horrendous attacks of terrorism have been carried out in Pakistan nearly every day. Unfortunately, the Pakistani Army continues to be a patron of terrorism in other parts of the world, and particularly with patron of the Afghan Taliban.

And that calculation was going to be difficult to do, but I think that's one of the priorities that the next president might have to focus on, when he or she thinks about what to do with the Afghanistan/Pakistan situation.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. I'm going to go down the rail and I have a question for each of you, but before I do that, I think I will go to Colonel Vowell, and let me just add, by way of asking him for two or three minutes of comments on what he saw with the Afghan Forces, just for those of you who don't study this thing full time, let me remind you of the different numbers we are talking about, and people can correct me if I get one wrong.

But basically the Afghan Army is organized into six main corps, and these each have a geographic zone, and you can sort of imagine doing a clockwise circle in your head, and starting up in the northeast, so along the Pakistan border in the very mountainous zone in the Kunar region, et cetera, is the 201st corps, and then we come

down southwards to the 203rd, over to Kandahar and 205th, Helmand was added as a separate corps later, so it got its own sort of out-of-sequence numbering of 215, and then there is 207 and 209 coming back around.

And so Colonel Vowell was the lead U.S. Mentor in a team of, I think, several hundred Americans deployed to Jalalabad, if I have it right, and he'll correct whatever I get wrong here in just a second, through last fall, and these were the largest formations, the United States still had deployed I the field, if you will. Most of the other formations where there are these counterterrorism teams that would be available on demand, or central training teams in Kabul or intelligence and other kind of institution-building mentors in the capital city and in other major cities.

So, Colonel Vowell was essentially in the most forward of the kind of units the United States still has in Afghanistan today, and that's what makes up this 10,000 strong force that General Allen was mentioning, which is a total of close to 15,000 if you add all rest of our NATO partners in other countries as well.

So with that as quick background, I want to see if Colonel Vowell would like to add to the discussion with his sense of both the security situation in the east, and also the progress of the Afghan Army. Sir?

COL. VOWELL: Thanks, Mike.

MR. O'HANLON: You are free to stand up if you like, it's whatever is convenient.

COL. VOWELL: Sure. I'll go ahead and sit down, if that's okay.

MR. O'HANLON: Okay. Sure.

COL. VOWELL: I don't want to obstruct the views for people for the panel. As Mike mentioned, I'm an Infantry Officer, I've been and Infantry Officer in the Army for 25 years, and agree with the perspective having been in three combat

deployments in Afghanistan the past 12 years. Some of the early days, to the middle, during the surge in 2010-'11, till I left the country in October of last year, all different missions, and that informed my perspective that I would call rationally optimistic about the Afghan National Security Forces and the government in Afghanistan. Much to what General Allen already alluded to.

This is also my first day at Brookings as a Fellow, an Executive Fellow with peers --

SPEAKER: Welcome aboard, all of you.

COL. VOWELL: Hopefully we are not graded too harshly. So, Afghanistan is hard, and it's hard all the time. For all those things the panel has mentioned, the human terrain, the physical geography; issues of social and cultural change, endemic corruption, illicit trade, et cetera, et cetera. It seems to be more than just the Graveyard of Empires; it's that Crossroad of Conquest, the things that change have to happen over very long periods of time.

So, evolutionary change is my perspective in the last 12 years. I will just keep the comments focused upon when I was an Infantry Taskforce Commander in Kunar during the Surge, and then in my Brigade Command experience last year, different missions. In 2010, we were there to partner with the Afghan Security Forces, in a counterinsurgency to help the government teach and extend its nascent reach to the people at the provincial and district level, and also to help provide efficient and effective fighting forces in the field, with our effort as a model, on missions and operations throughout the country.

A lot of experiences during that Surge, very kinetic, very heavy, our initial main effort to work with district and local governance were the main effort where the people contacted their government; it took a lot of effort. It's not three cups of tea in that

country, it's three gallons of tea, and that discussion and dialogue was very important.

I learned a couple of lessons that year. Some of which I'll describe here. One, there is no better instrument for counterinsurgency in that country than their own Afghan National Security Forces, and the meetings with governors, district governors, political officials, military officials, the Afghan Security Forces, could lead that discussion, could participate in that discussion in a supportive role to their elected government.

That was impressive. A lot of problem-solving that happens happens between the security forces and their government without coalition intervention that was pretty good. However, during that year I noticed the particularly troubling problem that without coalition involvement, without coalition partnership, without coalition enabling capabilities, Afghan National Security Forces were very troubled, were very hard to get in the field and fight.

And so I left that combat deployment in 2011 with kind of a: you can't want it more than they do. They have to have the leadership, they have to have the systems, they have to have the support, but there's going to be a requirement for security forces to plan, prepare, execute, assess their operations, recover from those and transition to their next campaign. I left thinking that would never happen.

We spent a long time in Western Europe, a long time in the Fareast after World War II, helping to develop and build those countries. If any model like had to exist we were on that path in Afghanistan. So, in January of last year, I deployed with about a third of my Brigade Combat Team, from Third Brigade 101st Rakkasans, into the East again.

So the perspective is three combat tours, I'd been at Bagram, I'd been Baton Commander, and now a Brigade Commander in the East. And what I thought in 2011 was impossible, I did not think the security forces would be able to take the lead,

take responsibility for their battle space, the terrain and the people and the problem sets, on their own with just us advising from behind in the offices.

Last year we didn't go in the field with them very often, we stayed at the Corps level, and as Mike articulated, with the six corps, there was about 12 to 15,000 soldiers in each Corps with about four Brigades. That's about on par with the height of the surge forces the coalition had in the country in the first place. So now they own the problem, and then Kunduz happens, as General Allen mentioned, Helmand happens.

These district centers started getting overrun, there's pressure from an emerging and resurgent Taliban effort, in particular, and what we saw on our watch, a nascent ISIL in the Khorasan Province, particular Nangarhar, which was a good thing, because now the Taliban and ISIL KP are competing in open-field warfare, village-to-village for the same population.

The people who picked up on that real quick were the Afghan National Security Forces. The comment I got from the G2 of the 201st Corps, this is the best thing that can happen to us. They realized just how bad both groups are, and we can just sit back and watch them fight. So in '11 these forces from the Afghan National Security apparatus had a problem holding checkpoints, had a problem holding district centers without U.S. or coalition effort.

After these setbacks with Kunduz, with Helmand and significant national support from the new Ghani Government, and a reorganization of his national security apparatus, they were ready to go back in and resiege these objectives in places that were taken, with difficulty. But I looked around in the East where we were, in Kunar, in Nuristan, in Nangargar, Paktika, Paktia, and all the other provinces in the east where the trend is contentious, the population has been complying, and you are on the Duran Line if it actually exists; but the border sanctuary that Dr. Riedel spoke about, very contentious

area.

Why weren't the checkpoints being overrun? Why weren't the district centers being overrun and taken? Why wasn't large swaths of terrain being taken by the Taliban and held in perpetuity?

Well, I got to go talk to one of the Brigade Commanders in my old base in Kunar, the summer of last year, and after putting for some assets from the coalition, particularly air power, which they are still trying to generate that kind of capability, he said, we can do it without you. We have too much ownership of this, this is our country, and regardless of what happens we are not going to leave.

So, between '11 when General Allen came onboard, and '15, all the Afghan National Security Forces by presidential decree, occupied all of the coalition bases and outputs, all of them. In our particular case the 201st and even 203rd Corps in Gardez, they doubled-down on that, they made morel. For example, Pech River Valley in Kunar, a very contentious place, we came out of that valley, for the most part in 2011, when the Afghan Security Forces took ownership of the problem they saw a different strategy and light in there, and they build more road, they built more combat outposts north of Wanat into the water board, to connect Kunar and Nuristan Provinces together, so the government would start having some security where it never had it before.

They wanted that. We told them not to do that, from our experience. They had the initiative, they wanted that to happen. And lastly, in the East corps get paid and what they are for is to synchronized combined armed security effort to protect key terrain in the population; the lines of communication from Khyber Pass to Kabul, the population centers in towns and villages, and the people from having absolute chaos going on.

The corps were afforded and opportunity to plan campaigns throughout

the country last year, starting with Helmand, going to Kunduz, and then Ashraf Ghani looked General Waziri the 201st Corps, on a VTC, yes we have them doing VTCs every week on security planning, and said: What would you like to do? And Waziri's answer was immediate: I want to go to Southern Nangarhar, I want to clear terrain, and I want to make sure it's sure it's safe from the Taliban coming up from the southwest into Nangarhar, because Jalalabad has had several car bombs, and had several pressures in the population.

The United States did not plan this, the coalition did not plan this. This was their effort. We advised them a little bit on some operations, but they did it, they went forward with a tactical command and control element, the Corps Commander and a small staff forward into deep Nangarhar, set up a base, and had three brigades maneuver into battle space that was attacked and contested by both ISIL, KP and the Taliban.

Their first operation, in 48 hours they cleared 167 IEDs by themselves with no fatalities.

MR. O'HANLON: This is in the spring or summer of 2015?

COL. VOWELL: This is summer of last year. So from, again, perspective of leaving in May of 2011 when they needed us to go with them on every mission and operation just about, to Afghan Security Forces leading a combined arms tactical effort in the field without much coalition assistance. They were using their own D30 Howitzers, their own MD-530 Aviation, and ground maneuver it to include engineers, infantry, et cetera, in concert to succeed its seize and key train objectives away from the enemy.

And then holding that terrain with additional checkpoints, with police to follow on the end, and governance at the district level to reach out to the people; that is

counterinsurgency their way. And so I kind of left October of last year with, wow, we've gotten a lot further along than I would have thought possible.

So, again, to echo John Allen's comment, it may be pragmatic, but I would term it rationally optimistic. It's going to take an enduring effort, it's going to take international support, it's going to take commitment to keep this effort going, and about these levels, and I think we'll all be surprised with what the outcome is.

MR. O'HANLON: And of course it's going to take, I think, President Ghani and Chief Abdullah being willing to find, if they can, commanders of comparable ability and put them in the positions in other corps, like the one you described. So, let me now, do a final quick round here and then go to you. I want to ask one question to each of our panelists.

And starting with Bruce, just following up on what you said about going after the safe areas. As we all know the safe areas are not just north or south to Waziristan and, you know, this remote, rugged terrain, it's also Quetta, Peshawar and Vanda's great, favorite spring break city, Karachi. This is where people think now, that Taliban leadership is located as well. Is there any way to go after them there?

MR. RIEDEL: There is. It's difficult, it's not easy by any means, but the May operation had demonstrated that you can operate in Balochistan, the attack was not on the border that was good fiction put out by the Obama Administration to make it easier for the Government of Pakistan to respond, and actually quite deep inside of Balochistan.

Now, drone operations are not going to be a feasible alternative in a major urban area like Kiata, or even more so Karachi. But the good news from the standpoint of thinking about how these safe havens and sanctuaries work, is you can't run them efficiently if the leadership, then top leadership is all the time hiding in a safe house in Kiata or Karachi.

Sooner or later they have to go out in the field, they have to go out and visit their commanders, they have to go out and see their troops, and that's when there's a level of vulnerability. Let me reiterated one point I made. We don't need the tempo of operations that CIA drones were using against al-Qaeda in 2009, 2010, 2011, that would be an unnecessary effort.

What we need is periodic, but maybe once a quarter, maybe three or four times a year, operations against senior Afghan Taliban leadership operating in these safe havens and sanctuaries, to make it more difficult for them to do business as usual. If we let them operate and do business as usual as they for the last 14 or 15 years, I don't see how this operation is ever going to tilt in the direction that we want it to tilt.

There's another reason for doing this as well. General Allen mentioned the peace process, and the Afghan Taliban's assessment of the peace process, and I think he got it absolutely right. The Afghan Taliban up until now has said, why should we engage in a peace process? The enemy is leaving, sooner or later the Americans are all going to be gone, and when they are all gone, time is going to be on our side.

We have to change that calculation. I think the President's decision to leave this number of troops in, was the right decision in that case. I think now showing them that the safe havens and sanctuaries are not as safe as they have been for 15 years, also tips that calculation. It also helps to tip the balance of power within the Pakistani system.

Pakistan is an unusual country in a lot of ways. It has a civil military balance which is not in balance. The military runs the Afghan War. The elected civilian leadership does not run the Afghan War. We saw that in the peace process. Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif I believe was a sincere supporter of the Afghan peace process.

It's pretty clear the Chief of Army Staff, General Raheel Sharif was not a

sincere supporter of that. And in the end his vote mattered more than the Prime Minister's. If we change the balance of the safe haven and sanctuaries, I think we are also going to, in the long run, help the Prime Minister and the civilian government in making the case, we can't go on this way, we are not going to secure victory through a military solution, we need to look for some kind of political process.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent! General Allen, I'd like to ask you pick up at that same place if you don't mind on the Pakistan angle, and let us know your assessment as to whether we can be successful in the absence of some fairly big shift either in Pakistani behavior or in our ability to reach out and influence events maybe through greater use of drone or even Afghan Commando Forces in Pakistan, what have you.

And then secondly, because you worked with both Dr. Ghani and Dr. Abdullah, I'd just be curious for your sense, as to whether they are likely to make this thing work. We've seen the discussion of, and Vanda got at it earlier, of the difficulties in their relationship, a longstanding challenge of this particular government structure that's been created to paper over the differences and uncertainties of the 2014 election. Do you think these two gentlemen are likely to make it work, or do you sense that it's starting to fall apart? So both those questions, if you will.

GEN. ALLEN: Well, the frontier between Pakistan and Afghanistan is really complex. When I was the Commander I thought I had a pretty good relationship with Ashfaq Kayani who was the Chief of the Army Staff. And I remember well the day I spent with him, alone in his office, over the maps in Rawalpindi, looking at the border with the intent that while I still had tens of thousands of maneuver troops to include this great Battalion Commander at the time, in Kunar, we had options, still, to run joint operations along the border in a hammer and anvil manner to achieve effect that had been achieved

in previous opportunities.

I woke up the next morning, roughly the 25th or so of November 2011, and one of my special operations units said, basically, devastated to Pakistani border post. That did two things, it shut down the relationship of Pakistan for the ISAF Commander. It also shut down the ground line of communication, over which 80 percent of my support came.

We never, during the period of time I commanded in Afghanistan, we never had the opportunity to achieve the potential energy of combined operations along that border that could have made the difference that we had hoped to. The difference with the Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan and us assisting the Pakistanis to deal with their own Afghan, or their own Taliban problem in North and South Waziristan and down in Balochistan.

So, we did not have that opportunity, but we did have something we haven't addressed yet this morning, which I think more needs to be done, and that bleeds over into the issue of leadership. We did have something called the Trilateral Commission, where periodically, I and until Pakistan went silent after this crisis, and then came back up on line later in my command.

Where I and the Chief of Staff of the Afghan National Security Forces, and the Chief of the Army Staff would meet for a day, periodically, and our subordinate leaders at key locations, and key ranks, and key functions, would meet together. And the intent was, as I said in my first meeting with the three of them, my hope is, and Colonel Vowell said it very a moment ago. My hope is my great ambition is that at some point there will only be two chairs at this table.

In other words, we can create the environment of cooperation, the environment of relationships between Afghanistan and Pakistan, where, eventually, as

we will do what will happen, which is to go to a very small number, or go to a zero balance, the relationship is sufficiently robust, not just at a governmental level, but at a security level, so that Pakistan and Afghanistan can both sustain the security of their frontier.

That was not to happen during my command for a whole variety of reasons, and I wish we had, because I had the maneuver forces I think to do that. That aspect is absent today in the relationship. And yes, we go through the motion of Afghanistan attempting to have a relationship with Pakistan, with the Chief of Staff of the Afghan Army attempting to have a conversation with Raheel Sharif. But it is not where it would have been had we been able to cultivate it from '12, '13 and '14 on.

And it will only come eventually, we will only control that border, we will only provide for the security as we need to in the eastern sectors of Afghanistan, and in the federally-administered travel areas and the K Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It will only occur if we are able to create a viable relationship between the Afghan National Security Forces and their counterpart Pakistani Forces across the border.

I do agree exactly, or entirely with Bruce, as we begin the process of continuing to first stabilize our presence, to increase our support to the Afghans, conceivably with the new President doing even more to improve the combination of the NATO forces with NATO Secretary General, having a relationship with the Pakistani Military, and being able to strike those Taliban leadership, both TTP, Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan, and also the Afghan Pakistan, to be able to strike on both sides of the border with precision, will help us, I think a great deal.

With respect to the current configuration in Afghanistan I think we are stumbling along and I just don't see over the long period of time, under a presidential system that we can have a relationship between a President and Chief Executive Officer.

It was a Band-Aid to keep the outcome of the election, several years ago, from tearing the country apart.

I think Vanda is exactly correct, we may now begin -- we may be seeing now the beginning of the cracks in that process, that will either, if we don't pay close attention to it, and we don't do something to try to reinforce either the current organization, or shift it from the presidential system that it is today, to the parliamentary system, we are likely to see those cracks widen, and in fact we could see open conflict.

I don't think we are there yet, I don't think we are at that dire point, but I think here are indicators that would point to the fact that we are going to have to see some form of political evolution, because this was an interim solution. It was never intended to be a permanent solution, and this kind of an interim solution under constant pressure, in particular under increasing pressure from the Taliban, make it difficult to govern the country, make it difficult to get the economy on its feet, and certainly makes it difficult to command and control an Afghan National Security Force which is still being trained, still being brought up to the full operational capability, but under full pressure at the same time.

It's a very difficult situation, and it is not optimal, it was not intended to be permanent and we need to look to get into a permanent outcome.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. So, Vanda, anything you want to add on all these subjects, but specifically, the last question I have before we go to the audience, would be your views of the state of the economy, which is obviously not great, but also that the production of opium, which is obviously not a great situation either. But is there anything useful besides dealing with these broader security and political questions that we can do to help the Afghan mitigate the difficult situation, and the economics and drug production realms?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: I'll come to the question, but let me start by saying that this moment Afghanistan and of course the opportunity with the U.S. elections and new President, it's a time to perhaps as again, to what extent the effort in Afghanistan is about a military effort to break, defeat an enemy? And to what extent it's about a political process and political evolution in the country?

I strongly believe that it is the latter, and that inevitably, even any conceivable increase in U.S. Military engagement in Afghanistan in the next year will not be sufficient to operate on the basis that this war can be about simply wiping out the Taliban. But requires very hard prioritization of how U.S. Forces are engaged, but it also very much drives engaging in Afghanistan through the prism of politics and government.

And the Afghans themselves need to come to that understanding and embrace it. So when Afghan Security Forces say, it's okay if the Taliban and ISIS, Khorasani, and killing each other and we just sit back and watch. That has profound political implications. When that happened in (inaudible) it fundamentally discredited Kabul Government, and discredited over the very contestable government in Jalalabad.

And ultimately the Afghan Government was not able to stay by the determination, would just watch the fighting take place. A key problem for the Afghan Government has been for the entire decade-and-a-half, and continues to be today, governance delivered in local areas. And so for many Afghans the Taliban is a brutal, thuggish entity, but nonetheless they provide more stable, predictable and capable governance, than governance that is either constantly contestable between militant groups, governance that is weak, that the ASF clears and hands it over to the ALP and they cannot vote. Or, governance that is outright pernicious and discriminatory.

Let's remember that Kunduz fell and was in the making of falling because for a decade-and-a-half it was one of the most politically problematic, vicious, in-fighting

place in Afghanistan, and that has not been resolved after the city, and just the city, has been taken away from the Taliban.

The issue of Pakistan is very important, but it is always used as an excuse by Afghans not to focus on improving politics and governance they need to increase -- they need to improve themselves. The convenient distraction on both sides perpetuating policies that are bad. Targeting also needs to become political, while it makes perfectly good sense to try to take away the sense of safety, as Bruce phrased it, from the Taliban in Pakistan, we need to be asking about the political implications of that.

And ask about, if we kill this Taliban Commander, whether it is on the Afghan or on the Pakistani side, what are the political repercussions, within the movement? Is it going to give rise to a more vicious element within the Taliban? I wrote a piece in the New York Times after the killing of Mansour, raising some of these questions.

So, my bottom line is that although security impinges and overlaps everything security is political, it is linked to politics and our thinking about strategy in Afghanistan and Afghan thinking needs to be about politics and governance.

And finally, come back to your security -- questions on economy. The economy is in a difficult shape. It was bound to be, and it is. The growth is around 2 percent that's vastly inadequate for a country of the level of underdevelopment problems and poverty that Afghanistan faces. It might be what, you know, in Japan, other countries would love to have, but this is not sufficient for Afghanistan. The massive economic shrinkage and contraction, and there is simply no way out of it.

Sadly, that's one of the reasons why the retention -- or level of recruitment for the ANSF continues to be high of setting the vast retention losses, because there are simply no other jobs. There is some good news, mainly that the

Finance Ministry managed to raise the levels of custom and tax revenues, very important, very important economically, but also very important politically, sending some signal that there is not completely impunity, that not everything can simply be stolen out of the country, and hopefully the trend will continue.

But there is no easy way to break from the job shortage and from the essential economic stagnation that we are seeing. And that also generates then pressures of refugees, some of whom go to Europe, or at least they've been trying. Others who have been fighting under Iran sponsorship in Syria, but this is sort of the level of options that people face.

Equally, there are very limited options as to what can be done about poppy that have left very bad and disastrous options. Namely, to try to ramp up some eradiation of poppy crops. It is a caricature to say that poppy is about the Taliban. Yes, the Taliban makes money on poppy, but so do very many other actors, including actors crucially to politics.

And it's not surprising. This is the economic lifeline of the country. Inevitably, if anyone wants to have political -- minimal political support they will need to, at minimum, sponsor and are likely more deeply engaged with the opium poppy economy.

But there are elements of policies that are available in the current context of security. One is to think, again, politically about interdiction targeting, and think about who are the dangerous actors and just on Taliban side that should not have access to the poppy economy. That doesn't mean that it will be any less opium poppy and heroin production in the country, but it's about who should have access, or rather, who absolutely shouldn't have access, and who is less dangerous in having access.

Again, this is not the holders and stakeholders are not just the Taliban,

there are a whole variety of political actors who might become problematic, whose opium poppy stocks could go up in flames. And the interdiction should really be about, we are enforcing the stability of a Kabul Government rather than operating on the delusions that it can alter flows and financing.

The other crucial element and one where the international community and the Afghan Government have objectively failed and did not have to start seriously boosting treatment options for Afghans' addiction, abuse, communicable diseases related to injectable heroin, have vastly increased in Afghanistan and there are some 42, perhaps, treatment center with very inadequate -- a very inadequate level. There is much more, there is simple starts that can be done on prevention as well as more robust treatment option.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you very much. Great. So, we have about 25 minutes. And because we don't have too much time, we have a lot of you and a lot of expertise in the room we'll take three questions at a time, and ask my colleagues to take good notes, and maybe just choose one question each to answer from each round, so please remember to identify yourself, and that's just one question a piece. We'll start here with the woman in the second row, then over to Harlan, and the woman in the fourth row, for round one.

SPEAKER: Thank you so much. My name is Naziri Azim Kirimi, I'm Correspondent for Ariana Television Networks from Afghanistan, and I'm from Afghanistan too. First of all, thank you so much General Allen for your hard job in Afghanistan. The time that you've been in Afghanistan was a very sensitive and tough time.

GEN. ALLEN: Thank you.

SPEAKER: As you know the Pakistan policy never changed toward

Afghanistan, and Afghan people have a high expectation from the U.S. authority. Based off your opinion, what policy United States supposed to take to Pakistan, to Pakistan change to what their policy toward Afghanistan? And also based off the situation in Afghanistan what's your expectation from the upcoming Brussels Conference in this?

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Thank you. And now over to Harlan, right here.

MR. ALMAN: I'm Harlan Alman. Thanks for a very thoughtful discussion. As people do not remember we've been engaged in Afghanistan since 1960 when Jimmy Carter issued a finding. I'd like to ask the panel the question that John Allen's former boss, Dave Petraeus, famously asked. Tell me how this ends?

President Donald Trump, listening to one of his key military advisors used that phrase loosely, and said he's getting out of Afghanistan if he's elected. President Hillary Clinton, according to one of her senior advisors said, she's going to double down and put more forces into Afghanistan. Tell me what's right and wrong with both positions?

MR. O'HANLON: Okay. And then we'll go here, in the fourth row.

SPEAKER: Hi. Good morning. I'm Marina Khan, I go to an American University, I also work for an Afghan nonprofit. Mike, Hacina Serjon, sends her regards.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

SPEAKER: I have a question regarding opium. So, UNODC's 2015 Opium Survey, reports that net opium -- poppy cultivation is down by 19 percent, that’s the first decline since 2009, and potential production of opium is down by 48 percent. What do you think caused such decline, and what factories do you think threaten the progress of ending Afghanistan's largely opium-based economy?

MR. O'HANLON: Why don’t we start with that one, and Vanda, if we

could, and then we'll see how we go from there?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, there is absolutely no short-term frame in which Afghanistan's opium poppy economy could end. So if our goal or baseline is when we will end it, we will be literally disappointed, as we have been many times over the past decade. There's only one country that -- Well, there are several countries that successfully ended opium poppy cultivation, one of them is Thailand, where it took 30 years. The maximum production was 19,000 hectares, and the war had ended.

In all the other countries which succeeded in eliminating opium poppy cultivation only to shift to another country, conflict had ended. As long as conflict is on, there will be opium poppy.

SPEAKER: What's (inaudible) in that question?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: The fact that opium production went down by 19 percent does not mean very much, a lot of it -- They have been fluctuating up and down, largely, irrespective of policy driven by a factor such as overproduction, disease, bad weather, the market is still vastly oversupplied by the level of production. The much more important and significant number that I would seek to look at is the extent of microeconomic dependence on opium poppy production as well as macroeconomic dependence, and those numbers have not budged.

We can discuss off-line the way one measures and what are the problems with that. I would just suggest that it's far more than the farm gate or even broader value, driven methods as the economic spillover issues. There are places in Afghanistan, the opium poppy does not have to be, where there are other valuable alternatives, some of those have returned to opium poppy as a result of insecurity, others have returned to opium poppy, because people are trying to generate assets that can be sold quickly, because they don't trust the financial system, the opium poppy -- or rather,

the opium or heroin are better assets, and a lot of the entrenchment is driven by insecurity.

And just to answer Harlan's question, the fundamental question, how does it end? At the risk of sounding funny, I will go back to what I said before. It will have to end through political process. I don't believe that it can end through simply eliminating or wiping out the Taliban. And I say that, even as I believe that the Taliban is increasingly making mistakes. Vastly because of their expectation that the momentum is on their side, they are treating a lot of their soldiers very much as cannon fodder.

Even missions that are not outright suicide missions are missions in which vast numbers of their soldiers don't come back. And so there is a real limit to their policy, and I think there is a significant possibility that one, slow end, but very, very slow end; it's one where, the hold long enough, and the Afghanistan Government holds long enough until the Taliban does itself in from its own mistakes.

But it's a very chancy policy, and to run a country or for that matter, your foreign policy towards a country and hoping that your enemy will make enough mistakes is a risky proposition. The only other way that it can end is through political process. And I don't mean by that, simply negotiations with the Taliban, which elusive and minimal, and they know we are going to come online any serious matter for a long time.

But it's about politics within Afghanistan. It's about the ending, the constant brinksmanship, one for all, they'll just make most money, and most power before it all falls down, and unless that mentality changes, no matter what we do with Pakistan, and no matter what we do with the Taliban, and as long governance continues to be pernicious from the perspective of Afghan people, the conflict will not end.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. John?

GEN. ALLEN: I think, Bruce do you want to touch the Pakistan

question?

MR. RIEDEL: Sure.

GEN. ALLEN: Please.

MR. RIEDEL: Pakistan is as almost every issue, a very complex, very complicated place, Pakistani policies towards Afghanistan has multiple layers. The individual actors involved in Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan have complicated layers.

First, in trying to get at that I want compliment Harlan. I've been looking for months to find out what Mr. Trump's posture is on Afghanistan. I hadn't been aware that he had indicated that the U.S. was going to pull out. I thought the Trump policy on Afghanistan was to make Afghanistan great again by building a large wall on its southern border. Now I've found out that that's not indeed the case.

I agree with Vanda. Politics is how this ends; politics inside Afghanistan, politics between Afghanistan and Pakistan, politics between the United States and Pakistan, and regional politics more broadly. Now, one of the flaws of the so-called AFPAK strategy back in 2009 was that it wasn't a South Asian strategy. We didn't try to incorporate the views of India, we didn't try to incorporate the views of Iran, we didn't try to incorporate the views of Central Asia in any serious way.

The new American strategy needs to do all of those things. I laid out some of the specifics I think we need to do about Pakistan; I think we need to be willing to engage in more drone operations like the Mullah Mansour. Not many of them, but some. We need to be much more decisive in trying to go after Afghan funding, and a lot of that goes through Pakistan at the end of the day.

At the same we have robustly engage the Pakistanis, so that includes both the political leadership and the military leadership. I would hope that whoever is

next President of the United States would early on invite Nawaz Sharif to come to the United States for discussions, a state visit. I would hope that the next President of the United States will travel to Pakistan on his or her watch, and engage with the Pakistanis there.

When she was Secretary so State, Hillary Clinton went to Pakistan on numerous occasions, she was very blunt in what she had to say. She repeatedly said that in her opinion, somebody in the Pakistani establishment knew exactly where Osama bin Laden was living, and I think in retrospect she turns out to have been very present of that.

I think we also have to realize, though, that the next administration is not going to have some of the options that Obama Administration have. You know, in the first two weeks of President Obama coming into office he sent someone in excess of 20,000 troops into Afghanistan. I think that's almost inconceivable that the next president would be able to do that.

Almost, caveat is there, because Trump has proven to be unpredictable in so many ways, who knows, he might even be able to pull off something like that. I think it will be very hard for Mrs. Clinton to pull off something like that. Her own political party perhaps in this country would not be willing to go along.

One option I think is pretty much off the table. I think you could make changes in the composition of American forces, you can change mission requirements. You could probably increase 1,000 or 2,000 but you are not going to be able to send 20,000, let alone have a surge of the magnitude that President Obama had, unless situation deteriorates remarkably.

Something else the next president is not going to be able to do, and that is substantial economic and military assistance to Pakistan. When President Obama

came into office he was an enthusiastic supporter of increasing economic assistance to Pakistan, and we saw a substantial increase in economic assistance.

President Bush and President Obama over the course of the last 15 years have provided Pakistan with, in excess of $25 billion in military and economic assistance. Now you could not get that through the Hill, it just is impossible today. The mood on the Hill about Pakistan has changed dramatically in the last two years, and it's changed against providing assistance to Pakistan, so that option will be off the table.

May be able to get some increases in aids in the economic field, I don't think you are going to be able to do it in a significant way, I think it will be very hard to persuade this Congress to provide substantial military assistance, military sales or anything in that order.

So I think it's going to be a complicated action. I think we need to be, as I said earlier, willing to be on the offence, I think at the same time we are going to have to engage very, very hard with the Pakistani leadership, and that's going to be a difficult and complicated conversation.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

GEN. ALLEN: I'll just follow on behind both comments. I couldn't agree more with both Vanda and Bruce that the solution is a political solution, and never were our recommendations with respect to the residual NATO Force intended to give the Afghan's the capacity to wipe to the Taliban. Our hope had been to give the Afghan National Security Forces the Army in particular, but as well as the Police.

To give them the capacity to control the Taliban, to render their operational threat, their potential existential threat to the country, to render that to a level where it could be handled over a long period of time by the standing Afghan Forces; and I believe, as Colonel Vowell saw personally, that with the right configuration of allied

capabilities, NATO capabilities, for the right period of time and the right resources to Afghan National Security Forces. I believe that security platform can be sustained upon which, then, as Vanda correctly has pointed out, the political stability can move forward.

The security platform is irrelevant, except in so far as it creates the environment within Afghanistan with large, where political progress and stability can move forward, and where economic stability and economic progress can also take hold. Those other two legs of that stool can only flourish if we have a stability -- a security stability that can only be sustained, I believe, by a long-term NATO presence in that country, long-term, well beyond 2020, a long-term sustainability to the Afghan National Security Forces well beyond 2020.

As Colonel Vowell said, and I think many of us in here recognized, you know, we didn't get to the point where the armed forces of the Republic of Korea, or the Japanese Forces, or the Taiwan Forces, or the Thai Forces, or the Philippine Forces, or the Colombian Forces, were able to achieve the level of stability, or level of capabilities that they could have by being there for three years with numbers that were irrelevant.

The only way we are going to do this with Afghanistan is to be there in numbers that are relevant with capabilities that are relevant for the period of time, that gives us the capacity to thrice them up, while they are building their own capabilities, to build that security platform for political stability and economic progress.

And I don't know what that number is, I gave a number a few years ago, and my suggestion would be that the next president, as I said before, take the time to do the kind of analysis that is necessary to look at the situation within the government and the economy and the security platform, so all three of those were looked at holistically. And that we can take the steps that are necessary to put in several thousand more if necessary, or to change the combination of forces that are necessary, ultimately to

achieve that stability.

With regard to Pakistan, you know, I used to get the CODELs that would come through, congressional delegations that would come through my Headquarters in Afghanistan, in Kabul, and it seemed to me that, taking an implication from Bruce's comments, it seems to me that invariably after they would get the brief from me, the intent was to go then to Islamabad and give them a piece of their mind.

We are moving to a normal American punitive reflex with respect to Pakistan, and I reject that, and I always advised against it, because we needed to engage with Pakistan, it needed there not be a punitive relationship because there's just so far we can push them before something may ultimately happen that we could lose control of. And frankly, I don't know that the Pakistanis even know how far that could go.

There have been helpful political developments and political progress. We have seen the peaceful change of one civilian government to another, but we've not seen the kind of military capabilities brought to bear in the FATA that are necessary, but to be fair, the Pakistani Military of course maintains a large component of its strength in the East, and a lesser and an expeditionary component of its strength in the West.

And that portion of its strength in the West is generally not well resourced and they live in difficult circumstances, they fight in difficult circumstances, and in many respects those troops are Punjabi, and in many respects are viewed as a foreign-occupying power, as much as we would be if were there.

So, it's a really difficult situation, as Bruce implies. Where, I think, we can make the greatest contribution is to try to, with the international community, facilitate the kind of dialogue and conversation between Afghanistan and Pakistan that can move us in a direction where they can have the relationship necessary to get a relatively effective peace process going. And I'll stop there.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. We have time for one final lighting round. We are going to take two quick questions, three quick responses, and we'll be done. So, let's see. Maybe I'll take three questions. So the two gentlemen right next to each other here, in about the seventh row or sixth row, and the woman over here in the fifth row. Then we'll wrap up.

MR. OLSON: Tom Olson. A question about the funding from Middle Eastern countries, from the Gulf countries: How significant is it, who is doing it, do we know is doing it and what is their motivation?

MR. CHAUDHRY: Thank you very much, Michael. I'm Dr. Nisar Chaudhry with the Pakistan American League. As Vanda mentioned that in Afghanistan corruption, bad governance, rule of law, and when anything goes wrong there they fix the blame on Pakistan. And for General Allen I have this question, that in spite of have communication lines open in 2011, why those special forces really to strike not only the check post, but killed 37 people including the Commanding Officer of that post.

And about Bruce, I will say he has mentioned about friction to be blamed on Pakistan that they finance the Taliban in Afghanistan, could he tell us what is the incentive of Pakistan to finance those Talibans, and --

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Lightning round rule, that's it.

MR. CHAUDHRY: -- under the leadership of the USA I think there should be a regional approach and all these stakeholders should be included in that negotiation.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, and now we go for the last question, please?

MS. SULTAN: Hi. Masuda Sultan, I'm a Founding Board Member of women's organization in Afghanistan called Women for Afghan Women. I've also been

running a business and have been serving as a DoD contractor supporting the ANSF. My question is, there seems to be agreement that political solution needs to happen, there's a large dissatisfaction with the National Unity Government and there's talks of loya jirga, and possibly new elections. This is mostly what I've heard from my Afghan colleagues, they've said if there loya jirga today, they scrap the NUG entirely, form an interim government or call for new elections.

And I just wanted to see your thoughts on that, what you thought? You know, assuming that the NUG is not working what other solutions might work politically, and whether the U.S. -- The Afghans say if the U.S. leaves us alone, then we will create a new government, but if the U.S. insists on an NUG type government then that will continue. So I want to get your thoughts on that. Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Vanda, do you want to start with that last question again, and we'll work down?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Sure. One of the misperceptions and some comment needs repeated in Afghanistan is that the National Unity Government was foisted on Afghanistan by the United States. Let's remember that there were months prior of Afghan inability to resolve highly-contentious presidential elections, and that by the time the United States was engaging with Afghan politicians on how to end the crisis, the country might have been on the verge of ethnic strife, with force of strife, with forces mobilizing in -- ethnic forces mobilizing around Kabul.

There was also talk of a military coup. And so far, one of the government's advantages that Afghanistan has had over Pakistan, which is equally characterized by miserable governance, corruption, problematic politicians, is also, then in Pakistan there are military coups, but as fortunately Afghanistan we haven't had one. And should we come to that in Afghanistan, there is a high chance that the military will fall

apart along ethnic and patronage rise, effectively ending our ability to maintain the current level of counterinsurgency.

It is up to the Afghan politicians as much as President Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah, but for a variety of key -- are the powerbrokers to resolve what to do about the National Unity Government. Calls for early elections are just unfeasible, there is no security put in progress for that, and the electoral issues that have prevented this, parliamentary elections from being held will not be magically erased for a new presidential election.

So calls for that, are calls that fuel political tensions, but really are not realistic. So there will have to be some sort of negotiations between the key actors. And constitutional jirga cannot be constitutionally held because the stricken parliamentary elections which will be feeding some of the delegates will not have taken place.

A loya jirga, which is what President Karzai, Former President Karzai has called for, lacked credibility, who will it be stuffed with and with what kind of agenda. There is nothing inevitable that the government needs to stay in its current configuration, there is, however, also nothing inevitable that it needs to renegotiated.

What is crucially needed is for Afghan politicians to recognize how precarious a state the country is, and instead of just engaging in in-fighting, agree to support the government whose purpose will be to deliver better governance and increase security. That can be with the current constellation, or it can be with another one.

Afghans often say that they don't want U.S. to be involved with that, and yet they, all the time, many politicians run to the U.S. than to negotiate and adjudicate among the sandbox fights that are taking place. And the U.S. is in a very difficult position. In my view, the U.S. should be less engaged in holding the Afghans by hand, at the same time I say it, having the previously called for, that the most crucial and yet most

difficult element is precisely managing the political processes and the many pernicious political processes.

I also want to just end on, although I say that Afghans often use a Pakistan as an excuse, Pakistan has often used Afghanistan as an excuse, and the country is equally troubled, by poor governance and very nefarious external polices that sponsor the Taliban.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. General John?

GEN. ALLEN: Just a couple of brief comments. Vanda has a couple -- has hit this a couple of times, and I meant to comment on it. When I came back from Afghanistan and I did my final briefs around Washington, I talked about what I believe to be the future of Afghanistan. And I said, that I believe that with the right combination of sustained support by NATO, the ANSF could, over time, be able to take care of themselves, to deal with the threat of the Taliban. And I believed it then, and I believe it now, and I think the next President has the opportunity to perhaps improve on that.

I also said that I believe that with the continued sustainment of the Afghan National Security Forces that we could handle the safe havens in Pakistan. Now they would be a challenge, they would always be a means by which the Taliban could replenish themselves and refurbish their capabilities, but I believe that over time, with the right kind of NATO presence to deal with the Taliban in the country, particularly in the East, in 201 and 203rd Corps area with the defense and depth that we were putting in place, that in fact the Afghans could handle the security situation and deal with the safe havens in Pakistan.

But I then said, and I was very clear about this, I believe that the existential treat to Afghanistan is not the Taliban, and it is not Pakistan, the existential threat to Afghanistan is corruption. And until Afghans are willing, ultimately, as Vanda

has said, to shed their self-interest, until we are able to deal with the criminal capture of institutions, both at the national level, and very importantly, which makes progress very difficult.

At the sub-national level, provincial and district, until we are able to deal with the pernicious nature of corruption, which is both corrosive of democracy, but also an impediment to building real capabilities and capacity within the institutions of government, Afghanistan is going to be stuck where it is today. And which I think, it's still on the poverty scale of fourth poorest in the world, maybe the third or fourth at this point, but also in terms of corruption, it ranks slightly above Somalia and North Korea.

And so if we are ever to see real progress in Afghanistan it has got to be at the point where ultimately the institutions of Pakistan can be arrested from the criminal capture of organized crime, and the unwillingness of Afghanistan's -- of Afghans to do the right thing for each other, and for their country.

And then finally, on the issue of Middle East funding. I spend a lot of time with our intelligent services, and Bruce may have a similar view, or a different view, trying to pinpoint the exact origins of funding for the Taliban, it's very difficult to do it. Large amounts of money come out of the Gulf. I don't believe it is stated-sponsored, I didn't believe it when I was the Commander, and since I've had the opportunity to spend some time in a couple of different billets where I've had to deal with -- I don't believe it is state-sponsored.

But I do believe there are key individuals in Gulf that are providing funding, and in order to solve that, it's both about getting after the financial system that makes it difficult for that occur, but also cooperating with the national governments in the Gulf, the monarchies in Gulf, to put pressure on those individuals who might be doing it.

I watched with great interest in the summer of '12, as Syria exploded as

a civil war, and I watched the funding be diverted from the Gulf into Syria, and the funding levels for the Taliban plummeted, and it became very difficult in the summer of '12 for the Taliban to field the kinds of IEDs, RPGs, et cetera, and it actually changed the operational balance.

So it is not insignificant the funding that is going into the Gulf, and with regard to the border incident I'll have to talk to you separately. I've got my views, very strong views, it was an unfortunate incident. We expressed our regret, I'm still in prayer over the lives of the lost Pakistani Military troops, but the shooting didn't start on our side. I'll just tell you that. I'll get that out, since you chose to make your comments as well.

It didn't start on our side, but sadly it got beyond both sides, and it was a matter of trust on both sides. Had we had better trust, had we been better organized in our joint border coordination centers, we probably could have solved it before the really heavy shooting started. And we would have prevented the outcome that we ultimately had; which, for all intents and purposes lost us nine months of cooperation with Pakistan, which could have been quite valuable to the progress of the war. And we still regret those losses by the Pakistani Military.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Bruce, the final word.

MR. RIEDEL: I'll be brief. I'll make two points. First point, the next President of the United States of America inherits the longest war in American history. In these upcoming debates, both the presidential and vice presidential, it is really incumbent on these two people to tell us what they are going to do about this war.

We need something serious, a real debate about what the United States is going to do in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The issue remains very serious for many, many reasons that you've already heard, I'll just add one more. While al-Qaeda has been disrupted and dismantled significantly in Pakistan in the last seven years, the one

fact we know about al-Qaeda is its resiliency. And if we take off the pressure on al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and especially in Pakistan, you will see that resiliency once again.

Second point is about funding. I think General Allen has addressed that issue very carefully, and I think correctly. It's a murky area, but a substantial amount of Taliban funding comes from rich private donors in the Gulf States. It's no accident that Mullah Mansour spent 18 trips to Dubai, because Dubai is one of the least-governed spaces in the Gulf States. The United Arab Emirates is supposed to be a single country. Anyone who has ever visited United Arab Emirates, know there there's seven countries and Dubai has very relations in many ways with Abu Dhabi.

We need to put considerable effort into working with the governments of the Gulf States, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and others, in order to persuade them to take the kind of aggressive actions against funding for the Afghan Taliban that they have already taken against funding for al-Qaeda, and for the Islamic State.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you very much. In closing, let me just say that in addition to what you have heard today, we are producing this paper that General Allen referred to really with a lot of the former commanders, the SRAPs, the ambassadors, a number of us in the scholarly ranks that we hope will be of use to the next president as well. That will be coming out, I hope later this month.

But let me just thank all of you for being here. Please join me in thanking the panel. (Applause)

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