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A Conversation with Former National Security Advisor Stephen Hadley:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to Brookings. I'm Mike O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy program and -- Adam, are you saying that we're not yet live? Microphones? I won't make you hear that part again, so don't worry. We'll go straight to Steve Hadley when the microphones are live.

It's my pleasure to welcome you to this forum on Afghanistan today, beginning with a featured conversation that I'm privileged to lead with Steve Hadley, who as you know was President George W. Bush's national security advisor and also his deputy national security advisor. I have no doubt that if you were going to do a poll of the people who are most respected in Washington on both sides of the political aisle, I think Steve Hadley would not only be in the top tier, he would win that, probably outright. Maybe George Schultz or Jim Baker has a chance, but there aren't too many more I can think of. He's a person that many of us have admired for a long time, considered by my colleague, Ivo Daalder, one of the best national security advisors because he assessed the problems that were occurring in Iraq in the period before the surge and recognized the need for a major policy review that teed up options that then led to a much more successful policy after President Bush changed direction.

He had also worked for the first President Bush and Dick Cheney in the Pentagon, when it was Secretary Cheney not Vice President Cheney. And believe it or not, given this man's youthful appearance and vigor, he actually worked in the Ford NSC as well. He hails from the great Buckeye State of Ohio and went to Cornell and Yale. And given all he's done for our country, I hope you'll join me in welcoming Steve Hadley to Brookings. (Applause)

And since we want to be efficient with time, Steve is with us until 2:30 and then we'll have a panel that follows immediately after. And I want to involve you in some of the time with Steve.

So let me just begin, Steve -- I want to get to the peace process, such as it

is, between whichever parties are actually part of the peace process for Afghanistan right now. And it's a topic that Steve in his capacities as U.S. Institute of Peace has been discussing and following for a long time, including a forum earlier this month with Zal Khalilzad, where Steve interviewed Ambassador Khalilzad on these same questions.

So we'll pick up a little bit in a second with that conversation and that issue, but first I'd like to ask for your overall take on just how we're doing in Afghanistan today. Most people think we're doing pretty badly. I think everybody is frustrated, but I'd just love to hear you describe where you think we are in the broader scheme of the military and the political and the economic effort, now almost 18 years old.

MR. HADLEY: So there's an embargo on any good news coming into Washington from the Middle East. You may notice that there isn't any. (Laughter) That's because there's an embargo. That doesn't mean things are sweetness and light, but there are things to be proud of.

Look, Afghanistan today -- and if you talk to Afghans, they will tell you -- it's a different place than it was in 2001. You look at the progress of women, you look at the progress of longevity, you look at the education levels, you look at healthcare, I mean it's a much more complicated, and in some ways, successful society. It has the same problem that most fragile states have, which is a governance problem. You know, the difficulty of having competent non-corrupt governments that are efficient and proficient and able to provide services that meet the expectations of their people. And that's hard to do, and we have not focused on it enough.

And I think you have to give Afghanistan an incomplete in that respect, even as much as we all like Ashraf Ghani and think he wrote the book on development in these kinds of fragile states.

The military situation is kind of stalemated. We moved our forces down fairly dramatically, fairly rapidly. That had knock on economic consequences and really pushed the economy under water. And the remarkable thing is the Afghan national forces

have held together, they are sustaining enormous losses, they are holding their own against the Taliban, the government still controls more than a majority of the population, but probably roughly half of the territory. And the economy I think is still struggling to overcome the impact of the rapid draw down of international economic resources that accompanied the draw down in troops.

In some sense, there is a bit of a stalemate and the United States has really changed policy -- which leads to the next part of this conversation -- and made it clear that we understand that we're not going to be able to defeat the Taliban militarily, that the President made clear we would like to not be there forever. This is not a base that we want to use to confront China in that part of the world. But we would like to come home, we'd like to end the war. We understand we can't defeat the Taliban and we're prepared to negotiate.

And Zal Khalilzad was given the writ by the President to talk to the Taliban and test and see whether they are ready for peace, a peace in which they would agree to reenter Afghan society and to accept the fact that Afghanistan is a different place, and that the women will have a different role, and education will have a role, and a lot of these other changes will not be lost and the major elements of the constitution that are based on democratic values and free markets need to remain. It's a test. And so far there's been some progress.

MR. O'HANLON: Do you think that the odds are very steeply aligned against peace? In other words, we're going to have to lower our expectations, especially in the short-term? Or do you sense that we're really potentially near the kind of breakthrough that Ambassador Khalilzad seems to hope for when he talks about maybe we can even have peace before the scheduled July elections, which sounds like putting a pretty positive and hopeful near-term spin on the state of play?

MR. HADLEY: Well, Zal has a problem, because he's got a constituency of one, which is the President of the United States, and his challenge was to show a President who is impatient to bring the troops home that there was an opportunity for peace here and

that therefore the President should leave the forces, should allow Zal some time to see if we can do a negotiated peace, which would redeem all the sacrifice that men and women in uniform have made in that country and the enormous investment we made in that country.

And so I think Zal understandably was leaning forward. That's why he talked to the Taliban, that's why he announced a framework agreement, for they will fight terrorism and we will at some point have a schedule by which we will come home. That was the thing that kind of unlocked it. And I think Zal felt some pressure to show some progress to buy time with the President. And I think he largely succeeded. Again, if the President believes his own words uttered during the State of the Union, it was we're going to stay in Afghanistan. We have an opportunity for peace. We want to see if peace is possible and our withdrawal will be conditions based. That's very different from, you know, we have a deadline and by this date all of them are going to come home.

So I think Zal has been leaning forward to buy time with the President. I think he has. I think what he did caused a fair amount of anxiety among the Afghans that in some sense we were going to do a peace behind their back or over their head, and that's why at the USIP event it was very important that Zal basically said that there were four issues. There's the issue about U.S. troop withdrawal schedule, there's the issue about Taliban fighting terrorism, there's the issue of cease fire, and there's the issue about a conversation with the Afghan government. Those are the four issues on the table. He has only jurisdiction to deal with the first two, the second two are things that are really for the Afghans, and nothing is agreed until everything is agreed. And I talked to Ashraf Ghani, President of Afghanistan, on the margins of the Munich Security Conference here a couple of weeks ago. And he was nervous about that and was very reassured by Zal's formulation.

The trick here is -- and I think you have to say it's less than 50 percent in terms of likelihood of a peace arrangement -- it's going to take a lot more time than we think, we expect. Because it's almost a four-ring circus. There is a negotiation, largely between the U.S. and the Taliban, embedded in a broader conversation among Afghans, because

there are a lot of Afghans who are alienated from the government and have a lot of grievances against the political system, who haven't taken up arms and who deserve to have those grievances addressed. So it's a U.S.-Taliban inside, an inter Afghan debate inside a regional architecture where the countries in the region need to be lined up in support of a peace in Afghanistan. And then the international community needs to come together with the kind of economic and development package that will favor regional integration and show that a peace will be followed by a better economic situation, not just for Afghans but the for the region. And you've got to work all four of those circles at the same time if you're going to come up with a sustainable peace. That's a tall order.

And one of the things that we've been talking about in various forms is how do you structure that and can we get some other folks in to help Zal do that. Because it's a complicated construct in order to bring peace to Afghanistan.

MR. O'HANLON: Just one last question from me and then please be ready with your questions, and we'll do a couple of lightening rounds where as we are grateful 10 or 15 minutes of Steve's time.

Could you begin to sketch out any element of meaningful power sharing between a Ghani government and a Taliban government at any level of detail where you feel like you've got an insight? Because it seems to me this is something we just don't talk about. As you say, it's jurisdictionally not in Khalilzad's mandate. Chris Kolenda and I just tried to write a piece on how to think about merging the security forces. It makes your head hurt to try to think about any kind of actually bringing these forces or these two entities together when they won't even talk to each other, or when the Taliban won't talk to Ghani, to be more specific. And so I wondered if at any level whether it's police, army, ministries, you know, regional governments, is there any particular place where you've seen a possible path forward where the Taliban could in some meaningful sense share power and therefore be induced to join in a process were they're not going to be handed the palace. We're not just going to say to Ghani, nice try, it's all gone, the Taliban are in charge now. That's now what

this process is supposed to achieve. It's supposed to achieve power sharing. So what does that look like in any of those manifestations?

MR. HADLEY: Well, I think this is the hardest issue. And I don't have a silver bullet here. I'm generally skeptical of these negotiated power sharing. You know, you have a lot of scholars in Brookings, I think if you have ask them most of the time that turns out to be a vehicle by which the bad guys with the guns ends up taking over the government and having the whole show.

I think we're going to get to this in pieces. For example, there's a whole question about cease fire. How do you do a cease fire? And one of the thought is actually you actually kind of do a cease fire in place. That is to say the Taliban continued to have security responsibility for the areas that they now control, the government has responsibility for the areas they control. There are models, some have been used in Afghanistan -- and David Sedney can talk about some of this stuff -- where there's been joint patrols. Usually those work if there is a third country, an international force that is also part of those joint patrols. That's a potential model.

So second, there are local political deals, power sharing if you will, I'm told already going in Afghanistan. Local communities have made their peace with the Taliban in various localities in terms of working out *modus vivendi* and operational concepts. That's I think another element of this piece.

Third issue is, again, who is going to be responsible for security, how do you do that. And, again, I think the model I prefer is the one I just described. I think the hardest part is do you hand over ministries to the Taliban, and which one. And I would much rather have a situation where the deal is that the Taliban get to participate in an electoral process and see how many votes they can get among the Afghan people. The Taliban know how that will come out. It won't come out favorable to them and therefore, before they are going to lay down their guns, they're going to have to have some kind of assurances. And the question is what is the form of those assurances. My instinct will be to try to get the political

deals down at the provincial level and try to minimize the participation at the national level in the government. We'll just have to see whether that works.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. That's very helpful.

Well, let's open it up. And we'll start with a couple here in the front -- the gentleman here in the front row and then in the second row. Take those two together maybe.

MR. HADLEY: Sure, sure.

MR. O'HANLON: And then try to have one more round or two more rounds.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. My name is Neil and I'm with the American Legion. My question to you is with so many frameworks of mind around the U.S.'s integration in Afghanistan -- to name a few, on the America First policy we shouldn't be worrying about them when we have problems ourselves. We have invested too much time and resources and American lives to back out now. Or the idea that we have a responsibility to the people of Afghanistan to finish what we started or to establish peace before we back out. How would you summarize America's -- or at least the government's -- current outlook on why we need to still be there or why we shouldn't still be there? Because there are so many different angles with a lot of overlap in between them, like the American First policy versus we have invested too much time and resources to back out now.

What would you say is the framework that kind of describes how the government is currently feeling about the situation in Afghanistan in terms of backing out or not?

MR. O'HANLON: Or the core argument. And then one more here please.

QUESTIONER: I'm Nasim Salizar with Voice of America. Can I ask two questions?

MR. O'HANLON: Let's keep it to one.

QUESTIONER: Okay.

MR. O'HANLON: Sorry. I've got to be tough on that today because of the

time.

QUESTIONER: Do you think --

MR. HADLEY: How about one question, two parts? How's that?

(Laughter)

QUESTIONER: Yeah, okay. That will be very -- first is that Pakistan and India's tension, how would you respond to that to reduce that?

And, second, will that spill over to Afghanistan? Both countries have rivalry in Afghanistan and proxies or followers.

Let me give one more --

MR. O'HANLON: I think that's very clear.

QUESTIONER: Okay.

MR. HADLEY: Why don't I try those? And I'll do that first and then I'll come back to yours.

It's interesting, I saw in the press today -- and I've been doing things, sort of catching on the run -- a Pakistani spokesman said that confrontation with India could adversely affect the peace process in Afghanistan. And then a Taliban spokesman came out and disavowed that the Taliban was of the same view. That is to say the Taliban was saying actually what Pakistan and India is doing doesn't affect the peace process. I think they will try -- I think everybody will try to insulate the Afghan peace process from what's going on.

Secondly, my read -- and the folks who come after me here are better witnesses -- but my read is that Pakistan and India are trying to choreograph this thing so that each leader can take some military action to show that they're tough. But if you listen to Imran Khan, it was a limited action he took in Kashmir with rhetoric that was not war like or inflammatory but was very much we had to show we were tough, we had to deter India. So I think they are trying to do a choreograph of tit for tat where they wind this down and try to not let the rhetoric get too far ahead of the actions on the ground.

So I'm cautiously optimistic that they will find a way to ratchet this down.

I could only tell you what Zal Khalilzad said. He said, the first thing is we do not want Afghanistan to be a base for terror that can threaten the United States or our allies. So that's why his conversation with Taliban was to get a commitment that they would join with us in going against ISIS and Al Qaeda. And that's why there's been talk about a residual counterterrorism force.

But I think also there is a view that as much as President Trump may not have approved of the operations in Afghanistan, we've made an enormous investment there. And if we can get a peace it's worth some time, it's worth some patience to try.

And, thirdly, I think there's a broad view in American society more generally -- those people are knowledgeable -- that Afghanistan is a better place and there are people who have relied on the kind of system we have tried to help them build and we have an obligation to them. And nobody is going to be comfortable if this situation turns into chaos and women start getting rounded up, you know, and put into stadiums and abused and shot.

So I think all of those things have prevailed on the President to give Zal a chance, to see if he can get a peace. And, you know, the commitment of American troops is not large, they're not at the front line. There are huge casualties among the Afghan troops, very few among the American troops. I think the American people are willing to give him time. I think that's what the President has decided, and I hope he sticks with that.

MR. O'HANLON: Let's now go to the back part of the room. I see two hands back there. I'll take them both please.

MR. BROOKS: Hi, Doug Brooks, Afghan-American Chamber of Commerce. There's a whole generation of Afghans who have been born since 2001 or came of age since 2001 that, you know, are essentially the NATO generation. What are the red lines at sort of negotiation that would keep them in Afghanistan and keep that brain trust from departing the country?

MR. O'HANLON: And then behind you, a couple over.

MR. FISHER: My name is Dan Fisher. I'm from SIGAR. My question is whether a possible withdrawal of U.S. forces could actually be conditions based when you have, as you point out, an impatient President who also said in the State of the Union Address that a peace agreement might not be possible.

MR. HADLEY: Well, we all know a peace agreement might not be possible. And if he were to say anything else, we would all think, are you kidding me. So he's giving it a shot. And I think the rest of the speech was about where he should have put it. He wants to show some impatience and urgency because the Taliban -- part of the Taliban think we want to be there forever. And he's got to try to disabuse them of that so they will take the negotiations seriously.

On the other hand, he cannot suggest that we're ready -- we're desperate to get out the door, because otherwise the Taliban will wait us out. So it's a difficult balancing act that he has to perform.

In terms of the people who are part of the new Afghanistan, President Ghani said something very interesting. The question was how can you get the Taliban to accept that new Afghanistan. And one of the things he said, and one of the reasons he has called for a Loya Jirga, which is bringing representatives from all over the country together, he thinks that if a negotiation can begin where the Taliban has to interact with Afghans and see visually how this country has changed, in some sense the pressure of Afghan society will force the Taliban to change some of their policies and adapt to the new situation. I don't know. You have to be skeptical about that. But in the end of the day, those issues have to be worked out in that inter Afghan dialogue. And the context of it is going to be how much of the existing the constitution, that guarantees the rights to these groups that have emerged, remains. And that's going to be one of the big issues in the debate.

There are some Taliban that say we have to have a whole new constitution that's based on Sharia Law. There are other Taliban that say we can largely accept the constitution with a couple of modest changes. We'll have to see. That's what's going to be

the subject of that inter Afghan dialogue once it gets started.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent. Steve, we have time for one quick last round and then we'll thank Steve and bring the panel up.

So Isha is going to be very angry if I don't call on a woman in this --

MR. HADLEY: Sure is.

MR. O'HANLON: And I also see David --

MR. HADLEY: So am I.

MR. O'HANLON: Right, so will you. So we've got two questions here and then keep them brief please and then we'll wrap up with Steve.

MS. FAZEL: Thank you so much. I'm Marina Fazel, an Afghan-American journalist.

Internally the idea that the Taliban can be incorporated in the step by step approach to provide security until the latter pieces of a peace plan can come together, this is something that is going to be curious to watch because the locals, yes, they have shown an aptitude to cooperate and have made their own deals with the Taliban, but wouldn't that happen in any situation where the local population, for its own safety, has to do the most expedient thing?

Externally, what can the U.S. Administration do at this promising juncture for peace to assure the different players that in this age of great power rivalry the U.S.'s stance towards Afghanistan, despite its own internal politics vis a vis potential interference by Russia in the elections, is aligned with Russia and other competitors in the region that these efforts are consolidated towards paving the road to peace?

Thanks?

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. And then to David and then we'll wrap.

QUESTIONER: Steve, I'd like to ask you about American interest. I mean, as you said, we have a President who people have said wanted to withdraw and that's a President's interest and he has the power a President has. But U.S. interests have always

been much broader. So this idea that the U.S. has not interest in what the Afghans discuss among themselves, that it's only an inter Afghan thing and U.S. has no interest seems very wrong to many of us, including me. We think that's a mistake in the way the peace process is going.

So how would you suggest those of us who support issues such as Afghan women, Afghan youth, a free market economy, how can we have a voice?

Thank you.

MR. HADLEY: Well, it's tough. It's not -- what I say to people is in terms of this is an unusual Administration. The President was elected to be a disruptor in chief. He's done a terrific job at it, he's quite disruptive. But there are people in the Administration who are working these issues -- Zal Khalilzad is one, and my attitude is what groups like Brookings ought to do is do what you do best, focus on the issues, let the politics take care of itself. Focus on the issues, come up with options that articulate American interests and defend American interests, and then talk to people you know in this Administration and give them the ammunition they can use in internal debates with people around this President and people with this President.

That's the best I think we can do.

Your question is a hard question. You know, the United States can't give assurances at this point. What we can do is structure a process, but in the end of the day a lot of these questions are going to have to be resolved by the Afghan people as they define a way forward. One of the things we can and should do is to try to neutralize the regional players and convert them from spoilers to sustainers of an internal peace process. That's something we can do and Zal is trying to do that.

I think actually there's more time. The people I talk to say that Afghanistan, even if wanted to have a presidential election, first round in July of this year, they're just not ready to do it. They don't have the machinery in place, there's a current deadlock about who's going to be the IEC and ECC, the two election commissions that are supposed to

oversee this election. There were a lot of things that were wrong with the parliamentary election that need to be corrected.

So I don't see an election anytime soon, which is then a constitutional crisis because Ghani's term runs out I think in May or June. So what's then going to be the government of Afghanistan during this critical time of peace negotiations with the Taliban until there's a new election.

So there's a lot that's going to have to be worked out here, and Zal's job is to try to help the Afghan's find a way forward.

I think there's been a debate -- and I leave you with this point, there's a very interesting debate of do you prioritize elections or do you prioritize the peace process. The theory is if you get a peace agreement then an election in which the Taliban would participate would be a much more legitimate election and give the new government a much firmer platform from which to implement a peace agreement. On the other hand, if you ignore the electoral process, pursue a peace agreement, and a peace agreement is not possible, you may have destabilized the whole Afghan political system and it descends into chaos.

So there are exquisitely difficult issues here. And that's why I say there's a lot of brain power here at Brookings, focus on these issues. Zal is a vacuum cleaner for ideas and options. And there are precedents out there and I think that people outside of government can help be the brain trust, if you will, for people inside government who have these responsibilities.

MR. O'HANLON: So as we move seamlessly to our panel, please join me in thanking Steve Hadley. (Applause)

Well, that was inspiring and I think there's a lot on the table, Vanda and Madiha. Let me just give the audience a brief word of introduction for each of you and then we'll launch right into the conversation where Steve left it off.

I think many of you know Vanda very well, know Madiha, who recently wrote

a great book, "Pakistan Under Siege". I'm just going to give a short personal introduction of each of them, which is to say to me these are two of the bravest and most ingenious and resourceful field researchers that I have ever met in my career. And they've both done amazing work in Pakistan and Afghanistan in this regard. So their credentials, in addition to their Ph.D.'s and blah, blah, blah, could not be more compelling for me.

And so I'm really honored to be up here with them both.

So we'll start with Vanda. Vanda, I just would like to frame the question of how do you assess the prospects for peace in Afghanistan? And, of course, also what advice would you give to policy makers as they pursue whatever chance we have now of a successful peace process?

MS. BROWN: Well, thank you, Mike, and thank you all for coming. We are really at a vital step or vital period in U.S. engagement in Afghanistan. Clearly, the pressures for U.S. disengagement are enormous and very much emanate from the White House.

The peace negotiations today is the most advanced stage, particularly what's been happening this week in Qatar, significant movement on both the U.S. and the Taliban side, at least on the U.S.-Taliban deal, where there is very little clarity and in fact tremendous amounts of trip fires, dangers, and lack of resolution on the Afghan side.

I agree very much with Steve Hadley. He's one of the most impressive knowledgeable -- he was foreign policy official, so it would be foolish for anyone to disagree with him. The July elections are very much a challenge. They are likely not going to take place, or if they take place at all, which technically is not in the making right now, they will be enormously contested. If they don't take place, they significantly destabilize the peace negotiations because they will set up a very intense opportunity for the political mobilization that we have seen in Afghanistan already to do away with the negotiations and declare an interim government that would include the Taliban.

There is a lot of political momentum behind that. Just about all of the

candidates who are running against President Ghani would like that and all of them are trying to court the Taliban to support both their electoral chances down in the future as well as the immediate objective of not holding the election.

So the Afghan peace is really the wicked part of the negotiations. I think it's fairly easy to strike a deal in which the United States will leave and we see essentially a replay of Vietnam. We leave with a decent or indecent interval and leave it up to the Afghans then to deal with the process that has very, very high chances of unraveling.

Now, it's very important to understand there is tremendous optimism, desire, and craving for peace in Afghanistan. The Afghan people don't want the fighting to go on. But what kind of peace, if a peace is at all achieved, what kind of peace will be reached is another major question. It could very much be a peace that is stable in which the Taliban is the preponderant political force and a peace that brings in a political dispensation that looks akin to Iran or akin to Saudi Arabia, that will be a peace that will disappoint very many Afghans, including the young generation that we are speaking about. In some ways that's a peace that I think will be the most stable peace, though I will say it's the most desirable peace by any long stretch of imagination.

The other issue, quite apart from the Afghan dynamic, as Steve Hadley also mentioned, of course is the regional dimension. And we will focus on Pakistan, but it's also worth to reflect on a whole set of other powers. I would emphasize Iran here that has really not been brought effectively and robustly into the negotiations, but nonetheless Iran that has tremendous influence over Afghan politics and over the Taliban, including in ways that have radically changed over the past, really strengthening the Iranian voices. So that's another very large sort of black hole in the process currently that can play in multiple ways, including some serious deleterious ones.

MR. O'HANLON: Let me ask one quick follow up before going to Madiha Afzal, Vanda, and that's you mentioned the Saudi and Iranian models, or lack thereof, undesirable models. What about the Lebanon model? Not that I'm endorsing that either,

but of course Hezbollah's role as both a power in the southern part of the country that largely controls territory or runs a parallel government, but is also part of the formal central government with a certain more or less allocation of seats but not making a grab for the entirety. Is that a model that would be good enough and that's realistic?

MS. BROWN: Well, I think that is certainly high potential for a better and explicitly peace deal or a de facto reality in which the Taliban ends up controlling very significant portions of Afghan territory, other powers, not necessarily the Afghan government, control other parts of Afghanistan. And you have multiple levels of contestation, whether political or military ones, where there is Kabul that hangs in some sort of authority. I would say the model to me is perhaps less Lebanon, although Lebanon is a possibility, and more so Somalia. Very weak central government, de facto revolution of power, significant territorial and other control by the Taliban, contestation in other areas. The big question in that setting is what is going to happen with the (inaudible) military, how long with the international community and the United States have the wherewithal to continue paying for Afghan national security forces in some kind of de facto arrangement of that kind. I'd been willing to bet right now that the peace deal -- if there is a peace deal -- is not going to look anything like Colombia. The Taliban is not just going to say, okay, we will accept some minimal leniency and penalty and we are going to DDR. There is not going to be a DDR in the way that we are used to. The Taliban will either retain its military power as a parallel power to the Afghan national security forces, or it will insist on significant integration into the Afghan security forces, in which case the U.S. congress and U.S. policy get the shock of are they willing to pay for an Afghan security force that has a substantial number of the Taliban in it, not even mentioning the procedures and dimensions of how any such integration would look like, particularly given the political power, mostly non-Pashtun control of significant faction of the Afghan national security forces.

I would also just add here that the deal is also not going to look anything like the deal in the Philippines where the Taliban just gets some parts of the south and minimal

influence. The Afghan constitution will be very much up for grabs. And, more importantly, quite apart from the constitution, the actual dispensation of political control and power will be highly contested.

And the other thing that is very important to recognize is that even say there is a deal, that there is some change to the constitution that is acceptable, that the Taliban is formally in power in the national government and controls de facto (inaudible) significant portions of the territory elsewhere, that there is some sort of *modus vivendi*. Or even that you have Saudi Arabia, Iran, or Somalia model. Under all of these circumstances you will have a lot of external power cultivating their favorite proxies and pumping a lot of weapons and arms to them. And will that arrangement be able to survive the dynamics is a very significant question.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. And I should have mentioned, many of you know, Vanda's book, "Aspiration and Ambivalence", which is a very good history of sort of the first 13 or 14 years of this war. I guess someday you'll have to update that and hopefully it will have a positive last chapter. Time will tell.

Madiha, thank you for joining us today. And you are of course a Pakistan expert in addition to knowing the region so well. So I'd love to get your thoughts on where we stand overall, but specifically on how you see the government of Prime Minister Khan playing a role in this process that may or may not be different from the role of previous Pakistani governments.

Over to you.

MS. AFZAL: Sure. So Pakistan is saying that it wants peace in Afghanistan. You know, both the military establishment as well as Prime Minster Khan are insisting that peace is an outcome that Pakistan wants for Afghanistan and for itself, and they are doing all they can to bring the Taliban to the table. And it seems like they've made some moves, like bringing (inaudible) to the table with Zalmay Khalilzad just over the last couple of days.

Imran Khan has always argued, long before it became sort of the prevailing model, he's always argued for a political settlement with the Afghan Taliban. He in fact gave an interview a couple of months ago where he said, you know, everybody used to call me Taliban Khan because I argued for this political settlement, and now it's become fashionable to argue for this political settlement. So he's certainly pushing for it in that respect. And given sort of the rough start to the relationship with Imran Khan, sort of the reaching out that President Trump's Administration has done, to get Pakistan to help with the peace talks, you know, with President Trump writing a letter to Imran Khan, with Zalmay Khalilzad reaching out, Pakistan wants to be conciliatory given that the U.S. is reaching out. So it wants to be able to show, look, we have some leverage over the Taliban, we want to help here.

But it is unclear to me how much Pakistan stands to gain from a resolution in Afghanistan. And I say this for a couple of reasons. One, Pakistan maintains some leverage over the Afghan Taliban the way the Afghan Taliban is now and it maintains leverage in the region with Pakistan considered an important player in the peace process. Once Peace is achieved then Pakistan's importance wanes a little bit. Pakistan also vis a vis its relationship with India, it's important for Pakistan to maintain this kind of lever that it has right now. Consider the current moment where Pakistan and India are sort of on the precipice of war, the U.S. is loath to sort of venture in and intervene because it doesn't want to anger Pakistan. If the U.S. is seen as taking a side in India, then Pakistan perhaps may pull out of the peace talks or helping out with the peace talks. So it helps Pakistan to keep things at this kind of status quo temperature.

With Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s, you know, he talked about during the Afghan-Soviet Jihad, he talked about keeping the water in Afghanistan boiling at the right temperature. He always kept saying this to the director general of the ISI (inaudible), and in some ways it benefits Pakistan to keep the water boiling at the right temperature where Pakistan can be seen as a power that can bring the Afghan Taliban to the table without the Afghan Taliban actually sort of gaining a lot of power in Afghanistan, because it does not

benefit Pakistan to have the Afghan Taliban be an overt power in Afghanistan right now. And there are a couple of reasons for that. One, the Afghan Taliban has changed since the 1990s when it was in power. It has changed in the sense that now -- or the equation is different in the sense that now there is another body, the Pakistan Taliban, which is allied with the Afghan Taliban, but is distinct from it, that attacked the Pakistani State over the last 10 plus years, and that has now got some sort of sanctuary in Afghanistan because it has been pushed by the Pakistani military's offensive against the Pakistan Taliban. It has been pushed into Afghanistan. If the Afghan Taliban comes into power in any significant way as a result of this power sharing agreement, if it comes into power in Afghanistan, then the Pakistan Taliban will be emboldened and it does not benefit the Pakistani State to have the Pakistan Taliban emboldened.

So Pakistan is at this point, you know, in sort of this some sort of sweet spot where the violence levels in Pakistan are low because the Pakistan Taliban has been driven out, but it doesn't want it to be emboldened.

Secondly, I'm not sure Pakistan wants a state such as sort of an Islamic theocratic kind of state to reemerge on its western frontier. Inasmuch as Pakistan relies on Islam as a pillar, it relies on Islam in very strategic ways. And it does not benefit it to have its Islamists emboldened by having a state which is terrible to its women and its minorities and which is trying to enforce some sort of Sharia on its western border.

MR. O'HANLON: That's great, but I have one follow up and then we'll come bring in the audience again. You made me think about which Pakistan were you talking about, which players when you talked about their interests in keeping the conflict at sort of a simmer in Afghanistan, because if I think of a classic interpretation of Pakistani military or ISI perspective, I could see your point. But if I think about a visionary prime minister, which I hope Mr. Khan is, he's got a country of 200 million people with a mediocre growth rate and a lot of challenges for their future internally as a country, and yet a proud history. And if they could get out of this rut they've been arguably for 20 or 30 years, a rut that by the way we

asked them to go in because we asked them to help us defeat the Soviet Union in the 1980s by channeling resources to the Mujahideen, which then had spillover effects into Pakistan, so we're not guilt free in this relationship by any means and they know it, even if they are also not guilt free.

But anyway, you see where I'm going. Isn't there a division of interest within the Pakistani State, which raises the obvious question, is Prime Minister Khan having any greater ability to essentially have his own vision for national security policy that supersedes the military and ISI's vision, or are the military and ISI still calling all the shots in regard to India and Afghanistan national security policy?

MS. AFZAL: They are still calling all the shots. So Prime Minister Khan certainly has some -- he has sort of a more progressive agenda in terms of sort of social policy within Pakistan, and he talks sense on some elements of foreign policy. And you can see some sorts of divisions emerging where he talked about wanting peace with India, for instance. And he created a visa free corridor for India Sikhs to come into Pakistan. But he is not going to diverge in any sort of meaningful way from the military establishment on foreign policy. That is the bargain that they have struck. He is very much -- you know, they seem to be in sort of lock step right now. They meet multiple times a day. The military establishment says that Pakistan civilian government has decided that such and such is the policy. Imran Khan comes on TV and gives speeches about the strategy, but it is very clear that it is a joint strategy with the military still calling the shots.

I think what he does is he puts a softer face on much of the strategy and he is able to -- domestically at least, for the domestic audience. He is able to package it in a way that the domestic audience is on board with it and thinks he's making the right decisions. So the domestic audience sees him as being the sort of one in power. But this is very much a joint policy because this is the bargain by which Imran Khan gets to be prime minister.

MR. O'HANLON: And that's not changing at all, so far at least.

MS. AFZAL: So far it's not.

MR. O'HANLON: So thank you. Let's open it up. Let's take maybe three questions at a time and then we'll come back to the panel; do a couple rounds of Q&A here.

And I'll begin with this gentleman over here in the second row and then the gentleman in the third row after that.

MR. STACEY: Jeff Stacey from Geopolicity. Currently doing a UN project in Afghanistan, UNDP, called the Rise Project, working on economic consolidation of the peace, assuming that it's going to happen.

Your comments really struck me, both of you, but in particular what you were just saying about the Pakistani leadership. So the degree to which Prime Minister Khan has said positive things about the peace process in Afghanistan and has communicated along these lines to Ghani and others, that has been sanctioned by the chief of staff of the army and the director of the ISI?

MR. O'HANLON: Great question. Go over here to the gentleman in the third row and then to the woman in the eighth row or so.

QUESTIONER: Thanks so much. This is Shafik; I'm an African analyst. My question is regarding the suggestions to share power between Afghan government and Taliban. I would suggest and say, you know, as a scholar or as an analyst or expert, we have to be accountable and we should have the sense that we are sharing views with people and it has to be very responsible. For example, when we bring examples of Bosnia and Herzegovina, we bring example of Lebanon and any other country, I hope there was a map of Afghanistan that they would show were if you wanted to share the power with Taliban, which location will that be. Taliban are all over. They are in Kandahar, they are in Nangarhar, they're in Kunduz, they are in Herat. Means they are all over Afghanistan. The situation in Afghanistan is absolutely different.

So I think my suggestion is that we have to be at least cautious and be mindful when we have such suggestions.

And regarding Pakistan, you know, looking at Mr. Khan, I used to work for NATO as a senior advisor in Afghanistan. The issue is the biggest trouble for the NATO youth forces in Afghanistan at the time was not only Taliban but it was Inbrahan, who was provoking people to look convoys of NATO and youth forces coming to Afghanistan. And he gained the power to I would say provocative statements against U.S. and NATO in Afghanistan in gaining support of the Pakistani Taliban. And we should not forget that right now, probably in a few months or the years coming up, Pakistan will turn again a safe haven for global terror because that's the experience that we have from South Asia. Whenever there's a conflict between India and Pakistan, Pakistan turns to a party place for the global terrorism.

So aren't you concerned that tension between India and Pakistan will push Khan harder to facilitate for more terrorism to come and use Pakistan?

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. And then the woman right there. Yes, please.

QUESTIONER: This is (inaudible), intern at the Embassy of Afghanistan. My question is a bit more specific, taking the most exploited section of society into account, the women in Afghanistan. When we talk about it, like in post 2001 Afghanistan, the international community in general and the United States in particular played a significant role in ensuring rights and liberties of women, a number of programs like establishing institutions or capacity building programs and also reservation, which were completely alien to the Afghan establishment, quotas and reservations. But when we talk about the peace negotiations, taking the highly patriarchal aspect and male dominated aspect of Afghanistan into account and the conservative society, there is always a fear amongst women that how would we be able to surrender the hard-earned rights and liberties back to Taliban and to the new establishment, or anything that comes into settlement in the peace negotiations.

So my question is that what role the United States and international communities should play in the best possible representation of women in this peace

negotiation?

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent. So let's work down. I'm just going to make one small comment in regard to the gentleman's point. I heard a lot of nuance about -- Vanda kept explaining why different models might not work. We're all in search of a model. We're going to have to invent -- the Afghans are going to have to invent an Afghan model. What we're asking is can we borrow from here and borrow from there. But as you point, as she pointed out I think quite clearly, there are challenges in doing this regardless of which example from other countries you might try to cite.

So, with that, Madiha, why don't we go to you on any of the Pakistan related questions, and then, Vanda, whatever you would like, including the women's rights question please.

MS. AFZAL: Sure. On your question, yes, Pakistan's ISI and military establishment -- they're saying that overtly as well, the director general of the inter-services personal relations has stated that he wants peace in Afghanistan and wants the peace talks to succeed. Pakistan overtly wants the peace talks to succeed also because Pakistan says that it wants its refugees, all the Afghan refugees that have been in Pakistan for more than two decades, millions of them, to find a way to be repatriated back to Afghanistan. So that's another reason it wants peace. So they are on the same page here.

I think on your question, very quickly, Pakistan's narratives on Afghanistan, the U.S., and the Afghan Taliban, which Mike also alluded to, are important here. What you say about now Prime Minister Khan's narratives back in the wake of the U.S. war in Afghanistan, you know, post 2001, that's in some ways a very -- that's a narrative that many Pakistanis have. You know, Pakistan says that it was forced to sign onto the U.S. war on terror with hugely negative consequences for Pakistan, because Pakistan says that the creation of then the Pakistan Taliban post 2007 occurred because Pakistan allied with the U.S. war on terror and then Pakistan has suffered not only terrorist attacks, but tens of thousands of civilians killed, lots of money lost.

And so Pakistan in that sense decries sort of the U.S. war on terror, but now it does not want American to leave in a hurry. That is really, really important because a hugely important narrative in Pakistan is also the post-Soviet-Afghan war abandonment, as Pakistan calls it, you know, of all of the region by the United States. And the fact that millions of refugees entered Pakistan post 1989, that is cited by Pakistan as a hugely sort of negative consequence of this will be on Afghan war, among other things. And so right now Pakistan -- and Imran Khan has said this, Pakistan's, again, military establishment has said this, that they do not want the U.S. to leave in a hurry.

And so these narratives are -- it's not something that Imran Khan was saying, perhaps he was the most candid of the lot, but these are narratives that are pretty common in the country.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. Vanda, over to you.

MS. BROWN: Well, I would add two things on Pakistan. It might be that Pakistan prefers a certain simmering conflict. The worst outcome for Pakistan is very intense civil war and chaos. And so peace might not be optimal, and particularly certain configurations of peace might not be optimal, but they are preferable to civil war and chaos, even from Pakistan's perspective, which is not to say that Pakistan couldn't live with it. It might have to, but that's not what they want.

I would point out that the current India-Pakistan skirmish is significant, not just on its own terms and the implications for peace and stability in that region, but I look at Marvin, the godfather of Afghanistan and South Asia studies and his own knowledge that every time there is a little bit of breakthrough in India-Pakistan negotiations, something goes off. Now that there is quite a bit of breakthrough in the U.S.-Taliban negotiations, however desirable and optimal, something significant blows off. Is that merely coincidental? Of course, the instability in Kashmir has been going on for several months. It's really been the worst summer and very difficult fall. There is a lot that has been boiling up and preceding the attack that's head of the crisis, but one only needs to wonder how the timing coincides

with the Qatar negotiations and the progress there.

The thing though that I would also add to that is that the Afghan Taliban wants to get rid of Pakistan. They might be dependent on Pakistan, but there is no love lost for Pakistan at all, including the ISI. And many a Taliban leader has explicitly said Pakistan is a yoke that we want to get rid of. And Pakistan is aware of that. Hence the fear of peace that would loosen the grip that Pakistan has on the Afghan Taliban.

On the issue of peace, I absolutely agree that one of the real difficulties is that the Taliban is all over the place. They are very strong in the north. And so if a peace doesn't break out, if instead civil war continues intensifying, we will have a very messy situation with a lot of the north, very intensely challenged. The Taliban has significantly and effectively recruited minorities in the north, it has Tajik units, it has Uzbek units. If it were really to disintegrate into civil war it will be very nasty, very difficult, very bloody civil war, not at all the line moving north over the Shomali Plains like we saw in the 1990s.

But, conversely, that also implies very strongly that it is very unrealistic that you have something like the Philippine scenario, the Taliban is simply satisfied with merely some provincial level of power. They will be asking for a lot of power in Kabul. How that is configured, if it is configured, remains to be seen. But it not just going to be little territorial divisions in a peace deal.

And so to go to another model, we can think of the end of the civil war in Nepal in which the Maoist essentially won and they came to be t dominant power and they became good capitalists, among other things -- or at least crony capitalists if not good ones. And the country continues to be in a morass and persistent terrible governance challenges since the peace deal. But it hasn't blown up into full blown fighting.

Now, the one thing that the Nepal peace negotiations had and that would be most desirable -- and this links to the issue of women -- was a significant representation of minorities, oppressed cast, and women in the negotiations, in the setting up of the interim constitution and final a decade later. The ultimate constitution. That is how the Afghan

negotiations should have taken place. This is how they still should take place as much as possible. To me it is beyond the U.S.-Taliban peace. But look who went to Moscow. The images from Moscow were enormously distressing. This was the turban male and geriatric crowd with some younger warlords (laughter) and two token women. It was definitely in no way representative of the Afghan society. And I fear very much that the negotiations on the Afghan side will end up being among the power brokers and the far more reckoning that needs to take place in the Afghan society, one that built in much pluralism than it is right now.

The constitution is one thing. In practice, the policy is not pluralistic. In practice, women are significantly oppressed and the conditions are much worse today than it was in 2006. There have been very significant backslides regardless of what's in the constitution. I fear very much that if there is a peace deal, it will be a peace deal that's tremendously disappointing.

MR. O'HANLON: So we have time for one more round of questions, after which we have to leave quickly at 3:15. My apologies. We have a little bit of constriction on our schedule here at Brookings. So at that point I'll ask you to leave promptly and even bring your garbage and cups out with you please. So I apologize in advance. But don't worry, National season is going to begin soon, so you can leave all your garbage in Nat's park, just please take it with you today. (Laughter)

And let's see if we can do one last quick round and finish up in about eight minutes.

So I see a gentleman out there in the -- right next to the woman who asked the last question. And then we'll come over here to this gentleman, and then finally to the second row.

QUESTIONER: Thank you. My name is Barakat and my question is to Ms. Madiha. You mentioned that Pakistan is not pretty much willing to see a peace deal in Afghanistan because it leaves Pakistan without a playing card in the region. But you also

mentioned that the sentiment by Imran Khan in support of the peace process is also supported by a statement by ISPR spokesperson.

So how do you balance this contradiction?

Thank you.

MR. O'HANLON: Over here please.

MR. WOODY: Hi, Matt Woody with defense industry.

My question is what does China play in all of this? Certainly they're in Afghanistan from a commercial standpoint, but maybe more importantly is their growing influence in Pakistan and how they use that to leverage against India.

MR. O'HANLON: Great. And then finally here. Just one question this time. One part, one question.

QUESTIONER: We hear a lot about the gains of the past 18 years by U.S. help to the Afghan government. And we are also talking about human rights, about women's rights, about education. So I believe the most important gain is the constitution and the election. Now that we hear here even there is a negotiation or discussion about the election, whether it can be held or it should be held, or we should be giving the peace process.

What do you think, the election should be held or not? Because most of the Afghan think that they have a legitimate -- they're proud of their election and legitimate elected government.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. So why don't we start for Vanda for this round and finish with Madiha.

MS. BROWN: Well, thank you. You know, the responsibility, and frankly the blame, is very much with the Afghan government and Afghan political class for the state of elections. Every single time elections have been held in Afghanistan, a costly but very important exercise, there have been enormous technical problem, but they could have been resolved. I find it absolutely heartbreaking to see how many Afghan people showed up for the parliamentary elections, at significant risk, and yet the elections have not been

announced for a vast number of seats. There is a tremendous amount of fraud. The election commission, both the IEC and the ECC, have been dismissed, and it did not have to happen. We did not have to be in this situation. President Ghani and CEO Abdullah Abdullah came to power promising to clean up elections. In fact, they also promised to parliamentary elections and lots of other stuff. And that did not happen.

Now we are at the beginning of March, we have a few months, to July, and both of the ECC and the IEC have been dismantled and all the problems that surfaced in the parliamentary elections are unresolved.

So I want elections to be held, I think they are important. I also really am deeply, deeply skeptical that the systems will be in place by July to hold them.

Then we get into complex scheduling, but it is quite possible that even the first round of elections will not take place this year, which had tremendously significant impact on the Taliban negotiations.

I would just sort of add one comment on Pakistan toward the end. Look, we could have been meeting here last year and there would have been some cheering in Washington about how we finally have U.S. presidential administration that has gotten tough with Pakistan, and yet Pakistan has managed to pull off exactly the same play that it did over and over and over, that Pakistan has delivered a little bit of breakthrough in negotiations to redeem its relationship with Washington without any significant change in its policy. We should be reflecting on that. All the drum beats of the last year, the President's tweets in January, how tough we are getting on Pakistan, and the state of play where we are today and how we got to that.

And that has many sources, one of which is also China and the fact that for many Afghan experts China was seen at one point as the silver bullet because of Chinese interest, OBOR and CPEC. China would finally manage what the United States has failed for two decades or more, namely to get Pakistan to start acting robustly and non-selectively against militant groups. Instead, Pakistan has managed to persuade China that it can take

care of the militants that are dangerous for China, and China, as a result of its anti-rigor policies, now believes that it can control through its own internal policies that space without having to pressure Pakistan to act more uniformly.

In Afghanistan China is ambivalent about the outcomes, but it also has very heavily courted the Taliban. It flies the Taliban to China regularly and a lot. It wines and dines the Taliban, including potential with the wine, as are doing other powers -- Moscow, Iran, and all kinds of other actors. So China, like Russia and like Iran, have fundamentally come to believe that they can live and deal with a Taliban with either a significant influence in the country or de facto power in the country. And that Taliban can guarantee Chinese interest, which would be no support for rigor or any kind of militancy in Xinjiang.

And perhaps the greatest noise is the deafening silence of the Taliban and other actors on the situation in Xinjiang and the rigors. Not a peep of supporting Muslim brothers. And the Taliban is also very explicit that it might want significant changes in social order, but it doesn't want economic aid to stop. It doesn't want to play the same economic policies as it did in the 1990s. It's telling us, the United States, and when we have a deal, don't stop the aid. We want your aid, we just want to decide where it will go and how. And the Taliban is giving that same message to China -- when we are in power, you know, please (inaudible).

MR. O'HANLON: Madiha, last word to you please.

MS. AFZAL: Sure. On this gentleman's question right there, so there's an official line, which is look, we want to move the peace process along. And that is very much the official line. And I will say that Prime Minister Khan probably sincerely believes in that official line to some extent as well. That's what he has said all along.

So Pakistan will move the process along, but for Pakistan, you know, peace talks, a permanent state of moving the process along for peace talks is better than certain types of peace where the Taliban is ascending, where the Taliban causes problems for Pakistan, (a) because of its alliance with the Pakistan Taliban. So when I say Taliban I

mean Afghan Taliban and then the Taliban's alliance with the Pakistan Taliban. And for other reasons. And also Pakistan loses its standing as a key player in this conflict and it benefits it to keep that standing going.

So that is something you will not hear ever officially from any Pakistani official, government, military, but it is something that I'm sure it's thought about. And that the end game -- there's only a specific kind of end game and a specific kind of power sharing agreement that would benefit Pakistan more than the current status quo, keeping these talks moving without ever reaching a resolution and maintaining its sort of power.

Very quickly on China -- and I think the question was on China, Pakistan, and India. So just on that, I think China has maintained neutrality over the last few days and I don't see China as helping deescalate this conflict. Ultimately both these powers, Pakistan and India, will have to deescalate the conflict. And the incentives, very much if they're for the world to deescalate the conflict, the incentive are very much for them to do so because they're both nuclear powers and, you know, the fate of 1.5 billion people stand in the balance of the de-escalation of this conflict. So ultimately they have to do it.

MR. O'HANLON: Fantastic. Thank you all for being here. Please join me in thanking the panel. (Applause) * * * * *

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

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