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STABILIZATION:
LESSONS FROM THE U.S. EXPERIENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

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Welcome:

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Keynote Address:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. ALLEN: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. And welcome to the Brookings Institution.

My name is John Allen. I'm the president of Brookings. And it's my distinct pleasure today to be joined by my friend John F. Sopko, the special inspector general for Afghanistan reconstruction, or SIGAR, as we have shortened it to save time.

John joins us as part of our event today entitled, “Afghanistan, Lessons from the U.S. Experience -- sorry -- Stabilization: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan.”

This event happens to share the same title with the report just issued by SIGAR which will be rolled out today, and you'll be hearing from John shortly on the report's contents, the findings and the recommendations.

I've had the honor of knowing this gentleman, John Sopko, for many years and he was a vital partner to me in my previous role, leading U.S. and NATO Forces in Afghanistan, and has been a trusted advisor to many U.S. policymakers and leaders throughout the years.

He and his team have maintained close and tireless oversight over our mission in Afghanistan, and have been a critical part of ensuring we remain accountable for our efforts, and equally as important, in making sure we learn from our successes as well as our mistakes. And frankly, over the last nearly 17 years of this conflict, there's been much to learn.

To the audience for this hour, John will first provide us his own set of remarks laying out the report, then we'll come together on the stage for roughly about 30 minutes of conversation, which will be a short period of Q&A between him and me. And I think we'll have enough time in that hour to go out to the audience for a couple of questions.

Then we'll be followed by a panel, a panel that will have a discussion on the report on Afghanistan writ large, which, given the caliber of the panelists that we have today,

will undoubtedly be an excellent discussion and not without some pointed views, and it will be during that period of time where we'll have a thirty minutes probably for audience questions and answers.

And finally, I would be remiss in not noting that this event takes place just a few days before our most solemn and important of American holidays, Memorial Day. And while over 2,000 U.S. servicemen and women have made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan since 2001, what's often overlooked and sometimes even forgotten, are the sacrifices by our many foreign service officers, USAID professionals, and civilians of all stripes and forms, as well as our numerous coalition partners and allies who also gave their lives in the name of peace and security for the people of Afghanistan.

Memorial Day is about honoring each of these heroes, and we must never forget them and their sacrifices. Those lives lost must mean something.

And indeed through the lessons learned reports of organizations like SIGAR, we can and we must find new and better ways to ensure that our missions are achieved with greater effect, and with less sacrifice, less suffering and less waste for all parties.

So with that, let me welcome John Sopko, special inspector general for Afghanistan, to the stage for his keynote remarks. John?

MR. SOPKO: Good morning. And general, thank you for those very kind remarks, and that introduction. And more importantly, for hosting today's event, and the release of our fourth lessons learned report, which is entitled, “Stabilizations: Lessons from the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan.”

This report is the culmination of two years of work by our office and examines the U.S. stabilization efforts in Afghanistan, detailing how USAID, the State Department, and the Defense Department tried to support and legitimize the Afghan Government in contested districts in Afghanistan from 2002 to 2017.

Today's report is also available in an interactive format, and like all of our

products may be downloaded from our website at www.SIGAR.mil. Actually, on the interactive format, I think we are only Inspector General's Office that releases reports in such format.

Now, SIGAR will be releasing its fifth lessons learned report on June 14th, focusing on our counter narcotics efforts in Afghanistan, for those who are interested.

We began our lessons learned program in late 2014 at a suggestion by you, General Allen, and also Ryan Crocker and some others. My staff has told me that I have credited you enough times about our lessons learned program that we should probably start writing you some royalty checks.

MR. ALLEN: That's (crosstalk).

MR. SOPKO: (Laughter) But that would be wrong. But in all seriousness, you made an observation that resonated with me during one of my first trips to Afghanistan while you were the commanding general of ISAF, and we later followed up on that after you retired, at a little breakfast meeting over in Pentagon City.

You noted, that of all the worthwhile audits and investigations that SIGAR was conducting there was still a question left unanswered. What did it all mean? And what did it all mean in the larger context of reconstruction and national security>?

Part of the reason you and others thought that the lessons learned program would be a worthwhile endeavor for my organization to undertake, is due to our unique jurisdiction. Of all the IGs we have jurisdiction to look at all U.S. reconstruction programs and projects in Afghanistan, regardless of their funding source, and regardless of which agency is actually conducting those programs.

We are statutorily unique in that fashion, since we are the only Federal oversight agency that can look holistically at the whole-of-government effort in Afghanistan, which means we are not constrained by agency stove-pipes.

I'm pleased to say that there has been great interest in our lessons learned reports up to date, and today's report is really no different, while we were finalizing our report

the Departments of State and Defense, along with USAID, were finalizing their own stabilization assistance review, or SAR. And they asked to SIGAR to brief their staffs on that work.

Their interagency review was recently approved and is well aligned with the SIGAR Report that we are releasing today.

But before I go any further, I think we have to ask the question is: what is stabilization? It is one of those terms that is rarely, if ever, precisely defined. While definitions have varied by U.S. agency and even within a particular U.S. agency over the last 17 years we've been in Afghanistan, earlier this year the U.S. Government finally defined stabilization as, "A political endeavor involving a civilian-military process to create conditions where locally legitimate authorities and systems can peaceably manage conflict and prevent a resurgence of violence."

But put simply, stabilization is the process of building sufficient governance to keep insurgents from returning, and convincing the population of that area, that government rule is preferable to insurgent rule. SIGAR undertook this project for one simple reason, the stabilization effort in Afghanistan was not the first the U.S. Government has undertaken, nor will it be the last.

Given the current security environment and the dangers of allowing poorly governed spaces to serve as launching pads for transnational terrorist groups, we anticipate future U.S. Government efforts to stabilize those areas by clearing them of terrorist groups, and helping generate sufficient governance to keep terrorists from returning, not only in Afghanistan but around the globe.

And I believe the panel discussion this morning will go into greater detail about that.

Today's report contains seven findings, identifies ten lessons, makes seven recommendations to the Executive Branch, and includes four matters for congressional consideration.

Rather than go through every one of these, I would like to begin with our overall assessment of the stabilization effort in Afghanistan, and then highlight some issues of particular concern.

Unfortunately, SIGAR's overall assessment is that despite some very heroic efforts to stabilize insecure and contested areas in Afghanistan between 2002 and 2017, the program was mostly a failure.

This happened for a number of reasons, including the establishment of a set of unrealistic expectations about what we could do and what could be achieved in just a few years' time. The lack of capacity of U.S. Government agencies to fully support those accelerated efforts, and institutional rivalries and bureaucratic hurdles, compounded this already difficult task.

Every organization and agency we found that worked on stabilization in Afghanistan, from DOD, Civil Affairs and special operation forces, to State and USAID, suffered from personnel and programming deficits, borne from rapid scaling, short tours of duty, and the pressure to show quick progress. No organization we found was prepared for these challenges, and unfortunately it showed with the results.

Stabilization is unique because it's an inherently joint civilian-military undertaking, yet given the size and resources of DoD, the Military consistently determined priorities on the ground and chose to focus on the most insecure districts, a logical decision on its face, but ironically one that had unintended negative consequences.

Why? Because those areas often remained perpetually insecure and had to be cleared of insurgents again and again, civilian agencies, particularly USAID, were compelled to conduct programs in these fiercely contested areas that were not ready for stabilization. Because the Coalition focused on the most insecure areas and rarely provided enduring security after clearing them, Afghans were often too afraid to serve in the local governments there.

Afghan civilians also had little faith that their districts would remain in

government hands when the Coalition withdrew, implementing partners struggled to execute programs amidst the violence, and U.S. agencies were unable to adequately monitor and evaluate the projects. And we spent a lot of time in our report on that particular issue.

One of the challenges facing stabilization efforts in Afghanistan, as I alluded to, and as it's reported in our report today, came from the institutional differences in rivalries that start right here in Washington, while the Military was focused on "clear, hold and build," those are tenets of the COIN Doctrine, State and USAID faced challenges, given the pressure from DoD to quickly show gains on the ground.

This led to significant tensions between USAID and the Military over AID's reluctance or inability to work in the most contested and insecure districts. The same areas the Military believed to be the most important to reverse Taliban momentum.

Often the Military would claim a district was cleared and thus ready for AID to start stabilization programs, yet "clear" meant something very different to the Military than it did to AID, and the Afghan contractors tasked with, for example, paving a road in an insecure environment.

The Military may have deemed the area safe enough for them, but it made little difference if the contractors charged with executing the hold or build phase of stabilization effort or in danger, or felt they were so.

Some senior AID officials told our staff that Coalition Military Forces pushed the agency into going along with clear hold-and-build and demanded that it implement programs such as cash-for-work, on a large scale over AID's objections.

Senior Military officials likewise told us if they had little choice but to do things quickly and focus on the most dangerous areas. Again, you have to remember the timeline, the short timeline that the Military was given, particularly as it was drawing down resources.

USAID officials also had a difficult time arguing against the Military's belief that stabilization would buy the support of the population, convince them to share

information about IEDs, and thus save Coalition lives.

As one AID official told us, "The Military expected us to be bags of cash." Prior to the surge AID advisors were often able to exercise veto power about where and how Military Commanders used funds, particularly from the CERP Program, or Commander's Emergency Response Program.

But later, USAID's influence over CERP expenditures; were significantly diminished as we were doing that draw down and that quick exit from Afghanistan.

As one official noted, when AID tried to stop implementing projects in areas where they could not be monitored or evaluated the Military sometimes set aside the Civ-Mil Partnership model and used CERP funding unilaterally.

As a result, all types of stabilization programming were implemented during all stages of the clear, hold and build sequence, even when AID knew the sequencing was inappropriate, and the programs would be ineffective.

Under pressure from the Military, the AID built schools in places where they cannot be monitored, the government could not maintain and staff them, and students only attended sporadically, if at all, due to insecurity. Military commanders likewise concentrated large CERP projects in less secure areas where they were less likely to succeed.

In contrast, the DOD, State and AID, the two agencies that provided the most personnel for the civilian surge, did not have sufficient staffing especially built-in staff redundancy to enable rapid mobilization in the field. Without that capacity in Afghanistan, State and AID particularly struggled.

To meet the demands of the civilian surge State and AID pulled staff from the other assignments and hired temporary staff. The number of civilian personnel under Embassy Kabul's control, for example, more than tripled between January 2009 and December 2011. Astoundingly by 2011 more than 20 percent of USAID's worldwide staff, were in Afghanistan.

As one AID official told SIGAR, at the height of the civilian surge our existing

numbers were so limited we were forced to bring on roughly 250 to 350 people per year to do the work of AID across Afghanistan. Unfortunately, many had no or little practical AID experience.

One of the hires told our staff that he got the job because, "I had a Pulse and a Master's Degree." By 2011 the demand for personnel had so exceeded the supply that State and AID were unable to hire enough people to fill all of the civilian slots that Coalition Military Forces requested, even with the hiring of temporary employees.

Now, I would like to say one thing before -- I'll get some water -- as I said, the use of temporary hires by AID and State actually had both positive and negative tradeoffs. On the positive side, unlike permanent AID and State personnel, temporary hires could stay in Afghanistan more than one year, avoiding the loss of institutional memory or what I and my staff called the "annual lobotomy" that occurs when personnel rotate out of the country after one year or less.

Unfortunately, those same temporary hires had little if any experience or training in monitoring and project oversight and carrying out specific AID projects. As a result, we were astounded to find out that few of those civilians working at the local level had agency authority to oversee programming.

At one point USAID's regional representatives who are the most senior USAID officials assigned to each regional command in Afghanistan, had no oversight authority over the programs in their area of operations.

Decisions therefore had to default to the Embassy in Kabul which had problems obviously of communicating quickly to the staff in the field. Contracting also surged, at one point a high-ranking AID official determined that in order to meet the U.S. Government average ratio of dollars to the number of contracting officials, AID would have to send nearly its entire overseas workforce to Afghanistan.

The number of contractor personnel overseen by direct-hire State and AID personnel was extremely large. In 2011 there were approximately 18 contractors for every

direct hire at State, and the ratio was a 100 to 1 at USAID.

Now even with sufficient number of highly-trained personnel, stabilization operations in Afghanistan would have been challenging. Unfortunately, as our report lays out, State and AID did not have the right personnel to effectively execute the mission in spite of efforts made years earlier to provide them with exactly that capability.

Now, despite all of this, and despite all of those other challenges, the question ultimately we ask is: did stabilization in Afghanistan work, and was it effective? Did it meet its goal? You know we talk a lot about inputs, outputs and outcomes. Did it reach that ultimate outcome?

Now, as our report lays out, we tried to answer that question by looking at other experts who had studied the issue, an external research reviewed by SIGAR unfortunately found that the evidence is inconclusive and sometimes exactly contradictory. Some research found that USAID and the State Department programming actually did accomplish stabilization, some found no impact, another research, ironically, found that the program itself was destabilizing.

There are some factors that seem to be common among, however, the most successful stabilization interventions in Afghanistan, and those will be laid out in the report, and actually we have on the panel following us, a Military Leader who actually we highlight as one of the leaders who actually succeeded in stabilization in his district and Kumar.

But what did we find were the common lessons learned, the common best practices for stabilization to work? First, we found out that stabilization was most effective in areas where the government had a degree of physical control.

Second, it was also more successful when implementers undertook fewer activities with a higher degree of oversight, flexibility, and staffing.

Third, stabilization could not be done well on the cheap, successful projects were labor-intensive for donors and implementing partners alike.

Fourth, we found at best it results in small gains that require constant

reinforcement to avoid reversals.

The timelines that U.S. agencies were operating under assumed that quick security gains would be matched by equally quick stabilization and governance gains. The latter failed to materialize before security forces withdrew and instability returned to many of the areas where stabilization programs were working.

Our research also found that implementing smaller projects helped programs avoid some of the common pitfalls of working in the midst of a counterinsurgency. Avoiding these pitfalls of stabilization such as predatory officials, corruption and insurgent sabotage while still providing tangible benefits to communities, was easier for smaller-scale projects.

According to a 2010 U.S. Embassy Assessment it was also easier to ensure community buy-in and ownership of small-scale infrastructure projects than it was for large ones.

As SIGAR has identified previously, research has demonstrated that superficial measures of success, such as sheer amount of money spent or outputs produced had no correlation to the eventual impact or outcome.

As one senior USAID official told us, "If you go fast, you actually go slow. If you go slowly on purpose you actually go faster with stabilization." One area where U.S. efforts seem to get it right was in Kumar Province. The panel discussion, as I mentioned, will go into that example in greater detail, but a combination of capable individuals and key roles, a willingness by those individuals to collaborate, and a heavy presence of U.S. Military Forces in the area helped that initiative succeed more than others in the country.

So, in conclusion, I have identified only a few of the major challenges in the effort to stabilize Afghanistan faced. The poor results of this particular mission may make it tempting to some policymakers to conclude that stabilization should never be undertaken again. I would disagree with that. Given the security challenges we face in today's world stabilization, or whatever you want to call it, is important.

Eliminating that ability or capability is not a realistic choice; rather, the U.S. Government must address the challenges and capacity constraints identified in our report. Given the lack of alternatives to stabilization in an ungoverned space that has been cleared of insurgents or terrorists, the best course of action may be for the U.S. Government to balance the importance of any stabilization mission with a realistic understanding of the level of effort required, and what is achievable.

Additionally, our government must improve its ability to prepare for, design, execute, monitor and evaluate stabilization missions. The need for such expertise will not diminish any time soon.

As military historian, Max Boot writes, "While the tools of warfare have changed, the challenges of small wars fought against guerrillas and terrorists have remained constant. American soldiers struggling against al-Qaeda and the Taliban could profitably study the past to learn how their ancestors dealt with Haitian Cacos, Philippine insurrectos, Nicaraguan Sandinistas, and other irregular foes."

Just as with the examples that Max Boot references, we cannot afford to fail to absorb the lessons we've learned in Afghanistan as we continue to contemplate such programs, both there in Afghanistan and in other countries in the future.

Let me conclude by acknowledging the tireless efforts of those who worked on this report. SIGAR's efforts were led by David Young, who was supported by Jordan Kane, Paul Kane, Jordan Schurter, Olivia Paek, and Elizabeth Young, under the leadership of Program Director, Joe Windrem. They have my thanks, and hopefully your thanks for issuing the report today.

And with that, thank you very much for this opportunity to speak to you.

(Applause)

MR. ALLEN: I'm sure some of you are seeing on your phones, that there's an apparent announcement that the White House has just cancelled the conversation with the North Koreans coming up. So we'll see how that develops today. Someplace where I

don't think we are going to have a stabilization effort (laughter) in the near future.

John, thank you for those comments, I really appreciate them. Let me just make a real quick editorial note. On the panel, as John mentioned, we'll have an Army Officer by the name of Vowell, who was a Fellow here last year at Brookings.

Kumar Province was one of the toughest fights that we had in Afghanistan, it's up against the Pakistani, border it's sandwiched in between Nuristan and Nangarhar, and it's a tough place to be a Commander and to be successful in stabilization.

If you want to see a little bit more about that there's an excellent documentary out there called "The Hornet's Nest" which, as the name implies, was a tough fight. He's featured in it personally with his great battalion, and it's worth taking a look at.

John and I retired from the Marine Corps in 2013. I never thought I would be concerned over these matters again, or mentioned in a SIG Report, but 18 months later I found myself, the Special Presidential Envoy to the Global Coalition to counter the so-called Islamic State.

And with the onslaught of ISIS, we had no real idea how this fight would ultimately take shape, but the one thing we did know was that we would eventually have a massive stabilization effort, not just to rescue the populations, but to keep out the Dash or ISIS in the aftermath.

But it was going to be big, it was going to be big across both Iraq and Syria. With that in mind, and given the lessons that you were already surfacing from the Afghan experience, as you well remember, we worked to set up a network of Inspectors General from the very beginning of this, which we think was really essential to these kinds of events, which would look hard at us and Coalition efforts as they were unfolding, to get the most out of the work that we were doing.

So already, John, you and your team have had an effect on a future crisis that we would be involved in.

So, what I'd like to do is we'll have a few minutes of questions, I'll ask a

couple then we'll go to the audience for a couple. And these are going to be forward-looking, the report obviously speaks for itself, there's a lot of detail in there about the deficiencies and the challenges that John and his team were able to see, and to document, but this isn't the end for the United States and for coalitions.

Already, as my remarks implied, within 18 months of, supposedly, the end of the conflict in Afghanistan, we are now embroiled once again in something in Iraq, and in Syria, and it will continue, and it will continue. And we need to profit and benefit from the work that you have done, and others, to ensure that we are better prepared as we go.

So, again, thinking about the future, John, at either in -- let's just call it a hypothetical administration of the future, we have a crisis, it is one where we have the capacity not as a result of an emergency, which is Afghanistan, but we have the capacity for some deliberate thought about how we will be involved in this evolution, how we will intervene, or how we will be invited in, and how long we'll be there, and what we think the issues will be.

You've been summoned to the White House because of your work, to advise the President and his National Security Team on what they should be thinking about right now, as the United States contemplates yet another effort which could result in a large stabilization effort.

If I could ask, what will you tell -- what will you tell the President? Keeping, of course, in mind that you'll probably be hired the minute that you're done talking (laughter), and please what would you tell the President, two or three things?

MR. SOPKO: Well, you know, the first thing, and General, you and I chatted about this in Green Room before we came is: get your staff to read the lessons-learned reports that are already out there. I mean that was one of the things you discovered, to your chagrin, when you were leading a team that you had no blueprint, no lessons learned, and then you found a USAID Report out there which actually helped you.

Reports have been written, and we discovered that in Afghanistan, that

there was an excellent report done by USAID on USAID's involvement from 1950 to late '70s, and we found that report and it laid out a lot of those issues that we were finding right now, but no one had ever read it. We couldn't find anybody in the Embassy or USAID who had actually seen it.

So, the first thing is read what's been out there. The Military would have done lessons learned, the problem is that the State and AID do lessons learned, and do they incorporate it into their training, teaching, et cetera?

The second thing is, before you go in, know where you're going into. As a Military Commander you know you have to know the terrain. Well, that applies to stabilization also. Know how and why the people in that region supported the terrorist groups. What was the issue or the issues they were doing?

I think in Afghanistan we decided to duplicate Norway in each one of these districts. We tried to provide schools, highways, et cetera, et cetera. What we should have looked at is, what were the services that the Taliban, and the terrorists, and the insurgents providing, which made the people relatively happy.

You don't have to give them everything at the start. The everything, is do it incrementally, and the everything I would tell the President is, despite your inclination to do it quickly, announce a success, and declare victory, so for peace, go home, it's going to take a long time.

Let's be realistic about this, let's be honest to the American people and to the American Congress that none of these things can be done quickly and successfully. So, those would be some of my advice.

MR. ALLEN: Okay so the President is dutifully impressed with this, and then lays the bombshell on you, that we always expect these days, and that is this is going to be a coalition effort, it's not just the United States.

So, Mr. Sopko, please advise the President United States on how he or she should be thinking about how a community of nations effort, for this stabilization effort might

be considered. Because as you know we had 50 nations engaged in the Coalition in Afghanistan.

MR. SOPKO: And in all 50 nations were sometimes going at cross-purposes to each other. That's one of the most difficult.

MR. ALLEN: How do we solve that? Or how do we think about it in ways that reduce the fratricide?

MR. SOPKO: Well, first of all we have to realize that we are dealing with, our coalition allies all are sovereign nations, they have their own political reasons for doing what they're doing. They all have parliaments or congresses that their officials, their generals have to respond to.

So, you're never going to eliminate the fact that every country has their own prerequisites, their own, you know, foibles you may want to call it, they probably view ours the same. So, knowing that let's assume the Germans cannot go into a certain area, take that into consideration.

It's not a fault of the German Parliament that they got a restriction, or did Japanese have a restriction, realize that and come up with a plan that utilizes each one of those countries' best capabilities. So that's the first thing. We have to be humble enough to realize that every other country is like ours, they've got political answers they have to come to.

The other thing, General, is if you know you're going to have a coalition approach, realize that what's promised isn't always what's delivered. And I think you probably faced that with NATO.

You would go out and recruit the troops, the NATO promised X-thousands, but it turned out that only half showed up. How do you then go forward with that hole in your approach? And I think that's something to take into consideration.

MR. ALLEN: Okay. You're hired. (Laughter) Get packed. You know, one of the things that was an issue associated with Afghanistan which I experienced in Iraq, and

we've experienced elsewhere is -- and I think you've touched on this. How should we be thinking about both the stabilization and ultimately the reconstruction effort, because they should blend, one should lead logically to the other, and sometimes they can go on concurrently, in order to avoid creating additional burdens to the host nation?

Because as you well know and, again, we are forward-looking, we did leave quite a bill for the Afghans each year for the maintenance of roads, and infrastructure, and buildings, et cetera. How should we be thinking about that?

MR. SOPKO: I think first, just thinking about that is important. I don't think we did think about it that much, particularly on the civilian side, and part of it was a problem I think that comes back here to Washington. We tend to think in appropriation cycles, maybe we all think that way. We get an appropriation cycle, it's one-year, two-year money, we have to show success that's justified. If we don't spend it we lose it.

And that is the problem. I've commented before, I think you and I have had a conversation on this, it's not that anyone we sent to Afghanistan was not as smart, and not as brave, and not as honorable.

MR. ALLEN: Right.

MR. SOPKO: We gave them a box of broken tools. We gave them a personnel system that was broken, a procurement system that was broken, your rotational system that you had to face was broken, how you could get the people you wanted and have him stay long enough, was broken.

We need to look at those issues first. And I do agree with you about the Afghans, and I feel bad when I go over and talk to Afghans, and we are putting new conditions on the Afghans, but we realize that all of the Coalition, are also putting new conditions and they're not coordinated.

And each one of the AID programs from all the various countries have their own requirements, documents that have to be filled out, meetings that have to be made, and you wonder sometimes: what must the Afghans be thinking on their side? Here comes

another guy who's going to help me, and another burden that I'm putting on them.

And I think if we could somehow get the allies together to think on a common platform, let's not overwhelm the Afghans with filling out paper, you know, paper reform. The Paper Reduction Act which we passed years ago here in the United States we ought to apply it to our coalition development.

MR. ALLEN: I think that, to your point, the personnel rotation processes of all of the agencies, and you use the term broken, I would perhaps use different terms, but they were certainly challenging. Remembering that while units came in for a year at a time, and they didn't always come in at the same time, there was an overlap, an echelon of units in and out.

We've often heard that this war was fought, this 14, 15, 16-year war, one year at a time. And I think many of the rotational issues, had they been better coordinated from the beginning, across all of the interagency and across all of the Coalition partners, could have given us an operational perspective, and a longevity of operational perspective, which would have been helpful.

In my first meeting with Hamid Karzai, as the new Commander, he pointed out to me that I was the fourth Four-Star General commanding Afghanistan in four years for him. This just creates our own institutional inertias that make this very difficult.

So, we have 15 minutes left on this session. What I'd like to do is, again thank Mr. Sopko for his answers to my questions, and for his remarks. Let's go out to the audience for a couple.

I will ask when you get the microphone, I will in about 30 seconds after you get the microphone be looking for a question in what you're saying. And we'll move very quickly to that question if I don't see it. So, this gentleman right here in front, and then I'll come over across the aisle.

QUESTIONER: Hi. Thank you so much for coming to speak here today. My name is Jonathan, and I'm a student --

MR. ALLEN: Please identify -- yeah, you are about to do that. As you introduce yourselves, and tell us where you're from, please? Thanks. Go ahead, Jonathan.

QUESTIONER: So, I'm wondering --

MR. ALLEN: From where?

QUESTIONER: From Connecticut, and I'll be at OSD this summer, in their East Asia office.

MR. ALLEN: Good for you.

QUESTIONER: But I'm just wondering, if you can speak a little bit about Pakistan, because I think Pakistan has been a key variable that has impeded any success, or stabilization efforts. And so moving forward with our stabilization approach with Afghanistan, what type of approach should we take with Pakistan?

MR. SOPKO: Can I just quickly answer that, and I'm going to defer to the General here. I look at just Afghanistan, and just reconstruction. Pakistan is obviously an important player; the new strategy from the administration has a key component on Pakistan. But I'm going to defer to the General because I think you spent a lot more time dealing with the Pakistan issue than I did.

So I'm sorry, I'm not avoiding it, it's just I don't do Pakistan. So, General?

MR. ALLEN: I'll just give you 30 seconds. The relationship between the United States and Pakistan is not divorced from the relationship with Pakistan, from Afghanistan; and getting the Pakistanis to see that their vested interests, over the long term, are best served by a stable Afghanistan, one that does not in fact benefit from the Haqqanis or from other Taliban elements, is in their long-term best interest.

There was a long time when I believe that peace in Afghanistan passed through Islamabad and Rawalpindi. In many respects I think the long-term stability of Pakistan passes, not just through Islamabad and Rawalpindi, but it also passes through Kabul as well.

So, getting the Pakistanis, the Afghans and the international community to

have a similar view, that a stable Afghanistan, one that has the capacity both for governmental stability, security to the population, and very importantly, a viable reinvigorated economy is not just important to Afghanistan, it's important to the long-term stability of Pakistan as well. Thank you for that question.

Coming over here, the gentlemen, yes sir, in the shirt, please?

MR. SEGAL: Thank you. General, first I'd like to thank you for your comments. I'm a retired FSO and a Vietnam Veteran. Thank you very much for that.

MR. ALLEN: Yes sir, thank you for your service.

MR. SEGAL: My name is Jack Segal, and I was the Political Advisor for NATO from 2002 to 2010, and made frequent trips to Afghanistan. When you began the discussion you said that stabilization is keeping insurgents from returning, and in my conversations with General Carter, General Richards, even General Nicholson, I get an impression that in places like Fayzabad, and Kunar, and Musa Qala that the insurgents never left. That they just went underground when we went there, that they were simply part of the society. So, the objective, if the objective is stabilization, or have we picked out the wrong target?

MR. SOPKO: That's a good question. Maybe by saying they always stay, I think what we are indicating is that this problem is an Afghan problem. And it's not like the people are going to run back to Pakistan. But when the area or district is unstable, those people whatever the terrorist group is, have to be taken out of the way, eliminated in one fashion. So if they decide to go underground, or if they decide to join a reconciliation group and become part of the government, that's another way, but you have to provide a service which in many of these districts they provided.

And that's, part of the idea is creating a central government that can run Afghanistan and have government control over a region so it doesn't become a hotbed for other terrorist activities. And can I just add one thing, General, also?

MR. ALLEN: Sure, please.

MR. SOPKO: We keep referring to Pakistan as being the key problem. The problem also, as we saw in this report, was that the Afghan Government at times was viewed very negatively by their local people, and what you really need is to insert a government that the people support, a government that is not predatory, a government that isn't a bunch of lawless warlords.

And that is a key thing. And that was one of the things, well, I didn't talk about, but I'm certain the panel will talk about, when we poured so much money into these unstable environments we contributed to that problem of creating more warlords, more powerful people who basically took the law into their own hands.

So, in essence, the government we introduced particularly some of the Afghan local Police Forces, which were nothing other than warlord militias with some uniforms on, were just as bad as the terrorists that were there before.

MR. ALLEN: Let me add to this. You know, if I were also summoned with him that day to the White House, one of the things that I would tell the President, is something that we learned not just in Afghanistan, we had seen it some somewhat in Iraq but we really saw it in Colombia, is that some days there's a distinction without a difference between the insurgent and the criminal patronage networks.

And I don't think we got a full grip on that in Afghanistan. In my mind there was a triangular threat to Afghanistan's future, but also in a military context, you had the ideological insurgency which we would, euphemistically call the Taliban.

You had the drug enterprise which fueled an awful lot of insurgent and criminal behavior, and then you had the criminal patronage networks. And I don't believe we were properly organized, frankly, to deal with that.

So if, again, the President were to ask me my views on how we get ready to go my first thing would say -- my first comment to the President would be: you must assume that there will be an inherent, sometimes inextricable link between criminality, and corruption, and the insurgency, and you've got to give the civilian agencies, and you've got

to give the Military Commander capacity to bring to bear law enforcement and drug enforcement capabilities, in the right numbers, to assist in the dealing with the insurgency.

If we are not properly mixed that way, we'll fool ourselves to believing we defeated the Taliban in a particular area, only to find out that now we got the criminal patronage networks to work, they are deeply embedded in the society, and they're well fueled with a drug enterprise. So, we have to be thinking in those multi-dimensional ways.

We'll take two more questions. This gentleman over here, and then Professor Maddox on the right; yes sir?

MR. STACEY: My name is Jeff Stacey. I used to work for Ambassador John Herbst at SERSC.

MR. ALLEN: Sure.

MR. STACEY: And I've spent a few years now doing global development consulting in my company, and I've done more projects in Afghanistan than anywhere else. I'll be headed back there in a U.N. contract in just a couple of weeks. My first question has to do with maybe one of the elephants in the room, which are the Afghans themselves.

I imagine that you gentlemen and a lot of people here might agree with something -- an observation along these lines that we've all met a lot of Afghans who are actually pretty darn good. Who are well-traveled, who speak a lot of languages, who have great skills, and a lot of them are young, and if they could only get the leaders at the top of their organizations who do tend to be corrupt, from their own complaints, out of the way, there's a lot of capacity already there in Kabul and other cities in Afghanistan to make use of.

My first question is, would you agree with that? The second has to do with the donors, Mr. Sopko, you mentioned toward the end of your remarks. I remember meeting some EU police folks working on a long-standing project that the EU had on police, and they obviously had to spend most of their time coordinating with the U.S., a much bigger police training program.

Their observations are very much in sync with yours, and they've been there for years, and some of the additional complaints that they would make were that, while they were seasoned detectives, and essentially sergeants, and captains, and what-have-you, their American counterparts were very young, were hired from all over the U.S., didn't have a lot of training.

And then of course we got into, if we were honest with ourselves a period of -- a kind of militarization of our police training, and that was something that the EU was very sensitive to. And one last thing about the EU --

MR. ALLEN: Quickly, please, sir?

MR. STACEY: Yeah, the question is, they set up a project in Kosovo, Pristina, where they actually set up a Bill to Justice Ministry, and the adjoining office with every top official there had an EU advisor. So, the question is, given that the EU doesn't have a great reputation in this town, and even more so since the election, are we also able to learn lessons from some of our allies and friends?

And even, you brought up at the end, even, you said if donors are all there, and we are putting on contingencies, and things, who coordinates all that? Is it always the U.S., because we fund the most and we have the biggest presence? Or should it be the U.N. on occasion?

MR. ALLEN: First, to year question about the Afghans, my personal experience is they are a remarkable people, and while I met a few that I'd probably want to detain from time to time, the vast, vast majority of the Afghans from the most senior, the most modern, to the most traditional, are extraordinarily admirable people. I've got great commitment ultimately to them, till I take my last breath.

With respect to the EU, when I was the Commander there, which is getting to be a few years ago, but I think I can pretty knowledgeably about it. I've felt that the EU was a good partner for us, they did good work, and in some areas where, as you remember, I'm sure you're committed, or familiar with this, we had Provincial Reconstruction Teams that

were nationally owned.

And so there were some limitations, and John used the term, or I'll use the term caveats, there were some national caveats associated with stabilization, where there were sometimes gaps in between what the Hungarians might be doing, or the Germans might be doing. The EU worked, frankly, very hard to try to fill in those gaps, and the EU remains, I think, a credible player.

Now, is it the perfect outcome? We can all do better, but the EU has been a good partner, I think for us in this regard and, you know, we may have a different opinion in some places in Washington, but I think the EU will be an important partner. And the U.N. will continue to be an important partner.

And I think when we look at the post ISIL campaign what we'll discover is one of the heroes of that is a woman by the name of Lise Grande in the UNDP, and we were able to put together a Stabilization Fund which came in immediately behind the clearing of Tikrit, or Ramadi, or someplace like that, where we were able to put stabilization funding in immediately, ultimately to achieve the rescue of the population to create the environment where the insurgents could not or would not want to come back in.

So, the U.N. is a great partner, it has to be the right moment for them, the EU is a great partner, we should bring in their strengths, and play to their strengths and recognize that they will have caveats as well.

This is a matter, as John said, this is a matter of ultimately us having the capacity for strategic planning in this regard, and not try to put it together on the ground, it's too late when you put it together on the ground, you're going to have to live with the inefficiencies of that.

And, if there's anything you'd like to add on the donors? And then we'll come to Professor Maddox.

MR. SOPKO: I agree with the General, and the one thing I would add about the youth in Afghanistan. I view them as sort of the canary in the coal mine. As long as the

current government is still surrounded by these young, honest, honorable, well-educated, and they're taking a lot of risk supporting the government.

And I meet with the President almost every time I go there, I see his top advisors. As long as we see them I feel good, I feel optimistic. When they disappear then we've got some problems. So, I agree with that. And we issued a report, the prior lessons-learned report, on security-sector assistance, where we talked about in great detail the whole issue of police training, and that was one of the problems we saw.

We were sending too many of U.S. Military helicopter pilots and other people to do police training. We should have police doing that. So, I'll just add that.

MR. ALLEN: One final point. When we are in the room and evaluating, or advising the President of the United States, one of the key pieces of advice we must give that individual is, the process of stabilization has to leverage the full potential of the women of that civilization, the women of that culture.

We have to support their civil -- their aspect of civil society, their role within the stabilization, and those efforts that can capitalize on that and leverage it will accelerate the role of women in the society, but also leverage one of the most powerful influences in the society as well.

And so let me go to Professor Maddox, please. And this will be the last question we'll have on this panel, and then we'll break, and then go into the regular panel.

MS. MADDOX: Gail Maddox, from the U.S. Naval Academy. Very interesting! I'll leave this short because it does dovetail well the previous question and some of your answers, but that is just to take the comments on coalitions a little bit further.

MR. ALLEN: Good.

MS. MADDOX: How do we actually accomplish then, addressing those problems with the Coalition? Do we do that at NATO? Do we do it -- does the U.N. take it on? Does the United States take it on? What do you suggest that we learn these lessons, and where and how do we do that?

MR. ALLEN: Do you want to take it?

MR. SOPKO: Do you want to --

MR. ALLEN: Go ahead, please. I'll jump in right behind you.

MR. SOPKO: Well, I think in our Security-Sector Assistance Lessons-Learned Report that came out, we talked about having to take that in consideration early on, with the Coalition. Now, that was just in the security sector. We have not, either in this report or in our lessons learned report I think on private sector development, really looked at that issue yet.

That's something, we have a lessons-learned report called Divided Responsibilities that we are working on right now, which tries to look at that whole issue of responsibilities, and authorities, and it's sort of that gap between them, so, I don't have a better answer in that. I know as a practitioner you had to deal with this on a daily basis.

MR. ALLEN: Let's go to the ISIL campaign again. That was an Ad Hoc Coalition in which NATO had an interest, and NATO was formally a partner, as was the EU. We are going to have to be organized, quickly organized, diplomatically, to determine where those priorities are, and establish those priorities within that coalition.

And just as a matter of, I think, importance, ad hoc coalitions can only get you so far for a certain period of time. And from the moment you form an ad hoc coalition, you need to be thinking about who you're going to be handing this off to, if you don't accomplish the mission within the period of time envisaged for that coalition.

So, it might be that a coalition will get handed off to NATO for security purposes, and handed off to the EU for stabilization purposes. But I will tell you, as we began to build the Counter-ISIL Coalition, we had five lines of effort, I won't take you through the other four, but one of the earliest of the five lines of effort we established early along, and Germany and the Emirates took the lead on the planning within that line of effort, was stabilization, the rescuing of liberated populations.

And so for the very beginning of the counter-ISIL effort, stabilization was

important to us. We envisaged we had more capacity to do it in Iraq, which was the first part of the fight, we also had a government we could deal with. It was much more difficult, and I think we have one of the panelists who will address this; it was much more difficult to undertake coherent stabilization in Syria.

And so we have to think about areas where we would conduct stabilization, where we are either in opposition to the central government, or the central government can't reach into that area. We have to have flexibility in that regard, but the grand strategic meeting of the nations has to occur early along in the process, whether it's a U.S.-called coalition as this one, was where it's a NATO-led coalition, or a U.N. coalition, that process of early leadership to determine from the very beginning, as it begins, where stabilization plays in that process.

It cannot be an afterthought. It can't be something we start to think about as we've finally cleared the first village. It's got to be something we think about from the very beginning.

And so I'm sorry we went over just a couple of minutes, my apologies to the next panel.

John, thank you for your comments, thank you for your contribution this morning.

Ladies and gentlemen, help me to thank our friend.

MR. SOPKO: Thank you very much.

MR. ALLEN: Thank you. (Applause)

(Recess)

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Well, ladies and gentlemen, good morning; and while my colleagues are getting themselves mic'd up let me welcome you all to the second part of our conversation, this expert panel. I'm Tamara Cofman Wittes, a Senior Fellow in our Foreign Policy Program here at The Brookings Institution and really delighted to lead a conversation with a fantastic group up here. You have their full biographies, and so I'll just

give them very brief introductions now.

Immediately to my left is Vanda Felbab-Brown, my colleague and Senior Fellow here in the Foreign Policy Program; someone with deep experience in Afghanistan and in many places around the world where conflict, organize crime and terrorism combine to pose major challenges to security and stability.

Next to her is J.B. Vowell. Colonel Vowell is billeted as Executive Officer to the Secretary of the Army; but I think his most important affiliation is with The Brookings Institution. He's an alumnus of our Federal Executive Fellow Program. He was here in 2016, 2017, and comes to this dais with three combat tours in Afghanistan and one in Iraq and, therefore, a lot of relevant experience and familiarity with the stabilization challenges on the ground; and you heard a little bit about the province where he was operating in Afghanistan; and we'll discuss that more today.

To his left, delighted to welcome Frances Brown to our dais. Frances is a Fellow next door at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. She joined Carnegie after doing quite a bit of work in the U.S. Government, both at USAID and on the NSC; and is now writing work on stabilization in Syria, which is a topic I'm sure we'll spend some time on over the course of our conversation.

And, finally, not last or least but, in fact, will be first in our discussion this morning is David Young. David is the SIGAR offices team lead for Stabilization for the Lessons Learned report that you are holding in your hands -- that's David baby -- I think it's fair to say or at least one of them -- and he's an experienced analyst of governance and of stabilization issues, both inside and outside the U.S. Government.

So I am going to turn it over to David first, actually, to kind of clue us into some of the other findings and, especially forward-looking lessons for the U.S. Government on stabilization issues coming out of the support. David, Inspector General Sopko laid out one central finding in his remarks this morning that urgency and intensity that's sort of imperative to win control in heavily contested areas led in many cases to stabilization

operations where the preconditions for success simply weren't there. There was still too much violence; it was still too contested. And I'm curious, first of all, were there cases of success; what were the conditions for success? And then we can talk a little bit about this integrated military civilian toolkit that seems so critical to successful stabilization. So, please.

MR. YOUNG: Sure. Well, thank you for having us and moderating, Tamara. We found that some of the critical ingredients for success included, as the Inspector General mentioned in his speech, our willingness to collaborate among civilian and military officials, both Afghan and coalition, a willingness for those individuals on the ground to provide robust services, including what implementing partners sometimes did with direct implementation, and that you had to have the right people in the right places; and so we had that in a few places but mostly what we found most of all was that stabilization efforts across the country mostly failed; and we traced that back to two critical decisions.

The first was that we prioritized the most dangerous districts of the country first -- and there was considerable debate about this throughout the campaign. Some believed that the best way to sequence stabilization programming was to build out sort of ink spots from relatively stable areas, including, for instance, provincial capitals, and work your way gradually toward the more insecure areas; and doing so would in a sense build momentum toward that effort.

This was tried in 2006 and 2007, but mostly failed due to a lack of resources. And the idea was that these were tipping point districts, essentially, that if you go after the easier places first, it paves a way for getting to the much more complicated places, the much harder places.

By 2009, that model was flipped on its head and for the bulk of the rest of the campaign the idea became going after, prioritizing, the most insecure parts of the country first with the hope that if you take the worst places out -- if you mitigate in the worst places -- it would create what was called a cascading impact into the lower hanging fruit

areas, and the rest of the country would sort of sort itself out if you take care of the most problematic areas first.

Unfortunately, what ended up happening instead of that cascading impact was that we got bogged down in these extremely insecure areas. As the Inspector General highlighted, the civil servants were afraid to work because of widespread Taliban assassination campaigns; civil servants that did work had trouble moving around in the country because of the danger of doing so; implementing partners had trouble implementing projects, etc. etc.; and so these areas that we prioritized were so dangerous that we had little hope to convince the population that they would, in fact, be able to be protected when the draw down eventually occurred.

So -- and I want to emphasize that these were areas that were so dangerous that many of them hadn't seen little to no governance in years, and they needed more time to actually come around, and to accept, and adjust to a new sense of normal; but there was no time. Which brings me to the second critical decision which was we drew down forces and civilians on timelines that were unrelated to conditions on the ground. So we -- if you'll remember there was an 18-month surge from about 2010 to 2011, and a 3-year transition period from about 2011 to 2014; and the Obama Administration had very good reasons for instituting these time-based timelines.

We had the financial crisis which had just occurred, and every dollar spent in Afghanistan would be a dollar less to spend here in the United States on the economic recovery; there was a sense that a prolonged surge would give senior U.S. military officials more room to request for more extensions and more escalations down the road; and, finally, there was a sense that these open-ended timelines would exacerbate Afghan dependency on American aid. And while these reasons were very good -- in our analysis we found that they were just not good enough. A government in Afghanistan state simply cannot be reformed on the timeline and at the scale that we had envisioned; and believing that we could do so, led us to make a number of critical compromises on programming, planning,

and staffing that nearly guaranteed the effort would fail in our eyes.

For instance, military planners in Kabul had to change, had to come up with new objectives for the campaign plan to accommodate these new timelines. As the Inspector General mentioned, USAID had problems with staffing, but they weren't alone. Department of Defense had a shortage of civil affairs units, so they converted chemical warfare companies into civil affairs to implement their programs using four week-long training cycles that were entirely PowerPoint. Village stability operations is another DoD program scaled extremely quickly, unsustainably fast because there was this pending sense of this precipice at the end of a draw down that would have to come; and there was a sense that the clock was ticking and we had to make as much progress as we could while we had the forces to do so.

I wanted to highlight one last thing regarding the service delivery model. We talked about the service, the hope that the way stabilization worked in Afghanistan was that you provide services in order to convince the population that government rule is better. Unfortunately, the services that we tried to help the government provide were far more ambitious than they needed to be, and poorly suited to the Afghan environment, the Afghan context.

For instance, the Taliban mostly secured the support of the population through coercion, just simple forced cooperation under threat of death; but, in theory, it should not require a great deal of social service delivery to win the hearts and minds of a population that is being terrorized by the Taliban. The bar should be pretty low in those circumstances for winning them over because they're looking for a safe alternative. They, you know, are looking for, essentially, rudimentary law and order as a prerequisite to anything else we might provide them; and so it's not clear that this robust service delivery model was necessary in many cases where coercion was the main method for securing the population's support.

In other places, the Taliban actually went beyond coercion though and

provided limited service delivery, specifically, security and dispute resolution. But instead of us using that as a model; instead of us competing on the terms of the Taliban, we tried to provide a diverse array of relatively advanced services ranging from agricultural guidance and advice; to agricultural equipment; to healthcare and education that went well beyond what the Taliban had provided; and, in some cases, what the Taliban had used to accrue legitimacy in the eyes of the population.

So in our eyes -- for instance, instead of doing dispute resolution or programming along dispute resolution lines of effort like the Taliban was doing, we built courthouses; we trained prosecutors in fiercely contested districts because -- even though Afghans found them unfamiliar, slow, and corrupt -- and we did this despite the fact that 90 percent of Afghans resolve their disputes through informal means because, according to one senior USAID official that we talked to, we wanted to give them something that they had never had before; and this was a chronic mismatch between what Afghans find effective and occasionally legitimizing and what we wanted to provide them. And so in our eyes, it points to this need to pinpoint what the government's pitch should be based on what had been provided to them in the recent past and allow them to accrue that legitimacy.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Dave, thank you; and I think it's important to highlight here, SIGAR's mandate is broad and what you've done in this Lessons Learned report -- and, I think, it's fair to say in the series of Lessons Learned report, you're not only looking at implementation; and in many ways what you've identified here, it sounds to me is yes, some failures of implementation; but primarily a failure of design; a failure of this sort of theory of the case of stabilization as applied in these circumstances.

Vanda, I want to turn to you for comment on precisely that point. One of the findings that David just laid out is this idea that the U.S. set the bar too high; it was trying to provide governance at a level beyond where it should have been trying to compete with the Taliban, which was really about basic security, basic law and order. Do you agree with that?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Not fully. I think there was a more complicated

mismatch of various sets of expectations and various sets of promises that had been raised. Fundamentally, I agree with David that a key part of the Taliban's entrenchment was, fundamentally, its ability to provide order -- often very brutal order -- but, nonetheless, fundamentally very predictable order. So in my many trips to Afghanistan, I frequently encountered very similar narrative from people about the Taliban, and the relationship of the Taliban to the populations. People would inevitably say -- Afghan people will say -- look we don't like the Taliban, we didn't like it; but then the Taliban they're in power. You could travel from Kandahar to Kabul with a million Rupees -- at the time it was Pakistani Rupees -- and no one would rob you. Predictable brutality is universally far easier to develop coping mechanisms and adjust to than unpredictability.

What happened with the U.S. intervention was not that we provided far more ambitious governance. We promised far more ambitious governance, but what we often provided was really mis-governance by the Afghan government and associated officials, with tremendous amount of corruption, unpredictability, and abuse that was partially conditioned by the fact that we often picked as our crucial security partners highly problematic warlords on whom we relied because of the lack of U.S. troops, and international troops, U.S. capacity to deliver crucial anti-Taliban gains; and they often proved highly predatory toward local populations, highly abusive, and highly unpredictable in their predatory behavior; with often minimizing access to markets for local populations -- not simply resorting to (inaudible) in imposing a set of rules, but becoming very exclusionary as to how people could go about their everyday livelihoods.

So, and I would also posit, that a crucial element, however -- and it applies way beyond Afghanistan -- that local people often have far greater expectations of what a government should provide than what an insurgent group should provide. That is the classic rise of expectations with a different kind of entity to rule you. My view is not that we gave them too much; we gave them, actually, far less than they got under the Taliban, but we promised far more.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Excellent summary. I have to ask you as well, Vanda, and we heard John Allen and IG Sopko talking about this earlier, how much of the problem here is the Afghan government?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: I would say that it is a fundamental part of the problem; and this goes back to the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Afghan people will often tell you that if only Pakistan were not the problem, there would not be problems in Afghanistan; and, indeed, Pakistan has been a tremendously destabilizing complicated actor, no doubt about it. However, if there were good governance in Afghanistan, the destabilizing effects of Pakistan would be far more limited in the effect than they have been.

Now, clearly, it's a new government -- it's not so new now; its four years into the government, but it's the post-Hamid Karzai government -- where people had very high expectations of how much the government would deliver on cleaning up on corruption and delivering better, more predictable governance, improving good governance; and, yet, it has been a tremendous struggle for the unity government with a lot of disappointment. Once again, very high in unmet expectations and because of a reduction in troops; continual reliance on warlord's highly problematic military power brokers as sources of delivery of some rule and governance.

But I want to highlight one other set of actors, not just the Afghan government here. There is more broadly the Afghan political class. It would be very unfair and inappropriate to put the blame solely on the Afghan government. A large part of Afghanistan's continuing troubles is the fact that the political class continues to see its role as constantly engaging in brinkmanship and rocking the boat of the state to gain a narrow parochial privileges and engaging in very narrow parochial political competition for one's political and economic spoils and never really coming together, even at times of great crisis and potential inflection points to put national interest and some sort of basic unity in capacity for governance to take place. So, instead, no one in Afghanistan ever governs; people

constantly engage in politicking.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. J.B., I want to come to you on this question of expectations, and shifting expectations. I've been thinking about this as well because Iraq just went through parliamentary elections very soon after the territorial defeat of ISIS in Iraq, although there's still quite a bit of work to do. And one of the striking outcomes of that election was that in the areas that ISIS held the hardest for the longest around Mosul, there was the least sectarian voting; the most interest expressed in effective governance; in service delivery. And so I'm curious whether what Vanda's describing about rising expectations, are people expecting more from government than they do from an insurgent? Does that ring true to you, based on your experience?

COLONEL VOWELL: Absolutely. First off, thanks for having me. It's still apparent that I'm successfully perpetrating an academic fraud to be brought back here again and again.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: We are (inaudible); that's what we do.

COLONEL VOWELL: But Vanda's spot on with expectations; and expectation management is a challenge from a tactical level to a theatre strategic level, in service delivery or the political framework. My particular case study in 2010 in Marawara district in Afghanistan worked there for a couple of reasons. I won't say it's a model for everywhere, but I'll close within a minute or two with some of the, I think, salient lessons learned if we're looking forward to potential Syria stabilization or other places the military and the civilian apparatus would be involved in.

So let me quickly paint an area -- I won't go over the entire case study. You don't need that you can read it, thanks to David's great work -- but in 2010, we came in at the start of the surge. As the strategy, our mission was to do counter insurgency of which the center of gravity are the people and winning them over. And the people gravitate to the side or sides that are winning. And at that time -- to paraphrase a former Speaker of the House -- you know, all politics are local and so you want to have people connect to their

district government. I mean I think everybody in the audience here gets their driver's license and most of their interaction with the government at a local level. I don't think you go banging on the White House every day to go get some services -- maybe you do -- the same thing in any other country. You want the connection to happen there, you want that interaction to happen.

So we had 13 districts in Kunar province, only which three were key-trained districts because they had most of the population. Well, and a very important district, Marawara, set two kilometers away from the provincial capital of Asadabad, but it wasn't a key-trained district; so it didn't have anything going for it for services. Oh, by the way, it was a major transit route for insurgents, and have been, historically, both Kunar and Nangarhar provinces to the south are the two key gateways to Kabul. When those two provinces fall, Kabul has always fallen.

In the 1980s, those were the places the Mujahideen very successfully fought off the Soviets; the Soviets could never find purchase in Kunar. We come into 2010, very similar situation, every three and four letter insurgent or terrorist group was up there from Al-Qaeda, to (inaudible) in Pakistan; little t - Taliban; a local Afghan Taliban; capital t Taliban, the operational Taliban leadership was in the area; all of it was up there, and all of it wanted to take Kunar because you had sanctuary; you had the terrain; you had the capabilities.

So we came in with some lessons learned in Afghanistan previously, and Iraq previously, a lesson people in the unit that had learned this is a whole of government problem; because it's not a military problem itself; not for an infantry battalion of a thousand people on a task force to solve. There are things we can do to enable, but in the month we were there before the -- the case that you read about in the book -- that happened the end of June of 2010. I lost nine soldiers; the conditions were that bad. There was a giant red arrow -- if I could show you a map -- there was a giant red arrow pressing on Asadabad. We broke up a suicide bombing ring of six suicide bombers by luck in that month. There's

pressure everywhere; so this whole come in and let's try to win over the people wasn't going to work until we could set the conditions for that. It was pretty bad.

So what we did, we got with our Office of Transition Initiatives partners who we were so lucky to have them in embedded with us, with Rebecca Hummel and her team --

MS. COFMAN WITTES: That's USAID.

COLONEL VOWELL: USAID is what I would call in the military (inaudible), they're the ranger regiment of USAID. (Laughter) They're in there; they're doing things precision, surgical, and they can make quick effects by synchronizing the tactical things on the ground; and the time is good too. Civilian partners, they're kind of an advance guard for USAID. A very effective tool for us; and we had a provincial reconstruction team in Asadabad too that was civilian and military; had AID folks there; had Department of Agriculture folks there; so you could integrate the provincial and district government capability. So -- I'll go over this later on -- we had to go into Marawara because we had to clear out some significant threats to not only the district but the provincial capital. And I won't bore you to tears with that -- the military side of that was pretty effective because we were able to pull insurgents away through some combat actions over 30 days; but the main effort and the integrated planning from jump street, from the beginning, was the ability for stabilization efforts contracts and the government to own the problem at the inset (phonetic) -- I mean immediately. Once hostilities ended, once we've cleared the battle field, trucks with stuff were coming in; we had contracts pre-written; we had worked that out with the district governor ahead of time who had looked at where he could have employment and work for wall abatements that prevented flooding for farm animals; we had veterinary capabilities came there inoculated animals for vaccinations -- we had did all that immediately to show hey we're here, and we're going to stay here.

It helped also that the district governor was a former Mujahideen, Pastur Ghoul (phonetic), this gregarious, red-bearded, hated the Soviets, very successful, fought there; so he not only knew everybody, knew the players on both sides, he knew the terrain

which was very helpful to us; and he gave great advice on how to meet expectations by under promising and over delivering -- key point.

So at the end state, it was all about integrating people -- and we were lucky in a couple ways. In the Army we say things are always about people, leadership, and a communication in between. The political will was there. Coming up to the operation, we had talked to some elders in the valleys; surreptitiously, we got them to come in and said we're here to help you; I was looked at in the face by members of the Taliban who said do not ask us to help you. We are Taliban, this is our government. Well, that's pretty shocking, isn't it; I need to do something about that; but that was a cry for help. They were getting some of those dispute resolutions in the upper valleys -- that's my parcel of land; no it's not; well, you pay me a thousand Rupees here, I'm going to solve it right now; it's done. The Afghanistan government could not compete with that. But the brutality aspect of it -- the going in and beheading elders in villages was too much, it was too much. So they were basically hostages; we had to free that up.

So some of the lessons learned I think are applicable. That whole integrated political, military plan is key from jump street -- a consistent plan over time that is not going to wax and wane because the political will waxes and wanes; you have to have that upfront. You've got to have willing partners, you have to. You can't have somebody who's going to pull out; you can't have somebody who's got one toe in the water; everybody has got to be all in -- you really do. We were very lucky that way. I will say that -- this may not be replicable in other places; it was for us for those reasons. You cannot want success more than the people do. You cannot want success more than the people you're trying to help, you can't do that. I could go on for days about some examples of that, but I'll just leave that little bumper sticker there for you.

Persistence, constant dialogue -- I've said it in a forum before that, you know, Greg Mortenson wrote a book called *Three Cups of Tea*, I'd argue that's incorrect; it's three gallons of tea. (Laughter) So socializing and talking to everybody all the time is part

of it. The Shurers (phonetic); the discussions before and after operations -- when the military side's done and we go to the main effort of stabilizing, it continues. You're not just going to create a government. Okay, we dealt with clear all the enemy out; okay, you guys got it; it's going to require some assistance and effort; but they have to want it too.

Seek out the true spheres of influence. Learning who the power brokers are locally and operationally are key and essential, and sometimes they are very hidden. We had a particular challenge culturally understanding some of those cultural differences and aspects, and so people who had gone into hiding because they were targets really could pull the people together when they wanted too; we had to find out what their motivation and incentives were and bring them to the table; that was hard. That human mapping of what we do in our business was all about human beings was very difficult.

Measures of performance, and Mr. Sopko mentioned this earlier; measures of performance do not equal measures of effectiveness. Handing out money for projects as a measure of effectiveness is an incorrect evaluation. I spent $1,000 this week on a trash cleanup project, I'm successful; well, no you're not because nobody asked for that; you pulled men out of the village during a harvest season; and so the cleanup of the road looks great, but there's pumpkins rotting in the field. The road to hell is paved with good intentions sometimes.

You're dealing with an open, dynamic, human interactive system -- a system of systems. You cannot predict how this is going to end. You have to constantly be there to see where the re-established (phonetic) changes are; and you have to be persistent. You can't come in; drop in; drop in some projects and leave. Not just from a security standpoint but to be there with the people you're helping to stabilize. And the Afghan government, your partners of whatever nation, have to be a lead in that; they have to.

Everything is hard, and it's hard all the time. Many things are simple, but the simplest things are difficult; so persistence pays off; and we had a great set of leaders and partners who were persistent and wanted to see that outcome. And those operations

that you read about -- I mentioned the nine soldiers I lost before -- that first month we were there, nine soldiers -- I lost another eight between the two operations, keeping Marawara and Sirkanay districts stable. There is a cost to that. Memorial Day's coming up and we all remember those things at a particular time; it's not just barbecues for the summertime.

There will be a cost and you have to access and analyze the stabilization in an area worth the cost in human capital, real capital, and you have to ask yourself, how does this end.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you J.B., and I want to come back to this issue of integrating the military; civilian toolkit; and how, back here in Washington, we set that up for success, because I think that's a key policy question for the future.

Frances, I want to bring us to you now. I know you've been thinking a lot about Syria's stabilization. It's something I've been working on as well this past year with colleagues at the World Bank; and I think one lesson they've taken away from their previous experience in places like Iraq is, you know, less emphasis on physical infrastructure, more emphasis on the human infrastructure that you were just talking about, Colonel; and the problem is they're not well set up to do that kind of work.

I think one of the grave challenges in these environments is that, that human terrain is so shaped by the conflict, right. You, essentially, have a politics and an economy of civil war; and in Afghanistan after decades of civil war; in Syria now after nearly a decade of civil war, this gets pretty entrenched. Especially when you're not working through a central government -- a central government that's not your partner in the Syrian case -- how can the United States or that warlord-ism and thereby setting the conditions for a conflict relapse as soon as we're gone, right? Are you, essentially, kind of rewarding the guys who won with the most brutal tactics in their own local area? They've set up their own system to sustain themselves in power and you're, essentially, saying okay, I now give you legitimacy and authority with my money and my investment; and, you know, and that's a deal that can break a part as soon as our money and investment are not there.

MS. BROWN: Yeah; that is so important; and I think that is a lesson that comes through both from the recent Syria experience and then also loud and clear in this report. On the Afghan experience that if we are thinking about a stabilization endeavor, we really need to be thinking about it in terms of a realistic, political end state; and that realistic political end state needs to be local and it, also to the extent applicable, it needs to pertain to the national governments.

In the Afghan case, as, I think, really is made very clear in the report -- the Afghan case, we really had a transformative, almost fantastical, political end state in mind. It was a clearly stated political end state but it had no bearing on the realistic timeline that change would take; the Karzai government's willingness to reform or decentralize; and as you say, local power broker's willingness to cede responsibility, authority, and accountability at the local level. So it was a real mismatch -- our political desired end state -- the Afghan case was a real mismatch.

In the Syrian case, we've got sort of a different mismatch ongoing on the realistic political end states. Very much exacerbated by these war economies. So in the Syrian case, our problem has been both that we haven't had a realistically stated political end state, or a clearly stated political end state that we're trying to stabilize towards. So stabilization programs always need to be in service of a broader goal; and, I'd say, in the Syrian endeavor, it's really been a remarkable progression of not clearly stated end state.

So, as you know very well, in the early years, we had an Assad-Moscow (phonetic) statement. It wasn't backed up by security choices for many reasons; but in that sense it wasn't a realistic political end state. In the middle years, I think, starting from 2013 to 2014, it became increasingly unclear what our stabilization programs were stabilizing towards. We had still a stated policy of Assad-Moscow were planning for a post-Assad day after. At the same time, from the U.S. standpoint, we had really prioritized military the fight against ISIS. So our revealed preference was in that direction.

We really saw this come through in the confusion on the ground within our

stabilization programming at that point. Are we empowering these local actors, these more accountable actors in order to be responsive and advance a post-Assad future; are we empowering these accountable local actors to enforce a counter-ISIS objective?

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Or are we just empowering the people who were really good at fighting ISIS?

MS. BROWN: Yes; precisely, precisely; and that begs all kinds of moral hazards.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Right.

MS. BROWN: So there was a real lack of clarity there; and one thing that I think we've learned time and again, is you really need clarity of objectives from every level in order to achieve the impacts we want, the effects we want.

Fast forwarding to the current day, as stabilization programs are underway still, we have still a less clear political end state I think we're driving towards. There has been -- from the Trump Administration -- a sort of revealed preference for the counter-ISIS fighter, even a declared one. Former Secretary Tillerson stated a much more ambitious -- going back to the lack of realism -- a much more ambitious set of objects for Syria. Now, since his departure, it's manifestly unclear what our actual objectives are at this point. And, meanwhile, we're sending mixed signals and the President, himself, has called into question our forces in Eastern Syria backing up some of these stabilization efforts, as well as the actual stabilization programming.

So, in short, without a realistic and clearly stated political objective, I don't see any way of getting around some of these exact challenges you mention of confusion and perverse incentives on the ground.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: So I want to turn to this question of how to build a better effort; and I think one of the big issues raised by the report is the insufficient capability on the civilian side; but also the primary recommendation of the report, both to the Executive Branch and to Congress, is to compel the State Department to take the lead across the

interagency and develop a comprehensive whole of government strategy that somehow somebody's got to direct, right. So there's a capability problem, but there's also a leadership problem.

And I was discussing this integrating the toolkit challenge with some colleagues last week and one of them challenged us to say, okay, well what is a successful example of the United States ever fully integrating the toolkit on behalf of a major stabilization mission?

I think when we add to that the political will question, a lot of people in the American public, a lot of folks in Congress, question whether this is something we can effectively do. And so I'm curious for your thoughts on that. Is there a successful mission that you would point to; and is this something that you can't fix merely by developing a strategy, but you need somebody who is given, perhaps, congressionally-allocated authorities, presidentially-invested authorities across the interagency to direct that strategy and implement it, not just design it?

I think, in particular, of the effort that was put into play after the fall of the Berlin Wall -- obviously, this is very different circumstances -- but Congress and the Administration mobilized, passed the Seed (phonetic) Act, passed the Freedom Support Act, those new authorities and investments were directed by somebody who had congressional authority and a presidential letter to bring the interagency together, and that office still exist in the State Department today -- although I think not necessarily with all those original authorities. So do we need a stabilization czar; and I don't just mean that in terms of title, but in terms of legal authority as well? Vanda, you want to start?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Thank you, Tammy. That's, you know, a fundamental question. I guess I'm not fully comfortable with the German example; and the crucial reason I'm not fully comfortable is, of course, that our fundamental problem is not simply the lack of our coordination and the illusion of the whole of government approach, the difficulties, but far more -- I would say that the crux of the problem far more is the cross

purpose workings of our counterparts. So where that was not an issue in Germany, of course, is that the German leadership had a very strong vision of what it wanted to achieve in the country, and had a very strong commitment to how to integrate East Germany with vast amount of resources, and still -- what we are three decades now past -- there is still vast disparity between East and West, but nowhere the level of disparity that we would see elsewhere.

So, you know, to me the crucial problem is not our deficiencies -- although they are, of course, a very big problem -- the crucial problem is the deficiencies of local counterparts; the fact that their view is often highly parochial, highly one of getting spoils rather than building a state, rather than building an accountable, equitable state with sufficient inclusion. And here is where we have not really developed any adequate roadmap as to how to go about it. We fall, and the Obama Administration -- both the Obama and the George W. Bush Administration -- struggled with it terribly in Afghanistan. But, particularly, the Obama Administration would put pressure on Karzai; Karzai would sabotage; we would pull back because we would constantly be afraid if we lose any kind of connectivity, any kind of work; what will they do. And, frankly, there have been real limitations with the unity government and what it had performed. So, you know, to me that is the realistic crux of the problem. How do we get our local partners, despite all the rhetoric, all the strategy of building local partner capacity to embrace the same political vision of good governance, inclusion, and equity? And the more we build up militias, warlords, the more we hand over military equipment, ironically, the more we are, in fact, often undermining that larger political goal.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Okay; thank you; and I take that point, but I'm not yet going to let go of the question of authorities and Washington decision-making.

So David, let me turn to you first and just ask did you consider, as you were developing the recommendations here, whether Congress might, you know, assign these authorities, legislatively?

MR. YOUNG: Sure. Well, in 2004 and '05, these authorities, specifically for a Civilian Response Corps was already established and petered out because of a few political compromises and issues that we talk about in the report; but I think to your issue of can it work ever; I haven't seen any evidence that it can, and in these specific areas -- in places like Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan. But for the issue of who should be in the lead and the inner agency disputes over that, we recommend that State should be in the lead, and its recent Stabilization Assistance Review also says the State should be in the lead; USAID lead implementing partner; and DOD should support their efforts.

It's interesting that what's on paper is not always what's in practice. I mean even while we recommend it on paper, it's important to note that the AFPAK Regional Stabilization Strategy that came out at the end of 2009 was drafted by State; so, in theory, they were the lead drafter of this strategy. But the reason that we are reinforcing it again and again is that once that strategy made it down the channel to end country, State was in control in Kabul, and DOD was in control outside of Kabul. And what that meant was that in what is inherently a political mission, the Defense Department is in charge of determining what areas need to be stabilized and how to go about stabilizing them. So that's one of the things that caused these enormous rifts. But it comes back to resources because how can we -- and SIGAR included -- how can we, you know, recommend that State be in the lead of an effort that they're poorly resourced to execute. That is why we are also recommending the revival of the Civilian Response Corps with necessary modifications because no credible State Department effort could be lead on the ground, especially outside of Kabul, if it's thinly resourced with both personnel, training before hand, and if it stood up the day the strategy is launched rather than between the contingency operations where we feel it's so important to establish these institutions so that we're prepared.

So that, in particular, State and AID are prepared. The military is accustomed to being prepared for the worst between contingencies; State and AID are not given the political bandwidth or the resources to do anything between these wars.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: J.B., from a military perspective, I mean, yes, these are inherently political missions and I think everything you were describing about the work you were doing on the ground is, in essence, politics, right; you were doing local politics. But the military's mission there is a counter-terrorism mission, right? I mean the national interest that drove us there was counter-terrorism; and if you look at the Syria case, that's even more prominent in the ways that Frances was saying. So is there a way that we can get pass that fixation to really think about this in a broader way?

COLONEL VOWELL: The short answer is yes. So the counter-terrorism mission of going after transnational terrorist networks in their home areas -- the away games, so they don't come to our home game again -- that's an aspect. What we were doing was counter insurgency to the broader application of force in stabilization against insurgents who would have kept that region so unstable that those transnational terrorist groups could continue to have that perches (phonetic) to project their violent extremism in other places.

So, from a military perspective, there's a role that we have to play to enable the stabilization to happen. I think the report is a great job of identifying what the military was trying to do too much of in the political environment on the stabilization; and I saw that at my level. We were the only thing that could get a lot of things done at a very tactical level. I don't think State ever reached a 1,000 officials in country, even during the surge. They had hundreds more, but I don't think they ever got over a 1,000, where there's a 120,000 multinational soldiers on the ground in the surge. So, just a law of numbers and security, it's going to gravitate towards the bigger bubble; it's going to go to the resourcing of security.

We've got to be better at that when we plan. How do we keep this consistent strategy over time wherever we are? There was a great description of Syria's problem said. There's no -- I won't say there's no, I'm a military officer (laughter) -- understanding the political end state in Syria first; identifying the problem and where to go with that is important for the military; it would be important for stabilization.

The last thing you mentioned, where has stabilization been successful so far. I look -- it was not fully a rebuilding part of stabilization -- but S4, Bosnia, Kosovo -- ongoing mission, there is some good aspects of that; there's some things that don't quite fit a stabilization model, they don't. But if you want to go broader, we haven't really done a good stabilization effort since Japan.

COLONEL VOWELL: Korea.

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: And even Bosnia is hardly settled and a lot of combustible, deeply unsettled element.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Yes; although one must always make these judgments in relative terms, right? Good. I want to come back to you Vanda on this, but Frances first. On the issue of integrating the toolkit.

MS. BROWN: Yes. Such a challenge and I agree with David that the Stabilization Assistance Review, I think, provides a really valuable, if long overdue, definition of who's lane is whose. The State should be in the lead for devising stabilization strategy; USAID as lead implementer; DOD in support. That very much tracks with what those agencies themselves -- department and agencies -- would like to do. I think the challenge is that in most of these environments we have to ask the question which part of State. State is not a unitary actor as we all know, and as in many bureaucracies we have a breakdown between regional expertise and functional expertise.

So when you conceive of a stabilization mission end country, you've got the ambassador who's the chief of mission. Is he devising the strategy, and then, again, which bureaus back in Washington are support -- the stabilization folks or the regional folks. I don't need to tell this audience that sometimes there is friction there.

Additionally, from the NSC perspective -- having had the NSC stabilization functional perspective -- I can certainly say the functional person at the NSC does not have the wherewithal to help lead these efforts in every single country under which we are undertaking stabilization. So, I think, we're making progress on this thanks in large part to

reports like this and The Stabilization Assistance Review, but I do think it's always going to be challenging on that regard.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thanks. So, Vanda you made the very worthy point that one of the key challenges here is persuading the governments of these places to embrace a different model of governance that the -- you know, seeing the government as a mechanism for patronage and division of spoils is a recipe for continued instability. And, I guess, number one I want to challenge that a little bit because I think we see some cases -- Lebanon is one -- where the division of spoils actually works very effectively to give all of those parties an incentive not to return to conflict, right.

It's not great in terms of delivering government services. Civil society has developed alternative mechanisms to meet its needs, including that patronage system; but it works, right. So number one -- is that so bad if you can get to that place? Maybe that's an okay place to get to from warlord-ish division of spoils to a peaceful division of spoils.

But the second question is, you know, if you're sitting in front of the Afghan political lead, what's the case you make to them that persuades them that shift is worthwhile?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Well, that's the tough one, that's what U.S. foreign policy has struggled with throughout the engagement. The case that I have tried to make is that the level of instability is too high for it to remain stable; and, in fact, the conversation that I have had often involved my (inaudible) pointing out look at Nepal; and I would say yes, but Nepal has got out of the civil war, and the country's deeply troubled. The governance is absolutely paralyzed and deeply dysfunctional; division of services is inadequate. But you don't have a very potent insurgency running on at the same time.

So the level of free (inaudible) and spoils you can extract in the time of relative peace is very different than when you have an intense insurgency burning. Nonetheless, there are two other moments for Afghanistan. To me, a crucial inflection point that was missed was when Kunduz province in 2015 fell to the Taliban, including the capital

city. And the Taliban looked like they were going to take over another province in the north very quickly. There was panic among the Afghan elite. With many people decamping and readying to go out the country; to fly out to Kabul; everyone was liquefying assets; and, ultimately, with U.S. effort, the Taliban was pushed out from Kunduz. In fact, the Taliban was surprised that they actually managed to retake Kunduz, and keep it so long; they kept it for several weeks.

But this moment when -- there was a moment when the Afghan elite was really shook up that the system was finally coming to a crash; and that moment was an opportunity to say it will all come out, it will all falling apart unless you stand behaving differently. And very quickly that moment of we have hit the brink dissipated and that same behavioral pattern set in. And it is at this inflection point that I would identify probably one of the most distressing ones.

The other aspect I would highlight is, you know the spoils are shrinking in Afghanistan to be divided. With the far more limited U.S. presence and international presence, the amount of money to be handed out in bags, and otherwise, is far smaller. The Afghan economy is doing better than a year ago, but it's still nowhere to where it was in 2010, 2011, 2012. So there is a limited opportunity to divide the same amount of spoils; and if you take poppy out, there won't be many spoils to divide at all.

It's not simply the Taliban that is critically involved in poppy; it's just about everyone in Afghanistan, including political elites, including government elites, as well as the population. So if you gather up the international money and poppy (inaudible) more broadly, what is there to divide?

My final point is that the crucial problem is that, unfortunately, in places like Afghanistan and for that matter, even Pakistan, the elites have a way out. It's just not the Taliban owns large houses and properties in Dubai. Who among the elite doesn't? And, you know, this problem that they can leave and the people cannot; that you can play politics all the time to the brink thinking it's not going to fall; it's not going to fall over; it's not going to

go into the abyss; it's not going to go into the civil war again, into full-blown civil war. But the moment, if it does, you can decamp with your family. And, perhaps, if they did not have this escape route, that would encourage better behavior.

My last comment -- we are heading towards a huge crisis in Afghanistan that's going to be next year's presidential elections.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Okay. It is time for me to open up this conversation to all of you. I'm going to follow my bosses lead, which is always wise, which is to ask you to please identify yourself briefly before you ask your question, and I did pose that word in the singular; so please restrict yourself to one question. You can direct it to a specific member of our panel or to the panel in general. Why don't we start right up here in the front? Please wait for the microphone.

MS. FASCEL: Thank you very much. I'm Morina Fascel (phonetic), an Afghan-American journalist. You've covered so many aspects of this, it's going to be hard to try and keep this question focused. I guess I will start with the notion that I heard about Afghan's having -- the elite having the opportunity to pick up and leave. Your commentary really summarized what has been the trouble of what was earlier termed the elephant in the room. I'm going to speak to you as an Afghan now, not just as journalist.

Having watched this whole saga unfold since I was nine years old when watching the Darul Aman Palace being bombed, while the West is on the brink of a new rivalry with Russia, while this lead democracy is trying to survive in the midst of being portrayed, at least, by your opponents, staged to look like it doesn't have substance. We are now in the context of Afghanistan talking about the flaws of that situation and you've just spelled out that the elite could just pick up and leave, and parts of the flaws are in the way that they engage in rivalry. Well, it seems like in the most modern corners of the world, and this lead democracy, political rivalry is well and alive and continues.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: And your question is?

MS. FASCEL: My question is as this administration makes clearer what is

its stand towards Afghanistan? While Afghans are glad to see a little bit more commitment toward Afghanistan, Afghans are very anxious about what will become of their country; and with new rivalries, people are more anxious about what this means. When will the U.S. reduce its involvement there, especially when we are all talking as experts about how much we should hand the problem over to the locals?

MS. COFMAN WITTES: I think we'll have to leave it there. Thank you. Okay; so look, we are a political system that on our own end of things tends to prioritize the short term over the long term. All of the lessons emerging from the SIGAR report, from our conversation today, are the need for long term viewpoints for persistence, for strategic planning, and sustained effort.

So, number one, do you think that there is today, in the U.S. Government, having been through these last 15 years, do you think there is sufficient will within the government, recognition within the government, of the need to keep our hands on the plow in Afghanistan; and number two, how do we make the case to the American people that we need to sustain that effort at this stage? Who wants to pick that up, Frances?

MS. BROWN: I think that what -- as you say, what we have learned from the 15-plus years in Afghanistan is the need for persistence -- is a need to in state a sense of predictability; and I think that lesson has been learned across the U.S. Government, and reports like this help. We did see the new South Asia Strategy come out last August that did lay out a commitment to Afghanistan. I did not work on that strategy, but that is out there for all to see, and I think it's a striking articulation of long-term commitments.

I do think we need to continue to push on this issue because I think what we've learned in the Afghan case, and in the Syrian case, and in the Iraq case is that we need to in state predictability, number one. It doesn't matter if we have a surge for 18 months where democracy seems to be doing better and security seems to be doing better. People make their calculations based on what they think the rules of the game will be, next year and the year after that; and in situations in which they are not sure about that question -

- what are the rules of the game a year from now -- they will hedge and they will hoard. And so that undermines stabilization objectives in Afghanistan; that'll undermine them in Syria; that undermines them elsewhere. So I think we've learned this lesson. Of course, learning is always the easy part, implementation the next time is always the hard part; so, maybe like the adage, it's too soon to tell.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: And, you know, let me make this a little forward-looking as well; given this lesson emerging from the Afghanistan experience, should the U.S. Government think a lot harder before taking on new missions in new places?

COLONEL VOWELL: Yes. (Laughter) From a military's perspective alone, I don't have those kind of opinions, but we're still maintaining a security environment for the world order along with allies and partners every day. I mean it's significant but what we do as an armed force across the globe to maintain what we did -- setting in place in Britton (phonetic) Woods -- you know decades ago. So the more and more that happens, that we continue to do that, it drains resources, it drains other capabilities. And our Secretary of Defense, Secretary in the Army would say the same thing, that that's the cost of doing business is if we're constantly engaged, the benefit is we're regionally and globally engaged with people, and allies, and partners, and that's good, stabilization security across the globe is good; there's reasons to do that. But every time something flares up somewhere else, we've got to make decisions, and then are those decisions reasoned with a long-term view or is it just trying to deal with the 50-meter target right there. Have we thought through that very well?

I would argue that the armed forces, military in the United States, doesn't have a great track record of getting the next conflicts right every time, we don't. Probably because we don't have that long-term view sometimes; and probably, almost certainly, we don't integrate all the facets of national power in some of those things.

I remember President Clinton told us we would be Bosnia for a year, we're still there. There're reasons why, but that comes at a cost. The more we do with that, we

have to weigh, strategically, the cost benefit of weighing will we be there longer than anticipating what those out-year costs will be, I guess.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Others? David?

MR. YOUNG: In undertaking this report, we sort to accomplish two things, specifically, or midway through, we started realizing these were the two critical objectives; and that was first to raise bright red flags for the enormous investment necessary to even consider making progress in these kinds of environments so that there would be sort of a one-stop shop of a document that we could look at 20 or 30 years from now when we're considering maybe the next big one. In the event that as those deliberations unfold, the idea is that if they have it they can see, and better principles, and national security council, and policymakers can have a better sense as to exactly what it would take and whether it's worth it or not; to be able to ask that question -- is it worth it? Even though if everything goes well and all the things that are in our control, we are able to affect helpfully and beneficially, there's still uncertainty at the end of that tunnel.

With those risks, if and when they decided to pursue another long-term stabilization mission, a large scale stabilization like Iraq or Afghanistan, then the second objective comes into play, which is how do you go about doing it; to what are the boxes you need to check; what are the best practices, the ways in which, you know, everything from the strategic level of considering the will of the host station government; whether they are on board with your strategy; all the way down and seeing, watching how those dominoes fall down to the tactical level of how do you cluster projects to make sure that service delivery isn't just a collection of one-offs, and so that that there's a real sense of a service being provided, and continuous engagement with a government.

So the report, we hope, serves both those purposes -- of a giant red flag for caution; as well as if you decide to pursue this, here are some ideas for how to go about doing it.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Here's a framework for thinking it through. Vanda,

anything to add?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: I don't want to throw cold water on the discussion in the room. I am not persuaded that the White House is, in fact, as committed to long-term persistence in Afghanistan as was announced. I think that the White House was deeply conflicted last summer -- and there were a lot of tensions -- in how the decision would be made. And I see various signs of impatience and, as I mentioned, we are heading to potentially very difficult situation with the presidential elections that will require a lot of thinking on our side about how do we want to handle that. Do we want to have a replay of 2014, including the role of U.S. intervention at that point in getting the national unity government set up with all the problems that followed, or do we want a very prolong political crisis; and what does that mean for U.S. engagement?

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. Okay; why don't we go right in the middle -- the gentleman in the blue tie? Where's our microphone? Right there.

MR. BRODY: I'm James Brody (phonetic), active duty Army officer assigned to the Defense Intelligence Agency. There seems to be a reoccurring theme of the need to synchronize or redefine the roles of the triad of USAID, the State Department, and the Army. What are some of the lessons learned or things we can do to maybe redefine that'll work better together?

MS. COFMAN WITTES: J.B., you want to take that?

COLONEL VOWELL: I'll start off. My personal opinion is that the military does a good job of collecting lessons learned; and, as you know, we beat ourselves up. Whether they're at a training center, it's open. Some observant controller is going to tell you what you did, right, wrong, indifferent; did you follow tactics, techniques, procedures, and doctrine? You get a take home package of stuff that you learn from and take back home again; it doesn't end. You run through the tape and those things like that when you prepare for deployment, or prepare for war.

Specific to Afghanistan stabilization -- I know there's a bunch of AR's

(phonetic) that came out that, I think, are helpful; and if I can, what I see inside the military right now is that we have a challenges, as the chairman would tell you, the 4+1, the new national defense strategy articulates differently the same kind of threats, global and regional actors; and the era of great power competition is coming back. But the military is not running away from the Middle East and South Asia completely just to focus on that.

We've inculcated a lot of those lessons learned. And I say that because my father's generation coming out of Vietnam, we didn't do that so well. We didn't take the Corps' experience; we didn't take some of the regional experiences where we had integrated civil military operations. We were cracking open the books after 9/11. We were cracking them open, and early 2002, going wow. I think we've done a better job.

From a military perspective what I've seen -- we've done a better job at doing that, and I don't think we're throwing everything out. If you go to the training centers now, it's a lot more of platform-on-platform, cyber space; that's great. There's still insurgent stuff going on; there's still somebody trying to integrate an asymmetric threat to your organization. So it's not just decisive action combat at 3 o'clock in the morning; there's a whole human network that's part of this procedure; and that's born of the lessons learned from Iraq and Afghanistan.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Frances?

MS. BROWN: Very quickly, from the civilian standpoint, I served with USAID on a FOB in Afghanistan, as well, and also a PRT. I think, actually, at the tactical level often the coordination and integration goes really well. I think a challenge is then as you get further up the chain there's divergent chains of commands; there's many tables to coordinate above that, and that can often lead to confusion with no ill-will miscommunication; there's also just, frankly, many fewer civilians to do the coordinating at each level compared to our military colleagues. So, I think, there's a lot of organizational challenges that really come to the fore.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. Okay; let's to this side of the room,

and yes, ma'am? Stand up; they'll bring you the mic.

MS. JOHNSTON: Thank you. My name is Karen Johnston (phonetic). I teach at AU, but at the moment I am a Franklin Fellow in the Conflict and Stabilization Operations Bureau in the State Department; and I'm very happy to hear the discussion about the Stabilization Assistance Review, which was quite a challenge anyway because, of course, it codified a particular division of labor; but the real challenge is going to be now in trying to implement it; and that's going to take a lot of time through Congress, through this trying to rebalance toe asymmetry and the resources and the demands that the State Department will also have in terms of the Civilian Response Corps and everything. You, obviously, know the history of CSO.

But my point in question is, this will take a very long time in trying to redirect the resources for that division of labor to actually be able to be effective in our coalition arrangements and everything; and so, in the interim, what can be done? I know that there has been discussion and sometimes very small exchange of, say, resources from DOD to the State Department to do some stabilization efforts. For example, we could try to see whether that division of labor happens in our coalition experts, for example, our material support limitations -- you know, U.S. government is limited; but say the Danish government or other governments do not have those kind of legal limitations or authorities. So what can we do in the interim, tactically or very specifically, while we try to work on the very heavy lifting of convincing Congress to give the State Department more money, to etc.?
Thank you.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Great. So how do we do this sort of stop-gap work on the civilian side while making that case for bigger civilian capabilities; and is there a role that coalition partners can play in that? Frances, you look skeptical.

MS. BROWN: I think you very well laid out the challenges; and, I think, the Stabilization Assistance Review and sort of the interagency effort underpinning it, is now moving to the implementation plan and, I think, they realize, as you know, as well. I think

you always need a proof of concept, and, I think, your idea to sort of start smaller is helpful. We need to look at aspects in which maybe this division has been tried or is being tried.

The other thing I think we need -- and maybe a relatively lower hanging fruit -- is we need to rethink of how we monitor and define success on stabilization. Because, as we all know, metrics drive how we operate in the U.S. Government and outside of it. What I mean by that is that in the stabilization setting -- I think in Afghanistan and also in Syria and elsewhere -- we've really edged towards always looking at ephemeral indicators of success rather than sort of durable lasting indications for the success. We've also gravitated towards anecdotes usually about success rather than sort of a more systemic evaluation of how we're doing on the stabilization endeavor.

I'll give you a couple examples. In Afghanistan, during the height of the surge, we saw a couple districts that really turned it around on the stabilization front; and we would hear about these districts constantly -- Arghandab in Khandahar, Nad Ali in Helmand; Marawara -- and these were areas in which where there was genuine success from a governance stabilization standpoint. The problem was that these particular factors in these areas didn't always generalize out to the broader effort, for just the reasons that J.B. has described.

They also didn't necessarily last beyond a couple of rotations, or that particular district governor who may have, unfortunately, been assassinated or reassigned. So we sort have gravitated towards these anecdotes. We also look a lot at ephemeral indicators. For example, in Afghanistan, we made great progress on sort of tracking local atmospherics; local attitudes towards district governments; but none of that told the fundamental question which is -- is the Karsai government willing to decentralize and reform; are we actually making lasting progress?

In Syria, similarly, we've seen a tremendous amount of really excellent research in atmospherics and monitoring on, again, local counsel dynamics; how are these processes working at a very granular level? And these have been meaningful indicators

during the stabilization effort; but, tragically, in the Syrian case, they don't necessarily affect the outcome of the stabilization effort. In the Syrian case, ultimately, it is military factors that affect whether a local counsel gets to stick around or not.

So this is all by way of saying that I think that if we're going to start on the implementation side, we really need to relook at how we're defining success and how we're measuring it because then, I think, the bureaucrats will move backwards from there.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Yeah; and I'll just add, as someone who ran an assistance program in the State Department and had to make that case to Congress, it is extremely -- look, I think the development field has moved a long way. I think USAID has come a long way in terms of developing, monitoring, and evaluation that can make a persuasive case -- but a lot of it does default to the compelling narrative, the great anecdote that shining example of a provincial governor who's the best partner ever, and so we can pour lots more money into that place. And so, part of the problem here is what persuades Congress. The best social science in the world is not necessarily going to be the story that brings them home on that.

MS. BROWN: And just to add to that, I think, in the Syrian case because we lacked a sort of unified U.S. Government, or codified U.S. Government, political end state, we often had different components of the U.S. Government persuading Congress in different ways. In times of uncertainty, the U.S. Government hedges and hoards like anybody else. So, I think, yeah; some of our own bureaucrats exacerbate that.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Definitely. Okay, right here in front.

MR. KRAVITZ: Thank you very much; Alexander Kravitz (phonetic) from *Insight*. I probably would have called the report, stabilization -- hard lessons learned. (Laughter) That's an obvious.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: I don't think anyone here would disagree.

MS. BROWN: Relearned.

MR. KRAVITZ: Yes. If we were having this meeting at Brookings Kabul,

and it was mainly an Afghan audience, what do you think the reactions would be to the report; and, I'm actually curious, have you sort of discussed with them; have you actually gotten feedback? Thank you.

MR. YOUNG: Sure. We, among our many interviews, we interviewed, 20 senior Afghan officials, senior and mid-level Afghan officials, ranging from ministers to provincial governors, to program managers involved in the stabilization effort. Their quotes, and feedback, and insight are littered throughout our report. In the process of interviewing them, we essentially socialized our findings with them, and they resonate very well. Their main perspective, to the extent that 20 people sprinkled across the government is representative, their perspective was often that the U.S. Government did not listen, pay enough attention to their concerns that they over-estimated their ability to institute reforms, and that they misunderstood Afghan poor capacity for willful bad intent.

I'll give one example. On the program, the District Delivery Program, it was sort of the -- it started in about 2010 and it was meant to be the program that deployed civil servants to the key terrain districts so that they could then have the people there to provide the services necessary to stabilize the districts. It's a core component to even the concept of stabilization. But over time, there was a hand-receipt process that DDP was using that allowed, that meant that, when, for instance, a district government official needed to buy a table for the office or something, the receipt for that -- it was hand receipted -- and it wasn't distributed. It took time for it to get back up to Kabul; and as these hand-receipt processes built up, there was a $700,000 or so shortfall and USAID interpreted this as misallocation of funds, and they shut the program down after $2.3 million was dispersed out of, say, 40 million intended. And this is just one example, and it's probably the most egregious of this misinterpreting poor capacity for willful corruption; and it was hard, you know -- in fairness -- it's very difficult for foreigners coming into a country -- even bright government employees -- to discern poor capacity for corruption; and this was one of the casualties in that battle.

So, Afghans, I think, that points to a significant gap in the expectations and

communication of the people who are implementing it on the ground and in Kabul with the Afghans whose support was absolutely vital to that effort.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Vanda, did you want to chime in on that at all?

Okay; all right; we've only got a few minutes left, and I see a lot of hands. I'm going to do the best I can to collect a few questions and come back up to our panel. So, yes, sir in the back corner? Just wait for the mic, if you would? Here it is.

MR. PAM: Hi, Jeremy Pam (phonetic) from G.W. Law School. From late 2010 to early 2012, I worked for State at Embassy Kabul as the Governance Policy Chief. My question is directed to David as an author of the report, and Frances, who I know has written on this. It's really what could be called a kind of operational question as distinct from strategic or tactical. I think Chapter 5 of the report provides an excellent case study of a couple of the key challenges we faced with stabilization. First, the initial focus on levels of government, on focusing our governance, strengthening effort at levels of governance, namely, districts that were not sustainable in the median term; and secondly, the common problem of bureaucratic inertia that prevented all of the different parts of the U.S. effort; different elements of the civilian effort; and different elements of the military effort, from focusing on it. For making the shift away from districts that might have made sense from a pure stabilization perspective, my question is, is the difficulty in making a clear and coherent policy decision on what is a pretty straightforward question of whether we should be focusing our governance efforts at the district level or at the provincial level, which has giant implications? Is our difficulty making a coherent decision like that an argument against stabilization as a whole; and if not is there something more that could be done to strengthen our ability to coherently make policy decisions like that? I suspect it's more likely to be at higher headquarters in Embassy Kabul versus in Washington; but I'll leave it to you.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you very much, and just hang onto that question, guys. We're going to collect a couple more on this side. These two gentlemen right here; Adriana? Thank you

MR. CARBURY: Sean Carbury (phonetic) with the DoD IG's Office. Frances, you mentioned in Syria sort of the evolving end state and how that affects what you're stabilizing towards. What's the end state in Afghanistan; what's being stabilized towards; is it realistic; how do you walk back promises and expectations that are unrealistic and unachievable?

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you.

MR. BROOKS: Doug Brooks from the Afghan-American Chamber of Commerce, also the International Stability Operations Associations. The contractors who work to support these missions -- and, yeah, you want an earful, sit down with a contractor if you're not the government, and you'll find out a lot of the problems -- but going back to what the Colonel mentioned in terms of Vietnam and the Corps program. We did have a stabilization czar, if you will, there in terms of Ambassador Bob Comer (phonetic) who controlled, had a ton of control; and I just wonder if that could ever be repeated because Corps in many ways was very successful?

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Okay; thank you; and let's take one more on the aisle right here?

MR. NASIM: Hi, my name is Andrew Nasim (phonetic). I'm a retired former vice president of the World Bank Group. I know nothing at all about Afghanistan. But the lessons I heard this morning sound very logical, very rational, and very sensible. I wouldn't have been surprised if I heard them for 10 years ago, 12 years ago; what I'm very surprised at is that I'm hearing these lessons in year 15, 16, or 17. That's really surprising. What sort of comes through to me as knowing nothing but a terribly complicated situation is something must be terribly,

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Got you.

MR. NASIM: So my question is if you had one or two things you want done so that we don't have these lessons in five years' time, what should they be?

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Okay. That is a fantastic question to end on. So

I'm, actually, just going to go straight down the line here and let David take that at the end. I think that'll be a great note to wrap us up. So Vanda, you want to talk about the end state?

MS. FELBAB-BROWN: Allow me to make one comment about the end state in Afghanistan. I don't believe that we have defined the end state; I don't believe the other strategy to define it. There was an announcement at that time, of course, that there are no timelines; that the process of an U.S. engagement will be conditioned based with very little articulation of what the conditions were. In fact, President Trump, during the announcements, made many statements to the effect, we will not tell the Afghans how to run their state; we don't care about the politics; our goal is to degrade the Taliban militarily; which were notions that both the George W. Bush Administration, as well as the Obama Administration, frequently flipped back and forth. Do the stabilization required, inclusive equitable governments, or is it enough just to kill enough of the terrorist, kill enough of the Taliban.

Subsequently, after the President's comments, many top U.S. officials were walking them back and re-emphasizing the need for good governance; emphasizing the need for politics. Nonetheless, the message was heard loud and clear in Afghanistan and still has consequences with us today.

Also we have been fretting back and forth all the time on what is the importance of the Taliban of being part of the negotiations. So in recent months, again, we have gone back and forth on is the purpose of the military -- persisting military effort in Afghanistan -- to drive the Taliban to the negotiations? Again, the President and various government officials have made quite contradictory statements; the Taliban, itself, is making, of course, very contradictory statements.

My take is that our strategy in Afghanistan is essentially waiting for the Taliban to make mistakes. We are holding the bag. If we go out, full scale civil war takes place; the project unravels. However, we don't really have a strategy to break out of it, so we're holding and hoping that over time the Taliban will make enough mistakes. That's not

impossible. Militant groups do, do themselves in; they do make mistakes. The FARC (phonetics) made critical mistakes in Columbia in the height of its power. Those mistakes, while they are not sufficient without also critical changes taking place on the part of the Columbian state but; nonetheless, the FARC mistake is very crucial.

But, nonetheless, we are in this mode; but what will shake up that mode very fundamentally again is what happens with the political situation after the presidential elections next year.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. J.B.?

COLONEL VOWELL: I'll take on the stabilization team; the czar, I think, comments from Corps. I do think, my opinion is, there is a role. It could be a more empowered special representative like we had in Ambassador Holbrook or something like that; but the challenge you're going to run into, I would think, strategically, is you've got 50 nations involved, particularly in Afghanistan, so there's an international, multinational component to it. There's a NATO command component to it right now and in the foreseeable future, and you want that. So to have one person integrate that is a supreme challenge the way we set up this byzantine command and control architecture to bring in the alliances; and it's evolved over time, and particularly in Afghanistan. That alone is a challenge for one person to pull together; but, I think, in concept, absolutely.

So what Comer did in Vietnam, what we did with MACV and the Corps program was to set stabilization zones throughout the country. We have the same problems -- sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia, sanctuaries in Pakistan -- a lot of the same problems. Insurgency that had a bunch of support from outside agencies and a compliant population they can control similarities; but until we can control some of those outside factors, stabilization is going to be a lot harder, it's going to take a longer time. It's an open, dynamic, human-based system of systems. But, I think, fundamentally, somebody could as long as the Administration and the Congress gives them the power -- him or her -- the capabilities to pull that together. I would be rationally optimistic that you would get a better

synchronized, integrated whole of a government approach because that person's been empowered to do so.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Thank you. Frances?

MS. BROWN: Yeah; Jeremy thank you for the question sort of focus on district level, why the focus and what could we have done to alter that. In my view, the focus on the district level came from an analytic proposition which was that Afghans encounter their government mostly at the local level; helping the government be more responsive and accountable at the local level will undermine the driving factors of the insurgency. It also, though, our focus on the district level also came from sort of a romantic notion that things were simpler on the local level; things were more traditional on the local level; that elite capture didn't happen on the local level; and I think those didn't hold up and that, actually, perpetuated some of the reasons.

As you rightly point out, the right focus would have been at the middle level of government, the province -- getting the provinces right first. There're 34 of them, there're almost 400 districts. So getting that level first, getting the incentives and the authorities right on that level would, I think, have been a much better way to go.

Why couldn't we correct in mid-course? I think this exactly comes back to bureaucracy. I'm glad that Comer got brought up in reference to Vietnam. I actually wrote a piece on Afghanistan entitled *Bureaucracy Does Its Thing Again* because I do think a lot of our inability to course correct when many sharp people around government and outside of it were pointing out some of these problems had a lot to do with our own bureaucratic structures; so I think there's a lot there.

And then in terms of sort what lessons -- yes, we keep on returning to these lessons. We're in 2018, what should we take away? I think a key recommendation of mine is do read the report. There's a lot good in there; and, I think, as I think about the Syria context in relation to this report in Afghanistan, I'm struck by first of all the fact that these are really different paradigms, these are really different conflicts. The Afghanistan conflict was a

stabilization campaign under a counter-insurgency logic. We were extending the writ of the governments, extending legitimacy of the governments.

The Syria stabilization effort is really a kind of a counter-counter-insurgency effort. We're extending the writs and legitimacy of an opposition, the outside government. There's also in the Afghan case a binary logic of sort of government versus the insurgency. In Syria, we now have -- I don't know if it's a quadrilateral logic or a pentagonal logic -- we've got the outside government; we've also got armed extremist groups; we want to marginalize the Iranians; we want to marginalize the Russians; so it's a much more complex dynamic.

And yet for all those differences between the two conflicts what I really take away from this report is the huge similarities within our own ability as a U.S. Government to address these efforts. So, I think, in that sense, our best lesson is to focus a little bit more on our own organization, and our own bureaucrats, and read the report.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: Okay; so with that, we're going to turn to David and, of course, as IG Sopko and John Allen were discussing, SIGAR's been there from the get-go; and this is by no means the first report. This is one that's getting a lot of attention for reasons that I think Frances just highlighted. So what can you tell us about the sequencing of this particular report in the realm of SIGAR's work; and how do we think about getting the lessons we need early in the process?

MR. YOUNG: Getting the lessons early -- a lot of lessons were coming out early on and we document them. Part of that problem with learning lessons earlier on is that the nature of the war changed so much that any lesson you might want to impose on the effort became mute shortly thereafter because of new strategies, new campaign, new agendas; Taliban resurged completely made the previous reconstruction effort mute, etc., etc.

But I also wanted to touch -- regarding the stabilization's role with SIGAR, we feel that it's very auspicious this report coming out now because of the issues being discussed regarding Syria and the U.S. Government's new concerted effort to delineate

roles regarding stabilization. So it allows us, as we see it, hopefully to be able to provide an admittedly enormous case study of what implementing stabilization looks like at a large scale while the stabilization assistance review can provide the small scale scope and the beginnings of a small scale stabilization focus. So it can provide that balance.

A couple of other things on what Jeremiah had said if I could finish with those. For those of you who haven't gotten Chapter 5 yet, the provincial level was often by-passed in terms of on-budget assistance. And the reasons -- a couple of interesting reasons for that -- was that the, as Frances mentioned, the district level became the focus, but the district themselves only had, you know, $15 to $20 monthly budgets; and so it was completely unrealistic to try and push on-budget assistance down to the district level. But one of the most difficult issues with doing that was that according to senior USAID officials we spoke to that the best part about pushing resources down to the district level was that it enabled the government to by-pass the political entrenchment at the provincial and national levels; and while completely understandable, by-passing the issues where all of the obstructions are happening is exactly the wrong way to go about it if, in fact, those obstructions are where the most reform is necessary; and there were many examples throughout the campaign of working around Afghan government structure problems to accommodate whatever priorities were on our plate on that given day.

MS. COFMAN WITTES: David, thank you. I want to thank you, IG Sopko, for bringing the report to us today; for giving us the opportunity for what I think was a fantastic conversation. Folks, I hope you will join me in thanking our amazing panel.
(Applause)

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