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THE LONG WAR IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

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MR. O'HANLON: Greetings, everyone. Welcome to Brookings and thank you for coming to this important discussion on Afghanistan. I'm Michael O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy program.

Along with my colleague, Vanda Felbab-Brown, we would like to welcome you and welcome our distinguished Afghan guests, who will begin our conversation, as you know, with some opening thoughts and then we'll have Vanda comment a bit of a discussion up here and then go to all of you.

I'll introduce all three of the panelists in just a moment, but I first want to express what I know is the sympathy of American friends for what Afghanistan's just been through in recent days with the tragedy in Balkh Province, but also congratulate our Afghan friends on the tenacity and the resilience that they've continued to display as they attempt this long and arduous task of rebuilding their country progress -- a project that's had so much progress and yet has so far still to go and where the United States, of course, has been a partner for so long and continues to be as President Trump reportedly contemplates various changes in Afghanistan policy as Secretary of Defense James Mattis visits Kabul this very day.

So with that general context and with the political context in Afghanistan also being that we're now more than halfway through the Ghani/Abdullah term, so to speak.

With parliamentary elections overdue and presidential elections not quite looming, but in 2019, not that far away, there's a lot to discuss in the political space as well as in security and economic terms.

So it's in that context that we welcome today Afghan ambassador to the United States, Dr. Hamdullah Mohib, who is a very young and yet very accomplished man who's received degrees from Brunel University in Britain including his Ph.D., has worked as the deputy chief of staff for President Ghani in Kabul, has been involved in a number of outreach and networking efforts among Afghan students, among other Afghan young diaspora of Afghanistan around the world, done a great deal already for his country, and now represents his government, the Ghani/Abdullah government here in Washington.

To my immediate left is a man who really deserves a huge accolade, but really doesn't need introduction among people who have been watching Afghanistan for a long time, Dr. Anwar ul-Haq Ahady has been minister of finance, minister of commerce, he has been an important economic adviser to President Karzai.

He's also been in more recent governments in recent years. He is an opposition politician as well in Afghanistan. So he's helped build the modern Afghan state, helped this current government in much of what it's been up to. Yet with those elections now already shaping up in 2019, he may be one of the key participants in one way or another. I'll let him describe his further plans in that regard.

But I guess I want to bring that to a point to let you know that while we're hearing two Afghan voices, these are men with very different current positions. Where we're starting to see healthy democracy and debate really begin to germinate and take root in Afghanistan, I think we'll probably have a better dialogue, in fact, among these two Afghan leaders than we sometimes have among our own political leaders in the United States, even after 241 years of democracy here.

With no further ado, I'm going to turn first to the ambassador to ask him to offer some framing remarks on where Afghanistan is today in terms of security, economics, and politics, or whichever dimensions of those broad subjects he wants to get at by way of framing and introduction.

Then I will ask the minister to offer his own thoughts and his thoughts about the future. Vanda will comment, and then we'll have a bit of a conversation before turning to you.

So given the protocol here and given how happy we are to have the Afghan ambassador and the minister, could you please join in me in a hand to welcome them to Brookings.

(Applause.)

MR. O'HANLON: Ambassador Mohib, over to you.

AMBASSADOR MOHIB: Thank you for having us here, Michael. Thank you, Vanda. Welcome to minister. It's an honor to be on a panel with you, and we have our minister -- former minister of foreign affairs here as well, so it's a distinguished crowd.

It has been a difficult week for us, for Afghanistan, but not to say that this has not been a difficult decade. I think the attacks of last week actually puts everything into perspective of what we have been achieving and what we have been trying to do.

I think at times like this, we tend to forget all that we have put together. We tend to forget that there are people in that country, and we tend to forget that we have made tremendous amount of progress so far in making sure that we defeat the terrorists.

Now, we have started to see a number of attacks on the Afghan security forces in places where they're not in a combat role, in a combat place. We have seen the Taliban attack a bus that was transporting Afghan security forces. We've seen them target a hospital and recently the killing of 140 Afghan armed military personnel inside a mosque.

It shows the nature and the change in the fighting trends, one. It also shows that the enemies are not going to stop at any point. They will target any location that they can and more frequently so than before unprepared and unarmed civilians in this (coughing).

To be able to put things in perspective and I think at times like this we forget how -- where the rest of the stage is. While we're focused on the security, we tend to forget what has been done in the Afghan government on all the other matters.

Normally I don't go to remarks like this, but I had some things prepared just so we get an idea of how far we have come along and that this unfortunate incident should not undermine all of the other efforts that have gone on.

This year, just this last year, the international community came together in Brussels to visit -- revisit their partnership with Afghanistan, and as a consequence contributed, committed, at least \$15 billion to continued support to Afghanistan.

We understand that the challenges we face remain considerable, but I want to give you a snapshot of the achievements that have happened over the past year and a half. As you mentioned, we're halfway through our five-year term.

This government created a national procurement authority to scrutinize government contracts. So far it has reviewed more than a thousand contracts worth \$3.5 billion and saved over \$300 million that would have gone to corruption.

It implemented transparency and accountability systems across government agencies and created the countries first Anti-Corruption Commission and Anti-Corruption Justice Center to investigate and prosecute senior Afghan official, several of whom have been punished under its auspices. This is the first time since we have had a culture of impunity targeted.

We created a new high council chaired by President Ghani that oversees the public declaration of assets by senior officials, appointed a new chief justice, an attorney general, in her place and hundreds of judges and prosecutors. We fired 25 percent of custom officials and prosecuted several money laundering cases.

As a result of these and other measures, government revenue has grown rapidly two years in a row, 2016 by more than 18 percent and 2015 by more than 22 percent.

In the areas of private sector our foreign investments increased from 15 million to over a billion dollars. The public private partnership law was approved by the Cabinet, approximately 28 hectares of government land worth 35 million was sold to one private company to build six factories that will employ 1,700 people and create thousands of indirect jobs.

The Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industries has identified 11 private sector priorities and the government has established dedicated committees to monitor and execute action plans for each.

The operation and maintenance of the Tarakhil power plant has been transitioned to a private sector operator. The contract for Afghanistan's first competitive private sector investment in energy infrastructure, the Kandahar solar power plant has been issued. The Kartikeya Turbine 3 was installed, gassed sweetening plant in Sheberghan field with minimum treatment capacity of 950,000 cubic meters per day was launched.

The High Economic Council approved an open access policy to break the Afghan telecom monopoly by allowing all private telecom investors to either access the fiber optic network or build their own.

The gains women have made under this government are also irreversible. Our public sector is leading the way by appointing qualified women to key positions. There are more women in senior government positions than in any other time in the Afghan history.

As of now, we have three female ministers, nine female deputy ministers, one female governor, a female deputy attorney general, and the first female deputy, head of the High Peace Council, and two female Peace Council members.

Four female ambassadors have been appointed to Indonesia, Norway, Switzerland, and Canada, and Elimination of Violence Against Women Unit headed by the female prosecutor has been established in Attorney General's Office.

For the first time ever, public housing ownership titles were registered in the name of the wife and the husband, not just the husband. The National Priority Program for Economic Empowerment of Women will be launched this year.

This will open up unprecedented professional, legal, and financial opportunities for women. Namely 20,000 Afghan women now operate kitchen gardens that produce money making crops. The program is scaling up to a hundred thousand women in 2017. All women accused of moral crimes are having their cases reviewed, 75 percent have been released.

One of the other big achievements of this government has been the launch of the Citizens' Charter, a social contract between the government and the Community Development Council to improve the delivery of core services to people.

Cross-ministerial targets transparency and accountability in public systems. First phase of program -- of the government's program of the Citizens' Charter is a ten-year national program that aims to reach 8.5 million people in the first phase.

The goals include to provide 3.5 million people access to clean drinking water, including the quality of service delivery in health, education, rural roads, and electrification, increased citizen's satisfaction and trust in government, and 35 percent return in -- on investment in infrastructure project. It will aim to better integrate internally displaced citizens, people with disabilities, poor people, and women.

In 2016, World Press Freedom Index ranks Afghanistan higher than every neighboring country, and four best among the 13 countries of South and Central Asia. An MoU was signed with the Republic of Azerbaijan to launch a project called Assaun Hunat, which is a one-stop shop to provide public services quickly, easily, and in a transparent way.

The Kabul Center was established and will soon provide 21 services, including national ID cards, wedding certificates, driver's licenses, and vehicle registration under one roof. A nationwide program was launched to survey, register, and provide certification of land occupancy to irregular urban settlements in five major cities. Over 6,000 properties have already been mapped and registered.

Namely 1 million new students enrolled in school in 2015, total enrollment now stands at 9.4 million and almost 40 percent are girls.

The first ever National Demographic & Health Survey provided new baseline information on education, maternal, and child health, fertility, vaccination, malaria, and HIV.

Approximately 58 million health care visits provided to citizens in 2015, 3 million more than the previous year, including some 1.2 million antenatal services, and about 7 million birth delivery services attended by health workers.

Just going to the livelihood part and President Ghani and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated the Salma Dam, which we now call the India-Afghanistan Friendship Dam in June 2016.

It will generate 42 megawatts of electricity for 40,000 rural families, irrigate 80,000 hectors of farmland owned by 50,000 families, and supply power to Herat City. The first phase of jobs for peace distributed over 70 million in salaries, reaching more than 5,000 communities and created at least 2.6 million days of labor.

More than 31,000 farmers have benefited from the \$60 million in Agriculture Development Fund loans. The government will construct 22 small and medium irrigation dams to increase small holders, farms productivity, six of which have already gone to tender.

Rehabilitation of the close to 2,000 kilometers in irrigation infrastructure has led to substantial increases in water availability for more than close to half a million hectors of agriculture land.

Afghanistan is now a member of the World Trade Organization and Afghan businesses -- businessmen and women have made new connections to regional and international markets, generating over 79.5 million in exports of fruit, nuts, and cashmere.

Agri businesses, producers, and farmers open new markets leading to an additional 325 million agriculture sales. The land and water administration we named Arazi has recovered 6,000 hectares of illegally seized land and is giving farmers land general security and safety from seizure.

On the security front, I want to say that the Afghan National Security Forces are working very hard shoulder to shoulder with our counterparts, especially the U.S. military, to defeat terrorism and the Taliban in Afghanistan.

Last Friday attacks by the Taliban that killed more than 140 of our brave soldiers was not just an attack on our security forces, but our whole country and our people.

Increasingly we see our enemies choosing to avoid meeting our security forces head on. Instead dressing up in disguises to attack unsuspecting, unprotected soft targets, even hospitals and Mosques, that's because our military has surpassed expectations in terms of its capabilities. Now our security forces are moving toward transparency and professional leadership, but we are on the front lines of a war being waged against the whole world, the war against terrorism.

ISIS Kadur Daesh is still a threat, and the Taliban in the Afghani network still enjoy support from sanctuaries across the border in Pakistan.

As most of you know, the Afghan government now has a four-year strategy to win the peace. With the right support and equipment, we can turn the tide in our favor and emerge as victors in this battle between good and evil. This attack is marked as the beginning of an end of Taliban in Afghanistan.

I'll stop here.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you very much, Mr. Ambassador. I have one very brief follow-up before we go to Dr. Ahady, which is that one thing I didn't mention about recent events, but it's just in today's news, of course, is the apparent firing of the minister of defense and the replacement of four Afghan Army Corps commanders, which I think is four out of seven, so a high percentage.

While last Friday's attacks were tragic and perhaps involved some less than robust defenses at the base where the tragedy occurred, without blaming the victims. Obviously it was

the Taliban or ISIS that carried out the attack. Nonetheless this seems like a very, very strong response.

I wondered if you could explain a little more about why Dr. Ghani -- President Ghani has apparently chosen to replace I think six of his top defense officials after one particular tragedy.

Is this because a lot of this was soon to happen anyhow, in the works anyhow, or should we understand this as a direct response to last week?

AMBASSADOR MOHIB: Well, both. There has been a reform plan in the process and this -- these events expedited some of those actions that were already being taken. This wouldn't be the last of the reforms, this is just the beginning of what is to come there.

Last year we prosecuted at least two generals for corruption charges and that has been a new movement coming in to bring transparency and accountability to the Afghan Security Forces.

When a civilian or soldier was killed, the weight of that -- those coffins is very heavy on our shoulders. Last year we had close to 29,000 casualties. The enemy is not going to stop. It's on us, the Afghans and our international partners, to make sure that we not only defend against these attacks coming, but also to go on offensive to be able to clear the areas that has been infested by the terrorists.

MR. O'HANLON: One last clarifying question, just to get the facts on the table here. So what we know there have been recent attacks by both ISIS and the Taliban.

How confident are you about attribution for each? Does the Afghan government have a clear diagnosis of what happened in each of the cases, the the hospital tragedy of several weeks ago, last Friday's tragedy near Mazar-i-Sharif, do you have clear attribution for each of those in your mind?

AMBASSADOR MOHIB: Well, all of these attacks are always claimed. There have been very small number of attacks that haven't had a claim associated, so those that launch the attack have claimed the responsibility for it.

MR. O'HANLON: So just to be clear again, with the hospital attack, ISIS?

AMBASSADOR MOHIB: Yes.

MR. O'HANLON: Then last Friday's attack, any ambiguity there?

AMBASSADOR MOHIB: No. Well, none so far, but there is investigation into it. If anything new arises, we'll obviously share that with the public.

MR. O'HANLON: Your understanding now is that was a Taliban attack?

AMBASSADOR MOHIB: Yes, that's who would claim the attack.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, sir.

Dr. Ahady, I should have -- could have called you Professor Ahady, Minister Ahady. He received his Ph.D. here in the United States at Northwestern, taught at places like Carleton College, had a distinguished career here before going back home, like many Afghan patriots, to help rebuild their country after the events of early 2001 -- well, early to late 2001.

I should have also been clear upfront, all of your government jobs were under President Karzai. In recent months, I think just dating to last year, you began a new political opposition movement called the new National Front of Afghanistan, I believe.

So without further ado, please, sir, the floor is yours.

MINISTER AHADY: Well, thank you very much, and I would like to thank Brookings for giving me this opportunity to speak about the issues in Afghanistan. I also would like to thank the audience. It seems like there is quite a bit of interest given from -- I mean, from the attendants.

I'm also pleased that if I have somebody from the government that it's this ambassador. As they say, you can disagree with people, but you don't have to dislike them. Well, I disagree with the government, but I don't dislike him. Actually I like him, so it's a good thing that he's around.

Actually I change my plan as to what to talk about last night. Initially as it was explained earlier, I was supposed to talk about developments during the national -- the so-called National Unity Government for the past two and a half to three years. I didn't find whether the successes, which I find it very difficult to find, but I intended to talk mostly about the failures of the government.

But given the importance of the security situation and the interests that the President Trump administration has shown regarding this situation in Afghanistan in the past few weeks, and also some statements that have been made, actually Ambassador just made that statement here too and our government has said that, and also some U.S. government officials regarding the future development of the conflict, I thought it would be best for me to talk about this

situation. If there is time, then I will talk about the other issues that -- the situation of Afghanistan later.

Let me also use this opportunity to them and thanking them the acts of the armed opposition that took place last Friday, the killing of more than 140, 150 people from the armed services.

I think regardless of how much we disagree with the government, this is one thing where we agree with each other, and that is that we totally disagree with the other side as far as their tactics or strategy is concerned.

Let me get to the actual issue and that is, even though that the President Trump's administration policy has not been declared yet, but I think there are some movements, there are some statements, and there are some activities that tells me that, well, this administration is not going to disengage from Afghanistan.

They have already decided to send some additional forces, and I personally welcome that. I think it's a good thing to strengthen the Afghan state. I might -- I disagree with the government, but failure of the state and especially a military defeat of the existing government or any other government would lead to a chaos that will really create a human catastrophe there, real tragedies.

I think in this regard, I support the recent, even though not declared policy, but I expect that policy to become more clearer. Nevertheless the acts that have been taken by the U.S. government in the past month or so, I support that.

But supportive as I am of this situation, I'm little bit concerned too. I think there are some statements that would tell me that both our government, the Afghan government and the current administration here, they might be going more in the direction of a military solution.

The ambassador just said, this is evil and good and that should be eliminated completely, and I think that there are some statements recently from some U.S. official to this effect. Sometimes president already makes such statement, especially when it's not written. When it's not writing something, in my opinion, it's quite careless his use of words and I'm concerned.

It's one thing to strengthen the negotiating position of the government, it is another thing to aim at the complete military victory. Complete military victory, of course, it makes it very easy then

to build a new regime and a new system there as it happened after -- in 2001 when the United States had complete military victory, it was very easy to establish a new regime.

But achieving that sort of a military victory, I don't think it's even possible in Afghanistan. I think military victory was possible in Afghanistan until maybe 2011, 2012 at the latest. But for the past three, four years, I don't think it has -- is possible for us to have a military situation in Afghanistan.

By "military situation" what I mean is that the United States NATO forces and Afghan forces, they would not be able to completely crush the Taliban movement in Afghanistan.

But at the same time, Taliban would not be able to take control of the states. As long as this government has the support of the international community, I don't think they will be able to do that either. Therefore, I think it's very important from a policy point of view, from a strategic point of view to contain one's expectation. I think it would be only realistic that we should seek political solutions to the conflict, not a military solution, military solution as I defined it earlier.

I would say this, that I don't think military solution is possible. Even if you were to increase American forces, another 10,000 American soldiers if you were to send them there, with a lot more bombs and a lot more really, the Taliban are throughout the country. They are everywhere and -- but most importantly is that they have foreign support.

In the past it used to be Pakistan, but now I think they have support from Russia as well. Russia, there was a few who were familiar with the realists' school of thought. It's more an expansionist, an expansionist more in the sense it's not happy with the status quo that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The international status quo that has been for the past two decades or two-and-a-half decades, I think they want to change that and I think they are picking places such as Syria, Afghanistan, et cetera, et cetera, and I think they will be helping the other side and that will make it very difficult for military solution to be successful in Afghanistan. Therefore, I want to emphasize that -- that I hope that we don't make that mistake of seeking political solution.

I also think that any rivalry, continuous or prolonged rivalry, between the U.S. and between Russia and Afghanistan will be disastrous for Afghanistan. It means neither side would win, but the killing will continue, there will be no progress.

I know the ambassador mentioned lots of facts. I can debate some of those facts, the importance of those facts. But a few years ago, we had 11 million students in schools. I don't think we have any 7 million students in schools anymore.

We had built lots of schools. Most of those are destroyed. The achievement of the first 10 or 12 years of Karzai, some of those are already gone and that's because of the war. So if this war were to continue for another five years, ten years, I don't think there will be any progress. There will be just regression. The state will be there, the government may not collapse, but I don't think we will be making any significant improvement in this regard.

Therefore, it is very important that we do have for political solution as our target. Now, with regard to political solution, unfortunately there is no peace plan by anybody.

The United States as well as the current Afghan government and actually Hamid Karzai's government, their position was the same thing as the balance of power was in 2003, 2004, to 2007.

Their position was that the opposition can join the government, we can give them some posts in the government, and they can join the normal political process, which is -- sounds not bad.

They use that formula with Islami basically to make them part of the system, but Taliban their position is such that I don't think they would accept that kind of solution.

We had a meeting about a year-and-a-half ago in Oslo and the government presented its position and the Taliban flatly rejected it. The Taliban don't have a very clear plan either. From my discussion with them through the Pugwash Conference, talks that we had a number of times with them, they have three main demands, but it's not a complete peace plan.

They want to withdraw international forces, they want a regime government, they don't want to deal with this government, they don't trust this government, they don't like this government. Also I think it's for them a psychological -- from a psychological point of view, they would like to tell their own people that we brought about the change of government, if not the change of the entire

regime of entire system. They want divisions within the Constitution, but there are lots of -- they don't have a complete peace plan there.

So what we need is really a peace plan and there are few points that I would like to mention with regard to peace plan that we need to take into consideration.

One, I don't think we should allow protocol to prevent as from discussing very serious issues. Sometimes discussion who is the other side, this is needing recognition, we shouldn't be talking with the Taliban, we shouldn't be talking about that because of the protocol, because of what the international norm says, et cetera, et cetera, I mean, it reminds me of 1968, '69 when there was the Vietnam negotiation. They spent six months on the shape of the table. Finally I think it was President Johnson who said, to hell with the shape of the table, just get to the talks.

The United States need not, the Secretary of State, the Ambassador need not to talk to the Taliban. They have other ways of talking to them, but let's get to the issues as to what are the issues of contentions, and I think we should not allow protocol.

I don't think the Afghan government, whether it was the previous government or this, should dictate the U.S. in this regard as to whom they can talk to or whom they cannot talk to. We are beyond that position. Our government is not that strong that we will -- that such attitude will help us.

The National Unity Government's position on this itself is inconsistent. There was a time they wanted direct negotiations with the Taliban. They were asking Pakistan for God's sake impress upon the Taliban to talk to us directly.

During this four quadrilateral negotiations, they wanted Taliban -- they wanted Pakistan to bring Taliban to the table. But now when Taliban accepted the Russian invitation, the Afghan government is saying they should not be there. So I don't think we should be allowing that situation to prevent us from reaching peace.

It seems to me that Russia seems to have developed leverage. Taliban rejected Pakistan's pressure to come to the negotiating table, but they accepted Russia's invitation, even though it didn't -- that was last week I think, or ten days ago. It did not take place, but it was very

low-level discussion with them, not being that important. That tells me that perhaps the Russians have developed the leverage otherwise probably they would not. I think we should use that.

I'm not even half through, so I don't know if you're looking at your papers, but I'll try to -- okay.

As I said earlier, I think the Afghan government and our allies, we should improve our military strength, the military strength of the Afghan government, to be able to resist and to prevent the advances of the Taliban.

But at the same time, I think our allies, as well as the Afghan government, should be very open to a political settlement, because I don't think a military solution will prevail in any case.

But for political solution, we need to know from each side what are you ready to concede and what are the principals that you will not concede? The Afghan government has not addressed this issue.

I have my own thoughts, I have my sort of like a peace plan, but neither the United States -- the United States' position on this is -- it's nothing. It has no substance in this regard. Taliban they have made their specified five-year demands, but they have not really made a peace plan. I think we should be working on that.

The Afghan conflict has become too complicated. It used to be a number of years ago, it was primarily the United States, the Afghan government, Taliban, Pakistan. Now, Iran is involved, Saudi Arabia is involved. Saudi Arabia and Iran they have their own rivalry. Pakistan and India has its own rivalry. Now Russia is getting involved, and there is a Russian and American rivalry. Now Central Asian countries are getting involved, Turkey is involved. This is so difficult.

When you have so many actors to be -- but when I talk to some of them, really it's -- I think there are quite a few things that Taliban would agree with. They accept the elections. They accept. They're no longer interested in having Emirates as the form of government. They want political parties. They accept elections.

There are a lot of things that one can work with, but they say they don't want to talk to people, individuals, that do not have authority. They believe, rightly or wrongly, that it is the U.S. that needs to make this decision and they would like to talk to the U.S.

I do not want to totally disregard in international norm, but I think probably they can have -- United States can find a different way to talk to those people.

Recently I think ambassador also wrote an article in the New York Times, and I think that was kind of a good start. It does not have all the issues, but it does argue that the United States is not against the Taliban, Taliban are not against the U.S.

So I'm not talking here in favor of Taliban. I'm talking in favor of peace for political settlement that will lead to a new regime. Therefore --

MR. O'HANLON: Minister Ahady, I want to propose a slight audible here, because you've done a clear job and much appreciated on laying out a peace plan strategy, which is obviously one of the big questions before Afghanistan. You've done a great job of audiblizing that yesterday when you changed your plan for the talk.

I'd like to suggest that we leave that as the opening. I want to ask you one follow-up question about the state of the economy, ask Vanda then to offer her thoughts, and then we'll come back to the fuller discussion on other issues as well, if you don't mind.

Because I do have this question for you, which builds on what you said about comparing the Karzai period to the Ghani period I want to make sure before Vanda reacts that we have a clear understanding of what you are arguing.

You suggested there was a lot of progress and there are a lot of people in this room who helped, I know. I see Ambassador Neumann and Ambassador Akayday and I see Tony Wayne and I see a number of others, JB Vowell, many people in this room, Afghan and American and other, have worked together, and there was a lot of progress. I think we all agree on that. Then there was an intensification of the fight. The Taliban really resurged.

What I want to understand from you is, do you think under Karzai in the latter years, up to 2014, that there continued to be a kind of progress on the economy and on politics and everything else about internal Afghan governance which has now reversed under Ghani; do you actually think there's been a reversal relative to say 2012, '13, '14?

If you could be very specific on that, then I'll ask Vanda to comment.

MINISTER AHADY: Well, I suspected that I would be interrupted, because I know that it's kind of long --

MR. O'HANLON: I'm American. I'm rude.

MINISTER AHADY: -- how long it takes, because I don't have a written speech. I just have talking points.

Coming here to answer your question, you see under the Karzai administration, things were better. Because for the economy to work better for education, for civilization, you have to go back to Hobbs. In the state of nation, there is nothing. There is no civilization, there is no industry, there is no commerce. A minimum level of security is a requirement for those things to work.

I think we had the good security up to 2008, 2009. I think we had the minimum required security to 2012 and maybe even 2013. I don't think we have the minimum required level of security for anybody that would be willing to invest in Afghanistan. Nobody's investing. We are fooling ourself.

The International Private Investment is nonexistent. All we have is foreign aid. Afghan investors, they do not invest anymore. They have taken their money. Most of them have gone to Turkey and they have invested somewhere. They are rationale people, because there is not minimum security that's there.

They don't trust the government, this current government. They don't trust it in the sense -- you can say also corruption has increased a lot more. The private sector does not feel secure. Contracts can be dismissed by the government any time. So I don't think they would do that.

If you want me, I can go to the -- I mean, let me take another minute or two on this. Basically my opinion is on this that this government, the so-called National Unity Government, actually the title should be divided government of this united government.

The formal name is National Unity Government. I feel that's calling it that name, so I call it the so-called National Unity Government. It had a terrible start. It was a complete violation of the Constitution, so it was illegitimate from the very beginning. But the general public sort of perceived that maybe these two guys get together, maybe they will do great things.

So like in theories of legitimacy, there is a procedure of legitimacy, there is a substantive legitimacy. You didn't come to power the right way. Procedurally you did not have legitimacy. But if you achieve great things, then people will accept you.

Well, the result was the economy is in terrible shape. According to government statistics, which is not very reliable either, 41 percent of people are unemployed. They say that we have 1.5 percent growth. I'm not sure. You talk to the people, it's not -- there is valuation of the currency, not intentional, but de facto, and that tells you that it's not that strong.

The economy's in terrible situation, and this government unfortunately, unfortunately, contrary to expectation, they don't have any plan. This government does not have a plan as to how to create jobs. It's just continuation of previous projects that -- which is Public Works, mostly infrastructural, road building, power lines, et cetera, et cetera. It's just those projects that we started a number of years ago, we have not started new. The government is engaged really in deception -- in deceiving public --

MR. O'HANLON: That's very clear.

MINISTER AHADY: The worst part is that the governance. Governance is worst here. This is one thing as far as governance is concerned, the government does not have to have a lot of financial resources in order to have good governance. This government has lost governance.

Internal perception is -- there is no rule of law. I mean, there is no meritocracy, some exception notwithstanding. For the past few months, the president has simply engaged in giving away any position for political purpose. He's creating parallel government. For the same position, he has created two, three positions so that he can give it away to politicians.

MR. O'HANLON: I'm going to ask you to stop there, because this is good. We have a very clear disagreement now and your last comment crystalized it even further, because we've seen the news of President Ghani replacing six top military officials and you're saying that he's creating sort of more of a system of patronage, so the contrast could not be sharper in the views. It's a perfect moment to ask Vanda to help us.

MINISTER AHADY: I have one.

MR. O'HANLON: No, I'm going to Vanda at this point. We'll come back to you, but I'm going to the rude American on this one. I'm going to first say that Vanda has a forthcoming study through United Nations on fighting corruption and dealing with narcotics challenges in Afghanistan.

She's also testifying this Thursday, which I'm happy to report is prior to when the government can shut down and, therefore, the hearing probably will take place before the Foreign Affairs Committee in the House.

Finally in addition to her outstanding book, "Aspiration and Ambivalence," Ron Neumann and I and Tony Wayne and a few others had the privilege of writing a chapter with her last summer in a Brookings book.

So, Vanda, without further ado, please help us make sense of this complex subject.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you very much. Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to be with you gentlemen on the podium. I'm reminded of the old Afghan joke when someone asks how is Afghanistan, please answer in one word, good; how is Afghanistan, please answer in two words, not good. To some extent both are true.

I think it's undeniable that the past two-and-a-half years really since the end of 2013 have been enormously challenging in Afghanistan with the study of duration of security and economy.

That's not the fault of the government of National Unity, they inherited, "they" being President Ghani and NCO Abdullah Abdullah inherited the country in a moment of major transition shock and really earthquake on multiple fronts, with the departure of -- and develop of ISIS forces at the time, and great uncertainty.

The election was highly contested, highly fraudulent, we know that. It resulted also, given the security situation then, in a deterioration of the economy, much of which was really war economy built around the presence of international troops. Well, in terms of physical material fights, but also in terms of the perceptions of what allowed for an investment.

So government inherited the situation in a very serious, I would say, quite dire predicament and has been struggling to cope with the predicament.

It's encouraging to hear about the changes in the military. We'll see how much they will affect the battlefield, but it's clearly something that's been overdue. I would point out that it was a

great lost opportunity in the October 2015 Kunduz takeover by the Taliban where debt crisis really shook up Afghan political elite as well as Afghan population to an extent it was unprecedented.

It was a great opportunity to crackdown on the massive corruption, ethnic patronage rift that pervades the security forces. Unfortunately that opportunity was not systematically undertaken. We see a lot of -- we saw a lot of challenges since then in Helmand and in other provinces.

So I hope that as awful as the events of the past two weeks, particularly past few days have been, that this is now a moment of real wake-up call where we will see systematic and robust acting against corruption and ethnic and other forms of patronage.

In the military, obviously not everything can be tackled at the same time, but it's important to start focusing the anti-corruption efforts on those that are most deleterious. Clearly the security forces is a critical issue.

There is no easy way to deal with the economic predicament. Yes, the most important thing that the Afghan economy needs is jobs, that's not just in terms of -- in terms of economic output and GDP growth, but in terms of the social impact that it has.

There is also no way to pull jobs out of the head, especially so much of the jobs has been linked to the presence of Foreign Forces. When Foreign Forces went, these jobs went.

I think the government -- the Ghani government and Ghani/Abdullah government is trying to find jobs. We heard from the ambassador about the jobs for Peace Program and some other initiatives. They are still a fraction of what Afghanistan needs, but there is really no easy way to imagine that jobs will just be created.

Indeed as familiar as jobs are in public spending, public infrastructure project, those are realistically the most feasible one that the government can in the current situation generate.

I do want to come to the issue of corruption and criminality that is not just a matter of the Afghan Security Forces, although technically there is clearly priority. It is indeed something that the government inherited from the Karzai era.

When I would come to Afghanistan during the time, particularly in the latter years, I would hear from many Afghan interlocutors almost exactly the same comments that Minister Ahady made about the current government. I would hear bad and far worse about the Karzai era.

If anything, it is the struggle of the current government to reverse the ethnic patronage and corruption that has so pervaded the system that frankly allows the Taliban to get entrenchment.

Yes, there are safe havens that are enormously problematic, and both Afghanistan and the United States and the international community have struggled and failed so far to change Pakistan's permissive attitude and support for terrorist groups like the Taliban, but it is the longstanding disintegration of governments.

The mafia like ruled, that pervaded, the Karzai era that allows the group to have entrenchment and reversing that is enormously challenging. The current administration has struggled with that.

The two men, Dr. Abdullah and President Ghani were I think -- the one thing that they had in common when the government of National Unity was created was the promise to act against corruption and criminality.

I think they have undelivered. Again, Kunduz, for example, under-delivered, was one opportunity where there was broad support that could have been ceased. Again, I think that we are potential inflection point now. I hope for the remaining two-and-a-half years of the administration, that will be the focus rather than already politicking about the 2019 presidential election.

That goes beyond the two men and really to the larger broader political scene in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is a country in acute crisis. Although it is the sign of democracy or help of democracy to have political debate.

It is also a very important time not to spend all of one's energy just on politicking on constant brinkmanship and for national leaders to come together to push for reforms to act in national interest to be unified behind program, so that at least for a while Afghanistan can actually be implementing policy as opposed to be constantly engaging in the highly fractious politicking and polarized confrontation and brinkmanship, which divert attention from implementing policy.

Trump administration is overdue in the reviewing its Afghanistan policy. It's clearly a very important issue. I want to endorse the broader comment that while increasing U.S. military troops is important and perhaps necessary, it is also not sufficient.

We seriously need to ask ourselves what is the political vision for Afghanistan, and I don't mean by negotiation with Taliban. I would put it far more broadly about what is the state -- building state, making political vision.

Under the current plan, even with increased troops, we are facing essentially two possibilities, two ways out of the conflict, one is simply hanging on until the Taliban does itself in, until it makes enough internal mistakes in its decisions that the group disintegrates, that's not impossible.

The Taliban our very brutal and not just brutal in how they act against civilians, they're also very callous in how they act toward their own combat soldiers. It's not just the recent attacks, but in many attacks they send young men to de facto suicide mission even when they don't have vests to blow themselves up. It's very clear the soldiers, the Taliban combatants, will not walk away from those missions.

So one question is how long they can maintain recruitment. Unfortunately so far they have been able to maintain recruitment and that's to no small reason due to the fact that for many Afghan people, particularly in the rural areas, the Taliban is no worse choice than necessarily the rule of the local powerbroker associated with the government or not associated with the government. So changing the government's perception dynamics inherited from the Karzai era is crucial.

One option for policy is to just hang on until they make a mistake. It's highly palatable, highly dissatisfactory, not impossible. The other scenario with the current deployment of political diplomatic and military efforts, is to hang on until the Taliban comes to the negotiating table.

We are nowhere close to that. The Taliban interested in talking, they get a lot of political disability and usefulness out of talking, but we have seen no serious effort to really come to a negotiated solution as yet.

So what happens on the military battlefield is, of course, critically linked to what kind of attitude -- serious attitude toward negotiations they maintain.

Neither scenario is not implausible, but both are unsatisfactory. It's something that the current administration needs to discuss with the U.S. public. I am delighted that Congress is focusing on Afghanistan, but it's also of course something what the Afghan policy needs to discuss with itself, including through dialogue we are supporting here today, and what needs to happen between President Ghani and the administration, the Afghan administration, and the United States, and the international community.

Finally I want to again sort of praise the efforts that the Afghan government has made in acting on corruption such as the Anti-Corruption Justice Center, but to say there is a long way to go.

It would be really important to see some of the serious top-level violators, not merely mid-level officials, being prosecuted. We have really not seen that. It was very important to see the government actions correcting down on corruption in terms of government contracting, but this has not yet resulted in broader cascade of anti-corruption.

The terrorism anti-corruption rules, for example, in the Afghan Security Forces is going to be a very difficult year in Afghanistan. The odds are very high this will be now the fourth bloodiest year in a row, and major, major challenges.

I would not be surprised to see another provincial center at least temporary collapsing to the Taliban. I hope that will not be the case and it can be avoided.

So the stakes are ever more dire and it's important that policy and politics in Afghanistan starts focusing on security, on governments, and stops being forever distracted by politicking and brinkmanship.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent. Thank you. We're already an hour in and we have the mother of all great audiences here to pose questions, so I think it's time to go to you. I'm sure that both of our distinguished Afghans as well as Vanda will want to make comments on each other's previous remarks, but we'll let that happen in the course of responding to your questions.

So I'm going to take two at a time, starting here in the front row. Ron, did you have a question or not -- not right yet.

We'll go here to the second row and then to the gentlemen on the floor. Please identify yourself and please keep it to one question and no further speeches.

Over to you, ma'am.

SPEAKER: Thank you very much. It was very interesting discussion. Minister Ahady, welcome to Washington, D.C.

My question regarding the Donald Trump administration want to achieve (inaudible), Afghan government that's an idea and different opinion. Do you have any comment about it?

Also President Karzai speech yesterday was entrenched regarding the Taliban -- before he called Taliban brother, but yesterday people in Afghanistan were so happy that President Karzai never called him brother and criticized him.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent. Thank you.

Gentlemen here in the fourth row.

MR. BAYGENTS: Similar to her.

MR. O'HANLON: Use the mic.

MR. BAYGENTS: Ron Baygents with Kuwait News Agency. From what I heard, I think my question is similar to hers. I'm interested in the great mystery in America. What is going on with the Trump administration as far as Afghanistan?

I know you alluded to it briefly, just could you flush out, any of you, a little more of where you think this is going with the Trump administration?

MR. O'HANLON: So, Minister, would you like to begin and we'll just work down the row.

MINISTER AHADY: Well, I guess I don't need to --

MR. O'HANLON: You've got it. You've got one on your lapel.

MINISTER AHADY: With regard to that mother of all bomb that was dropped on Achin, nobody has explained the logic of that decision, and I think the Afghan government with own people as to why they thought this was a good thing to do.

Sometimes war is not something where you exchange pleasantries and you need to do something that's quite awful, but I think the logic should be there quite clear as to why this particular bomb.

Most people now they talk about that this was not so much related to Afghanistan, it was more related to tell Syria and North Korea as to what they could be facing. I can't really comment on the rationality of that decision.

Those people who make that decision, they should comment there, and I think it's their responsibility, the Afghan government, to explain to the people. Unfortunately, this government does not explain anything. As a matter of fact recently Dr. Rene` has actually stopped journalists. In a press conference he tells them, you cannot ask these questions, so that doesn't bode well for transparency and openness.

With regard to President Karzai, I haven't heard his speech. But whether you call them brothers or enemies is not going to change anything. Some people think that if we clearly say that Taliban is the enemy, they think that's going to -- you clearly identify the enemy and therefore you're going to win.

The fact of the matter is that they are being treated as enemy by the government during Karzai administration as well as now. It's just that they don't have the capacity to destroy the other side.

So whether he calls them brothers or not, that's not going to be that significant. But eventually if you want to go more in the direction of negotiated settlement, political solution, I don't think you necessarily need to call them brothers, sisters, et cetera, et cetera, but you have to be somewhat cautious with the words that you use.

If you describe somebody as an evil and the next day you are sitting down with that evil person, it doesn't reflect well on you. So, therefore, I mean, I can't say more. It's his decision which way to go.

In my opinion, those acts of Taliban are reprehensible, they're to be condemned by (inaudible) and we have condemned them, President Karzai including, he has condemned them, all those acts, regardless of whether he calls them brothers or not.

The Trump's policy, President Trump's policy, I think it's -- they have not declared it. I think probably the thoughts of people, the major security, people such as the Defense Secretary, such as the National Security Adviser, they used to be in Afghanistan, I think they were against disengagement. I think they were against the earlier withdraw of American or NATO forces, but the Obama administration I think it had different political reasons, which did not serve security in Afghanistan well.

It deteriorated. It got to the point that as I said earlier maybe for when Petraeus had his surge in Afghanistan had the withdraw not taken so place so quickly after that, maybe we would be in a much better position. Had there been greater cooperation between the Afghan government and the Karzai and the American administration, Obama administration, probably would have been in a better situation.

But President Trump I think during -- before his campaign indicated that he probably wanted to disengage, but his advisers have made different statements and the fact of the matter is that right now they have sent additional forces. I think they are talking certainly not disengagement.

My question is that, okay, I think this will help the Afghan government, which is good thing to do, but I feel we are going to go for a military solution. You send just 1,500, if you send another 10,000 you will not be able to do the job. At has got to that point and, therefore, what has to be very clear as to what are your objectives and move accordingly.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

Mr. Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR MOHIB: I think we have to address one thing. When I talked in my initial remarks, I said that we have four-year strategy to win peace, specifically said that -- and didn't say we were -- I could have used word "war".

But the point about having a peace -- having doors open to peace process is one thing. The other is to allow the enemies to kill Afghan civilians on daily basis. And for a government to be able to sit there and not be able to explain what is going on or fight back, for us as long as the

Taliban want to bring havoc on the Afghan people, kill our innocent civilians and hospitals and places of worship, we will fight back and we'll fight with strength.

The nexus is changing on the Taliban. They have turned into what used to be the mujahideen of the 1990s. They're corrupt, they're taking -- they're extorting taxes from local population and not just -- not just traders or others, poor farmers. They're involved in illegal logging, illegal mining, you name it, narcotics trade, this is not a -- this is not a political movement anymore. It's a movement of criminals.

Not just that, we have started to see that they've turned into mercenaries there out for the biggest bidder. I agree with Vanda about them -- the peace talks give the Taliban a really good platform to be able to get pressed, but what has come out of it from the past 16 years.

If we are to sit back and watch them continue to slaughter the Afghan people, I think that would be the biggest injustice anyone has ever done to any country. Last year we had 29,000 casualties. If this was a convention of warfare, the world would have taken notice. But just because they happen in suicide attacks, places of worship, hospitals we think that the numbers are small, but that is 29,000 families.

In the 10,000 that were killed is one thing. The others who have been amputated, who have been injured are probably the only breadwinners in that family, and it doesn't just impact that one person who has been injured or killed. It is about the impact of the entire family. In most cases, those would be in hundreds of numbers, that is close to 2.9 million Afghans that are affected in one year by the war that is brought upon by the Afghan people -- to the Afghan people by the Taliban.

Now, what do we do, do we sit back and wait? Like Vanda said, there are several scenarios there. Wait until the Taliban are ready to talk or do we bring it to them. That's what we are going to do and are doing, that this war is brought to those who want to destroy Afghanistan.

These enemies have really shown their true color and they have made the mistake. This attack on the Afghan -- at the Mosque was one of those mistakes that the Taliban made. The other mistake was the targeting of poor injured people in the hospital. The other mistakes they have continuously made and I've tried to list some of those that were made. Just in the past year alone,

the journalists that were going -- on their way home, places of worship several times and they're no longer protestors. All of those have been mistakes that the Taliban has made.

One key point that the minister also referred to, I want to bring that point on and address is the Taliban's key demands are the withdrawal of foreign troops. Well, foreign troops have withdrawn from most of Afghanistan in 2014. We didn't see improvement of security situation in Farah, in Kunar, and places where there were no security forces.

In fact, we saw deteriorated situation. We saw more attacks in those provinces where there were no security, foreign security, present than they were. So in Kandahar, relatively secure; Mazar-i-Sharif or Balkh, relatively secure; Parwan and Kabul, relatively secure; Jalalabad, relatively secure.

In areas where there were no foreign troops, in fact, the number of attacks increased. So the Taliban have made serious mistakes and all of those mistakes are now out in the open, and it's time for us to redefine the narrative on who the enemy is. If killing 29 or 10,000 Afghans and mostly civilians in one year is not evil, than what is?

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, sir.

Vanda.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: The Ambassador's comments that the war needs to be brought to the enemy, I'm paraphrasing you, sir, I think it's very important. One of the key problems with the Afghan Security Forces over the past two, two-and-a-half years has been they have (inaudible) us, they have been essentially hunkered down in defensive positions and allowing the Taliban to dictate the tempo.

That clearly needs to change for many reasons, including morale. So, of course, difficult, given the tremendous casualties that the Afghan Security Forces are taking, but nonetheless getting out of the hunker-down position to go on the offensive is crucial.

I think we can think of comparisons with Columbia. Often they are made in a very (inaudible) manner, but there is -- so two elements I would like to highlight.

It was really the stalemate on the battlefield from 2007, 2008 on that allowed the negotiations, but the stalemate that significantly reversed as far as momentum, that significantly reversed the security gains of essentially two decades of -- after the fact insurgency.

Second, until the peace deal was brokered, very frequently it was alleged that the FARC are just criminals, that they are involved in the drug trade, they have become just a cartel, and, hence, negotiations are not possible. Yes, the FARC has been involved in the drug trade, just like the Taliban are, but both remain and continue to be very politically oriented entities.

What I think is sort of far more complex in the Afghanistan situation, that it is not just the insurgents, the rebels, the terrorists that are involved in extortion and illegal economic activities, but also, of course, much politically associated on the other side of the Taliban and sometimes associated with government, and very much associated with the government during the Karzai era.

So it is cracking down. It is cleaning up one's own house is crucial for ultimately presenting a credible political vision and credible choice.

I very much hope that General McMaster will consider those issues. He after all headed (inaudible), the organization, the ODI's organization, tasked with going after corruption. At the time it struggled. It very much struggled, because President Karzai did not make it easy for it to be effective, but nonetheless it struggled.

General McMaster is well versed with these issues and I hope that he will emphasize them in the Trump administration policy review, and the policy will not simply be merely more troops but will involve a broader vision of state making, state building, and a political vision for Afghanistan.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. I'm going to add one tiny comment of mine own before going to round two. On the MOAB ordinance, I agree we haven't heard a clear explanation. I agree that there probably was a hope there would be other messages heard around the world.

I also think, from my understanding, that there is a tactical military reason this weapon was used in this case, which makes some sense, but also has no general applicability.

Normally, and, JB and others, forgive me if I'm oversimplifying, and you correct me later. But normally the United States' military, especially in a war like this, would rather drop a large

number of smaller bombs, because we're trying to hit precisely against small targets, one vehicle, one person, one part of a convoy, or what have you, one part of a building.

In this case, however, we only knew where the tunnel networks access points were and, therefore, maximizing the explosive versus the overpressure at that location to the extent this was one of our goals perhaps in this particular use of the weapon.

Maximizing the overpressure there was actually the best way to reach deeply into the space that we were trying to target insurgents within. So there was a, if I'm right, if I'm even half right, there was a specific reason to do it here, which was valid, but which will tell us very little about how to fight the war going forward.

In fact, that's part of why we haven't done it before and probably won't do it much in the future. Just my best guess.

We'll go here with the gentleman in the second row and the woman in the third row for round two.

SPEAKER: My question has to do with the media reports that (inaudible) has returned. What does that imply for the politics of Afghanistan going forward and into the -- into the election in 2019?

MR. O'HANLON: Do you have one person you'd like to address that specifically?

SPEAKER: No -- perhaps to the Minister Ahady.

MR. O'HANLON: Ma'am.

SPEAKER: My question is also to the Minister Ahady. I'd like to -- in view of the divide between the Pashtuns and the non-Pashtuns in government, I wonder what role that plays in the problems of Afghanistan.

I would also like to know what are your views in terms of the party that you're running. How is your platform different from what is presently being practiced in Afghanistan?

MR. O'HANLON: Before we go to the minister and also the Ambassador and vanda, I'm going to take one more question for the ambassador specifically, because I also know we're probably not going to have a third round.

So is there a question for the ambassador? Gentleman in the -- about the eighth row right across -- all the way to the wall, please.

SPEAKER: My question is about Chinese relationship with Afghanistan and is China investing right now in copper mines and also military aid, so if you could talk briefly about that -- that aspect of China evolutions of Afghanistan.

MR. O'HANLON: So, Minister, we'll start with you, then to the Ambassador, then to Vanda to wrap things up here.

MINISTER AHADY: Thanks. Let me answer the third question first, and that is the platform or the position of my political group with regard to the situation.

This was formed almost a year-and-a-half ago. Initially I was supportive of Dr. Rene`, but I waited for a year to see what he was going to do and I was not happy with it.

I thought that this government would never take off. This government will remain a failed government from the very beginning. They just simply do not have the capacity they need to lead a nation, okay.

I called for early elections. One thing the first election, based on which they started their government, was not conclusive. They did not announce the results as to who won really the election, because it was fraudulent. I called for early election, but that was year-and-a-half ago. I didn't want the Afghan nation to lose five years.

But now we're two years -- there are two years left for -- less than two years left for next election, so I'm not emphasizing that part anymore. What I'm emphasizing and what my group emphasizes is transparency of future elections.

I have no trust in this government that they will have transparent elections. Yesterday the deputy speaker of parliament mentioned that President Rene` has already received undated resignation from the election commissioners in case he's not happy with -- that he can dismiss it.

I don't know how true this is, because I just got it today on my messages that yesterday this was mentioned. I suspected all along. I'm firmly of the belief that this government is not going to hold honest election and we'll have another disaster.

I ask donors that -- for sake of Afghanistan, you have to take that matter seriously that we have transparent next elections. Simply stating that the newest one's transparent election is not going to make it happen. It needs more. It needs to -- you need to work with the opposition in -- with the -- in the presence of government, because otherwise the government feeds you wrong information and you believe in it, which most of this tells us.

There is no reduction in corruption. There is actually much more in Greece in corruption. It's much more open than it used to be, et cetera, but anyway, so that's...

With regard to (inaudible) return, I welcome it simply because this is a person who for 50 years fought against the government and has mattered -- politics was armed, conflict.

Now he comes and he says, well, I'm willing to accept a more democratic way to get the will of the people. Well, that's good for me, but I don't think it will have much of an impact, maybe negligible impact on peace.

The war is conducted by other people. It is mostly Taliban Daesh becoming stronger and stronger, but it's mostly Taliban. It's not (inaudible). Therefore, I don't think it will have that much of impact on there.

There are also some conspiracy theories that he's coming back with the help of the Turks and with the help of the Saudis that they will get a lot of money. Of course if he gets a lot of money from them, it's going to have an impact on politics. I wouldn't like that. Let us compete fairly for vote of people, not with the help of those people.

Regard to the rule of the Pashtuns and non-Pashtun, that's a given there, that's given there, but in this government, and actually in Karzai's government, we had good representation of various ethnic group. We had Pashtuns. We had -- Abdullah's -- non-Pashtun of Rene`, Pashtun of ministers, I don't think it's really -- as far as composition of government is concerned, as far as policies' concerned, I don't think that's really that much of an issue.

Sometimes the non-Pashtuns, they think that the president usually favors Pashtun and, therefore, that's why Karzai didn't want to call the Taliban enemies and that's why Rene` when he started, he called them political opponents, et cetera, et cetera. I don't think that really influences policy and strategy that much.

Now, this does not mean that ethnicity is not a major factor in Afghan politics, no, it is. It is a major factor. But has that contributed to the failure of the government, I'm not so sure. That's because I think the government has failed, not because -- I think the government does not have the capacity to manage, that's the main problem there.

I think China they had the -- but I'll leave it to the other --

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

AMBASSADOR MOHIB: We want investment from all our neighbors in China as one of our major neighbor has been vesting in Afghanistan. It's not just the financial investments, things that we want to create jobs and opportunities, but it's also for leveraging their political might so that they could use it on Pakistan to be able to perhaps convince them to end sanctuaries across the border.

We've also been trying to create a consensus in the region with all our neighboring countries to cooperate to create -- to get their -- to compete in Afghanistan constructively, rather than through proxies.

MR. O'HANLON: Good. Thank you. We have time for one more round. Go ahead. I'll find out.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Just to follow up on that. I think that President Ghani was very hopeful at the beginning and invested a lot of effort in the China relationship precisely with the hope that China would accomplish what the United States has struggled to accomplish; namely, changing Pakistan's behavior.

I think there's been a lot of disappointment in that, which is interesting I think and revealing about the constraints, limitations, and decisions in Pakistan and the complexity of policy there as well as both issues of limited capacity and incompetence as well as issues of willfulness and willful decisions. But the hope that China will deliver Pakistan has not yet happened, even though China has become much more active.

Of course the difficult internal situation in Afghanistan only encourages old habits of cultivating proxies. We heard about Russia, and it's not just that, but it's a highly contested

international environment where clearly Russians actions in Afghanistan are not newly, but are newly explicitly anti-American.

MR. O'HANLON: Let's see if we can do one last quick round. We'll go to the back of the room. Actually here in the same row we just got the question on China and then all the way to the back with Doug.

SPEAKER: Thank you. This is for Mr. Ambassador and any one of you who want to comment. If in an all-ideal world with the Trump administration, what sort of response would Afghanistan be looking for from a Trump administration that would be very tailored toward bringing peace to Afghanistan, especially when it comes to the leverage that it can negotiate with China?

So far with the Trump administration we've seen somewhat visibly warmer relationships evolving and the opposite happening with Putin government. Thanks.

MR. O'HANLON: Finally the last.

MR. BARON: Yes, my name is Kami Baron with the Pakistan --

MR. O'HANLON: Doug Brooks.

MR. BROOKS: That was a good question too. Doug Brooks, Afghan-American Chamber of Commerce. My question is: What role -- or what position would you like the Trump administration to take on Pakistan and their role in causing Afghan problems or not?

MR. O'HANLON: I will take yours as well. I'll see if we can answer really briefly one question maybe for each person up here.

MR. BARON: Yes, sir. My question was about compromising with Pakistan. I know of Afghanistan -- after Russian involvement in Afghanistan, Afghanistan stopped demanding about Pashtunistan, but can it end Indian presence in Afghanistan, the people who have -- there is a full civil blown -- civil war in Pakistani (inaudible), so can Afghanistan compromise that, Pakistan, okay, we stop interfering in (inaudible) and then you stop interfering in Afghanistan.

MR. O'HANLON: Vanda, would you like to start this round or what's your preference?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Sure. Well, I think that Pakistan is very convenient and Afghanistan is an excuse for a lot of Afghan internal problems, but it's also a very serious

perpetrator of a lot of Afghanistan problems. But equally, Afghanistan is a very convenient vein excuse in Pakistan for not adopting policies that need to be adopted.

So is Pakistan's definition of its relationship with India and the exaggeration and paranoia about Indian threats in Balochistan why Afghanistan is a proxy and in Afghanistan itself.

So clearly if both countries could achieve a more friendly relationship that would be enormously important for progress, but let's remember that President Ghani invested tremendous amount of political capital in his outreach to Pakistan. Not just political capital, actually redirected forces toward the Afghanistan-Pakistan border taking them from political areas in Helmand in response to Pakistan's operation finally in North Waziristan. Pakistan could not bring itself to reciprocate in any way. They just did not deliver.

I often say Afghanistan needs to stop blaming external problems and focus on its internal situation. In this case, I think there are many just grievances in Pakistan's behavior.

However, I would be very surprised if the Trump administration had the magic wand in how to change Pakistan's behavior. It's not just Obama administration that struggled, it's very much the George W. Bush administration for eight years that struggled with Pakistan.

I think we need to remember that in our policy toward Pakistan, we need to focus not only on pressure and (inaudible) -- perhaps too many (inaudible) and too little pressure or at other times too much pressure and too little (inaudible), but in focusing and understanding what are the limitation and internal constraints of Pakistan's behavior.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you.

Mr. Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR MOHIB: I'd like to talk about the Trump administration and what an ideal response would be. We have been working with this new administration as it conducts its review to ensure that we have a winning strategy going -- both addressing the combat problem, but as well as the political side, and that includes a lot of reform. So our discussion there is to be a holistic strategy that would that would get us out of this mess and into a prosperous and peaceful Afghanistan.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you, sir.

Mr. Minister, last word.

MINISTER AHADY: Well, I think I'll just reiterate what I said earlier. I think it would be a good thing for President Trump's administration to help the Afghan government militarily so that it does not collapse and that it becomes stronger in the battlefield.

There is nothing wrong taking war to the other side as you ask for it, but I think at the same time you should recognize that the ultimate objective should be political solution. It's not because I love political solution, actually the other solution is quite neat is that you are not going to achieve it. I think -- I don't know if the Americans want to have that sort of patience to prepare there for another ten years fighting there, so that's why I'm in favor of that.

The other point I would like to make is that this support for the government, military support for the government, which I support, should not mean really political support for the government, because the government will abuse. The same way that it abuses state power, it will also abuse it's alliance with international power to promote itself.

We do need very transparent elections. I do not trust this government that it will have transparent elections. I don't think that the Election Commission the way it's supposed to work, it is not working that way. We really need to address this issue. Hopefully we'll have more (inaudible) in international -- international supervision next election than not.

These people are handpicked by Rene` and they will serve Rene` to the very end, and we will have another crisis in two-years' time. I hope that donors will listen and simply not say we want fair and free elections. You wanted that in 2014 too, it did not happen. You wanted that in 2009 too, it did not happen, so most probably you will not have it in 2019.

Let's do something about it and do it together with the government, the opposition, and the donors so that we agree on something that's really fair, and that's all we are asking for.

MR. O'HANLON: Please join me in thanking this great panel.

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

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