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POWER DYNAMICS, REGIONAL RELATIONS, AND US POLICY

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DISCUSSION:

MODERATOR: VANDA FELBAB-BROWN

Senior Fellow and Director, Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors,  
The Brookings Institution

TRICIA BACON

Associate Professor, Department of Justice, Law and Criminology, American University

TAMIN ASAY

Senior Fellow, King's College London

RONALD E. NEUMANN

President, American Academy of Diplomacy

ORZALA NEMAT

Director, Development Research Group LTD

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**FELBAB-BROWN:** Thank you for joining us today for our conversation about terrorism in and from Afghanistan and Pakistan, and security and political developments in Afghanistan, the governance and stability and sustainability of the Taliban regime. I am Dr. Vanda Felbab-Brown, director of the Initiative of Non-State Armed Actors and co-director of the Africa Security Initiative, as well as our fentanyl series at the Brookings Institution where I am also a senior fellow. We are meeting here today to discuss these issues on the anniversary of al-Qaida's 9/11 attacks in the year 2000 on the U.S. homeland, the bloodiest terrorist attacks the United States experienced. Al-Qaida's also terrorist attacks claimed the lives of almost 3000 people in 2001. And the mourning and tragedy lasts. Let's acknowledge them with a moment of silence, as well as the many US soldiers who and intelligence operatives who lost their lives or were injured in subsequent US efforts to stamp out terrorists with global reach.

Thank you. The 9/11 attacks prompted a major reorientation of US policy that defined combating terrorism as the principal axis of U.S. foreign policy. As part of the US global war on terrorism. The United States toppled the Taliban regime in Afghanistan that had been conquering in Afghanistan since 1994 and which by 1999 ran most of the country. It also hosted al-Qaida and provided safe havens for it. The United States then spent two decades fighting a resurrected and over time, increasingly powerful Taliban insurgency while unable to induce accountable, equitable governance from post-Taliban authorities. When the U.S. withdrew from Afghanistan in the summer of 2021 following the deal the Trump administration signed with the Taliban in Doha two years prior, the hollowed and ineffective Afghan authorities of the Afghan Republic rapidly folded and with an unexpected speed, the Taliban took over the country.

Our focus today is to examine how the Taliban has been ruling since it seized power in the summer of 2001. What kind of regime with what internal structures it has put in place, how sustainable the regime is economically and politically, and how it treats its citizens. Of course, women, ethnic minorities, but as well as Pashtun people. We will also be looking at the Taliban's external policies, as well as policies in the security domain, such as its response to terrorism and its engagement with counterterrorism issues, but more broadly, its trade and foreign policy agendas with countries in the

region, such as Iran and its neighbors, Russia, China. And we will also, of course, examine U.S. and international policy responses and the possibilities of imagining different policy responses.

To that end, we are very fortunate today to have brought together a most knowledgeable set of very distinguished speakers with deep experience, knowledge and connections in Afghanistan on Afghanistan to Afghanistan. I will introduce them each just before they speak. Because we are meeting today to talk about Afghanistan and terrorism issues on the anniversary of 9/11. I will start with the terrorism and counterterrorism picture and Professor Tricia Bacon. Professor Tricia Bacon is an Associate Professor at American University School of Public Affairs. There she directs the Policy Antiterrorism Hub. She is the author of important pieces of work on terrorism, including two highly acclaimed books, *Terror in Transition*, *Leadership and Succession in Terrorist Organizations* and *Why Terrorist Organizations Form International Alliances*.

Dr. Bacon also comes in with a distinguished policy career. Prior to her employment in American University, she worked on counterterrorism issues in the US government for over ten years, including in the Department of State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, as well as the Bureau of Counterterrorism and Bureau of Diplomatic Security. Professor Bacon in the Doha Agreement and well beyond the Doha Agreement, the Taliban was promising that it would not allow terrorist activities to leak out of Afghanistan to affect the regions and the rest of the world. They had never actually promised that it would end terrorism or not provide terrorists safe havens in Afghanistan. It was rather purposeful and consistent in its phrasing of no leakage out of Afghanistan. What is the actual picture? What's happening with terrorist groups presents al-Qaida in the country. What's happening with the Islamic State and, of course, the danger in Taliban Pakistan. How consistent has the Taliban been in its promise to hold up crucial international obligations?

**BACON:** Thank you so much, Vanda, for convening us here today and for the opportunity to speak with this very distinguished panel. Your question really is the central one. And unfortunately, on this 23rd anniversary of 9/11, once again, the greatest terrorist threat to the west is emanating from Afghanistan. The state of the picture in Afghanistan today is in some ways familiar. The Taliban regime is harboring a number of foreign militant organizations that it believes or promises it can monitor, manage and control. But this time around, the critical difference is, there also is a terrorist

organization, the Islamic State, ISK, that seeks to attack both within Afghanistan, including striking the Taliban as well as more broadly in the region and beyond, including the West.

And that is really the core threat emanating from Afghanistan today. There's four aspects of risk that are worth distinguishing up front. One is, since it was formed as an Islamic State affiliate in 2015, it is really carved out an unusual position in a region where there is a proliferation of militant groups. ISK is the only solely rejectionist organization in the region, meaning it violently opposes all governments in the region and beyond. And this is in a region where most, if not all other militant groups have at least one government backer or in some cases, the Taliban regime. So, ISK is able to offer an alternative bet to new recruits and dissatisfied members of other militant organizations and thus puts pressure on other organizations and shapes their calculus. ISK really offers this broad tent for those seeking to violently oppose the status quo. It has expansive ambitions to attack virtually anywhere.

It can do so, and it's transnational in its composition and its ambitions. Importantly, the group not only has the intent and capability to conduct and inspire attacks beyond Afghanistan, it's emerged as a linchpin in the Islamic State's broader attack network. So, it has roles that range from being the primary architect of attacks, a facilitator of attacks and in inspire of attacks. And it appears to be equally comfortable in all three roles. The second aspect of the group that I want to mention is its resilience. It has demonstrated remarkable resilience to weather pressure and reemerge as a threat consistently since its formation in the initial years of this organization. It was facing pressure from the United States, from the Afghan Republic government and from the Afghan Taliban. That would be enough to seriously damage most organizations, let alone a young organization. Like ISK was then. But I still managed to weather that and reemerge consistently as a threat. It's now almost a decade old, and surely pressure from the Taliban alone will not be enough to seriously weaken this group over the long term. And since 2015 its attack patterns have been peaks and valleys.

We see spurts of attacks followed by reductions in violence while it evades counterterrorism pressure. And then attacks will peak again. Since July 2022, attacks in Afghanistan have declined. It has still struck soft targets in Afghanistan and attacked in areas controlled by the Taliban. But most importantly, since that time, its external operations have expanded significantly. And this brings us to carefully calibrating the threat from my risk. ISK some ways, defies our conventional thinking about

strength of these organizations equaling threat. In this environment, we hear a lot about groups like Hezbollah who are strong from a conventional standpoint.

ISK doesn't necessarily have those same kinds of numbers or same kinds of weapon arsenals. Its strength is its threat is not derived from its strength. It's derived because it's so highly indiscriminate. It's willing to attack even maternity wards or schoolgirls taking tests, and is completely unrestrained in its targeting, and it's also highly opportunistic and will conduct attacks wherever it can and seek to inspire them elsewhere. It's not an organization like al-Qaida that sought to develop sophisticated attack capability to conduct an attack like 911. It seems to apply more of a minimum viable capability to conduct operations. It's willing to have a high rate of failure in order to have some major successes. So, while some may argue this group is in some ways weak, that is not a good way to assess the threat from the organization.

As it is now one of the most lethal militant organizations in the world. At the same time, CT efforts against ISK have serious limitations in the current international environment. Too many governments view the group through the prism of strategic competition, existing rivalries or just plain conspiracy theories. The result is there has been insufficient counterterrorism cooperation between governments against the threat, which in times has led to deadly results when warnings have not been heeded. And this is also a major limitation to anyone who wants to propose cooperation with the Taliban against ISK. Because the Taliban has repeatedly characterized ISK as a proxy for the United States, reflecting the kind of conspiracies that limit cooperation against a group. At the same time, we have this cadre of foreign groups that are aligned with the Taliban and still hosts a slew of foreign groups who supported it during its insurgency against the United States.

Among those is al-Qaida and its regional affiliate, al-Qaida in the Indian subcontinent. This comes at a time where al-Qaida is seeking to exploit the war in Gaza to regain momentum and reestablish its leadership in the Sunni jihadist movement. And the Taliban expresses confidence in its ability to manage these groups, though it is worth the caveat that it had such confidence in the 1990s as well. But this time that's complicated. By ISK providing an outlet for those who are dissatisfied with the Taliban's approach. Importantly, the Taliban has not demonstrated a willingness, ability or some

combination thereof to constrain the Pakistani Taliban. The, this organization has really evolved and emerged as a much more sophisticated organization and resurged as a threat in Pakistan.

In something of a role reversal, Pakistan now faces a threat from a militant group that finds haven in its neighbor, while the Taliban regime implausibly denies that the Pakistani Taliban has a presence in its border. And while Pakistan's plight may invoke limited sympathy in Washington, given Islamabad's support for the Taliban insurgency, it is notable that the Afghan Taliban failure to prevent the Pakistani Taliban from using its soil for attacks suggests that there are serious limitations to its willingness or ability to fully manage militant groups to find haven in Afghanistan. So, we're in an environment where there's limited international appetite for Afghanistan and for counterterrorism. We have strategic competition is the priority amidst a war in Ukraine, the war in Gaza. But terrorism remains a threat that can really disrupt these other priorities. Given sufficient measures are not taken to mitigate the threat.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** Well, thank you very much, Tricia. And I would add that, of course, the issue of terrorism remains the primary agenda for just about all the regional actors dealing with the Taliban as well as other actors. And I would also note that in the Crocus City Hall attack conducted by ISKP, Moscow went to great lengths not to blame the Taliban and not to associate the Taliban's management of internal security with the attack. Before I go to former deputy minister, I'll say I just want you please to clarify to our audience or explain to our audience what is the Taliban-ISKP relationship, what kind of actions the Taliban has taken. These are the ISKP.

**BACON:** So ISKP actively targets the Taliban and has virtually since its inception, they've used the Taliban as an illegitimate government and an illegitimate actor. So, there is an adversarial relationship. The Taliban has conducted operations against ISKP since before the US withdrawal, and it has increased those operations since its takeover. It has conducted crackdowns as well as more targeted operations against the group and has been active in trying to mitigate the threat within Afghanistan from the group. It is, by some reports even penetrated ISKP, but this has not resulted in ability to disrupt external plotting. As you point out, in the attack in Moscow, as well as one in Iran and numerous plots in Europe.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** And I would just add here that the Taliban has been rather effective in depriving escape of urban safe havens but found it much more challenging when escapees set up urban operations in the same way that Western and Afghan Republic counter-terrorism efforts previously struggled with, which is a great transition. To talk now to bring into the conversation, Deputy Minister Asey. And the question that I have to you is how stable and secure in power is the Taliban three years into its rules? What are its internal structures, cleavages, vulnerabilities?

Mr. Tamin Asay is the Executive Chairman of the Institute of War and Peace Studies and of the Council on Foreign Relations of Afghanistan, both professional, non-government and nonpartizan national security and foreign policy think tanks based in Kabul. He's also a Senior Visiting Fellow at King's College London and a graduate of the Royal College of Defense Studies in London. He was the former Deputy Minister for Policy and Strategy at the Ministry of Defense of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, as well as the Director General of International Relations and Regional Security Corporations, and the former Director General of Policy at Strategy and the Office of National Security Council of the Afghan Republic. And Tamin is a super knowledgeable Afghan official, an analyst. I could hardly imagine anyone better than him asking about the internal dynamics within the Taliban. Mr. Asay, please. The floor is yours.

**ASAY:** Thank you very much, Vanda, for this stellar panel. It's an honor to be part of this panel to meet good old friends. Ambassador Neumann, Dr. Nemat of course, Professor Baker, in terms of the stability of the Taliban regime or the emirate, as they call it, Emirate currently is in charge of the 100% of the geography. They have they're in charge of the security of that geography as well. But the regime does not have stability. And it's one of the concerns that a lot of Afghan, big Afghan interlocutors who are actually residing inside of Afghanistan right now, they've been consistently voicing to the Taliban leadership that security does not equal stability in Afghanistan.

There are a lot of underlying factors that contributes to the instability of the Taliban regime, a lot of disenchantment. If you look at U.N. surveys, other independent surveys, some of them private, some of them public. That the underlying factors brewing and contributing to the instability of the Taliban regime are a mix of four factors. One is the internal struggles within the Taliban regime. People like

my brother is not happy. Senator Kony is not happy with the edicts with some of the policies. You would be surprised that an extremist like him does not like edicts of mullah.

But the setting in Kandahar. Then you have people like my boss, the current Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the emirate, publicly criticizing some of the policies, after which he was warned by Kandahar not to raise those concerns. And at the same time, you see people like including the current emir asking and summoning various officials to Kandahar as recent as a week ago. For example, in bulk, he reiterated the fact that what he calls it, which is obedience and implementation of his edicts, will be the backbone of the longevity of the Emirate. So, in terms of the stability, one factor is the internal struggles which are within that. Then there is the population. They cannot deliver services. The government is still enacting so-called government. The ministers are acting ministers and then different ministers and governors have loyalty to different factions of the Taliban.

And essentially the way they look at the government is as, you know, bonuses that they got from years of jihad. The third factor is their very anti-women gender apartheid edicts, which has completely isolated them within the international community as well as the region partially also inside Afghanistan. So that kind of contributes to the one of the factors that contributes to the instability of the regime. And then the finally, it's the division of labor between what they called moral philosopher, which is where all the edicts come, where all the religious authority is kind of bestowed, which is in Kandahar, the main center of decision-making Dunham, which is the center of governance. Now, hypothalamus is essentially another version of Ashraf Ghani in terms of micromanagement, because he is literally micromanaging everything in Kabul, in Kandahar.

And a lot of the ministers in Kabul are powerless lame ducks. They pass paper on. And a lot of those ministers are not happy. People like the son of former, and the first Amim, he is completely a powerless person right now. So, it's happening. As recently as a month ago, his chief of staff was replaced by the Army chief is one of his closest people sitting in his office. And just today, one of the probably the most famous Uzbek commander of the Taliban, clerics, along with the newbie, resigned in protest. And in an emirate that prides itself in unity and discipline, there's a lot of anarchy brewing. But the success of the Taliban has been that they keep it under the wraps. That's why they have imposed so much media restrictions, reporting restrictions and other things.



The biggest, I think one of the most important thing that we should pay attention to is the social engineering project or what some people call the 'state building' project that Hayatullah has undertaken. He essentially what he's trying to do is trying to create a model Islamic country to be emulated by his own words. And the words of his spokesperson by other Islamic countries are Sharia-based government. Creating sort of a what I call homo-Talibani like homo-Russian that Stalin wanted to create. And he has installed a series of very extremist measures. And it was very, I think, calculated a small steps. And then now it's getting bigger and bigger. He started with what he calls correcting how the people dress, how the people should look like as an Afghan. So, grow a beard, you know, where this and then imposing a job on others of women.

Then he went on cleansing the bookstores and the libraries of books that are so-called against the Emirate ideology. So, the deputy minister of culture of the Taliban was going around looking for books which is contrary to the through the Emirates ideology. Then we saw a plethora of edicts that he has he has issued. And then the final thing was the madrassa built that he has been building. Right now, there's an estimation of around probably 3 million Afghans who are now being trained in those madrassas and that they will be the base for a bid to the main constituency. So therefore, the regime is both at the same time, is both engaged in a social engineering, cultural revolution type of a project, but also uses GDI and its police apparatus as a theocratic police state to suppress dissent and also keep a grip over Taliban, over Taliban rank and file.

And they've also removed different centers of power, which was their or at least warned them or sidelined them or took the power from them. So, it's a pressure cooker, I think. And I would end with a quote from a very senior Taliban security official who warned in private that say that if, if there's going to be some sort of an explosion, internal implosion, in one wave, 12 provinces will go and then another wave would be another few provinces. And two Taliban basically goes back to the son in Afghanistan. So, they're very worried. And just last week, as I mentioned, Hayatullah publicly warned all the Taliban leaders that if the current rate of cruelty and of corruption in the emirate continues, the regime would not survive. Those are his words last week in Buffalo.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** Well, thank you very much to me for those absolutely fascinating insights. Before I go to Dr. Nemat, but I want to say a little bit on this theme of pressure cooker implosion and obedience. Of course, the flip side of obedience and this one-man rule micromanagement, the ultimate word that is to some extent being subverted or at least slow walked in implementation on the ground in various ways, is that the regime or the one-man mode, really the regime stops being completely responsive to even the crucial pulse of power.

Now, of course, high [ineligible] some extraordinary adroitness has surrounded himself with powerful Southern commanders, such as Zakir, to create the Victorian guard around him that benefits disproportionately as a battery and guard from distribution of resources. But we saw various levels of pushback. You mentioned Baradar. You mentioned Yaqoob. You mentioned Siraj. Where are we today? Are all those sidelined leaders who are having their chief of staff officials removed? Are they simply accepting? I mean, what are your thoughts on this balance between Batalha cowing everyone into obedience and or in fact setting up the internal implosion?

**ASAY:** So, anybody who knows history of Afghanistan knows that you cannot run that country with edicts and decrees sitting somewhere in one province and turning yourself into a machine producing various decrees. Otherwise, Babra Karmal, or the communists would still have been in charge because they were also another machine producing all sorts of edicts. In fact, the same words were conveyed to Hayatullah, that you cannot govern this country with edicts. Let me give you an example. The last leg, which was this last law by some virtue law which was issued. Taliban figures like Saroj, Yakov, and a few others, including a brother, told their commanders not to enforce it. Report to them. But in your provinces. Be careful.

For example, in Herat province they tried to, they actually, within the first 48 hours, established checkpoints to start checking women whether they are complying to the to their new by some virtue law. The governor intervened and took out all of those checkpoints from across the city inside her province. So historically, edicts and decrees, when it actually goes into implementation at the local level has always been what I in, in a passive way resisted, because Hayatullah is not there in all provinces and all districts to implement that.

And part of the reason why he started his provincial travels, which is now actually traveling, is because GDI reported to him that people are not implementing decrees and people are not listening to you. So therefore, when it comes to this passive resistance and these centers of power within the Taliban, yes, they listen to him. Yes, they on surface on, you know, on face value, they are obedient. But down the line, they are all putting their hands up and, you know, making a door and prayer that when would his heart issues prevail and he would die because he does suffer from heart disease, serious health issues.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** Well, perhaps the surplus implementation bill will have an echo in the Potemkin villages. And this year Tula travels around the provinces. What he sees might be more of a window dressing than the full extent of the implementation of his very brutal edicts, which is an excellent transition to now bring into the conversation. Dr. Orzala Nemat, so on them because part of how any entity rules is, of course, not just how it rules its own groups, what kind of structures of consultation and order it sets, but also how it rules citizens under its control. And we have seen very brutal and increasingly tightening Taliban rule with many dimensions of that tightening. That I am delighted to have Dr. Orzala Nemat to explain to us and to detail to us.

She's the Director of the Development Research Group and a Senior Associate Fellow at British think tank. She served as the Director of the Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit from 2016 to 2022 and was a Chairperson of the Open Society Foundations Branch in Afghanistan until July 2021, as she's also a trustee of Afghan Aid for over 25 years. Dr. Nemat has led organizations focused on women issues, youth empowerment, education and legal reform in Afghanistan and as part of that work was awarded an award in 2000 the Amnesty International Award. She was also a Yale Greenberg fellow in 2008 and Young Global Leader at the World Economic Forum in 2009. So please, Orzala, what has the Taliban's governance been like toward its people, toward ethnic minorities, toward women? And, of course, we're meeting just on the heels of a very brutal edict being issued amounting to what some have called gender apartheid.

**NEMAT:** Thank you very much, Vanda. Good morning. Good afternoon. Good day to all listeners. It's a great honor and pleasure to be with all of you today. And on this day, we stand together, united in

remembrance on the 23rd anniversary of darkest days in the probably one of the darkest days in the modern history, the 9/11 or the 11th of September. The tragedy of the 9/11 is one that the people in Afghanistan have experienced throughout these years, since 9/11 happened almost on a weekly basis for over 20 years, either in the capitals and the cities or in the remote and far villages. So, speaking about the Taliban's today, it's important to also remember what led to this 20 years of investment, which we have seen vanished as soon as the international military forces have left and the former republic government basically collapsed.

The point that I wanted to make in terms of what the Taliban's edicts are coming from. Like what are they based on? It's not something that was completely surprising to the Afghan people. We don't know. And yet it is hopefully a topic that will be covered by Ambassador Neumann and other speakers. But the reasons that led the United States, among all other partners or allies of Afghanistan in 2019 to make an agreement with such a regime that hosted the perpetrators of 9/11 and trust them is something that still the Afghan people don't understand. We've been asked. By we, I mean the Afghan women, but also in general, any non-Taliban Afghans are continued to be neglected and ignored in any conversation related to Afghanistan.

When it comes to formalities and that in itself is creating this environment that there are more hopelessness in the world of diplomacy and in the awareness of actually being hopeful, politically speaking, more than then in other ways. So, the Taliban's sort of misogynistic policies continue to come after one after the other. The most latest one, the most recent one, is their recent so-called law, again, written or endorsed by the supreme leader, is creating and sparking a lot of debate, even among the religious scholars and how un-Islamic and how unacceptable these laws are. And there are two sides of the story when looking into the Taliban governance, and particularly in terms and in relation with women and their work and their education. There was one side that is not really justified on any grounds, whether Islamic or non-Islamic, and that is the one that is coming back really through directives from Kandahar, from the supreme leadership.

And there's the other one that allows a level of flexibility and a level of understanding, which is with what even some of the Taliban members also trying to sort of like close their eyes and let the Afghan

people emerge and continue to struggle quietly and not with a lot of noise making from inside Afghanistan, but continue to struggle and not the struggle in a kind of an anti-Taliban resistance or anything, but at least to struggle to survive. The struggle to continue actually some form of education for girls, something that is completely banned by Taliban. And the struggle to find ways and workarounds to reach the most vulnerable segments of the society, including women headed families and so forth. So, this is ongoing. And there are, of course, expectations from Afghan people in general that we should not let them alone. We should continue these efforts to ensure that any Taliban are kept accountable.

When they are treating half of the population in such a sort of like draconian way and be to ensure that the Afghan people don't feel that they are left behind and left alone. And repeat the history of the past. And on this day, so also important to remind ourselves the danger that can come through Afghanistan once again. There are reports, there are evidence from different parts of the country, particularly in the eastern south, eastern parts and even some parts of the northern region, that there are bases being established.

There are activities that cannot be explained by the local population. Who are these people who are not Afghan, who are coming and quietly residing in these places? For some plans nobody knows related to where and everyone fears. So, there is an in-appearance end to the war. There is no suicide. Well, there, there are fewer suicide bombing and suicide attacks. And as mentioned by other distinguished panelists, those are sort of like labeled as the Daesh attacks or the ISK attacks. So, the war is not completely ended, but at least there is a significant reduction in actual violence. But there is a gradual war that Afghan people in majority, the youth and particularly the women, are experiencing. And I think there is a collective responsibility from the international community to address this gradual death that we are experiencing today.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** Orzala, for our audience let's get specific about what the edicts are showing. The latest round of edicts are. Women are prohibited from showing up in the public space without being fully covered. The voice of women is not allowed in public spaces, whether this be singing or, for example, radio or newscast work, in which some Afghan journalist, female journalist became very

prominent. An accomplished women are not allowed to travel long distances without the that of the Mail Guardian. Please just fill that picture of rules and restrictions. And you mention no education for girls in snow. Education after the primary education.

**NEMAT:** Yes. In addition to that, a few other points. There are also rules set for men that they have to have beard long enough to be held like this. I don't know how to explain this in English, but somehow, like long beard and they have to all dress in local traditional dresses. And most importantly, music is completely forbidden. National cultural celebrations such as Nowruz, which is a very historical celebration across Afghanistan, such as shall be the longest night of the year. And several others are all also forbidden. And there are no permissions or allowance for celebrating these social cultural activities. So, this law is an indication that the supreme leader of Taliban is aiming to take Afghanistan back to, I don't know, dark ages somewhere that its women are completely illiterate and somewhere that it's men are also not able to drink or be allowed to work beyond.

And of course, there are lots of contradictions because when it comes to TV, when it comes to media and the way that is being used, the Taliban are more efficient in using the media and social media and publicity platforms. So, whether there is a possibility or commitments or willingness to implement these edicts in complete full force or not is questionable. But the edict, the significance of this edict, this particular law is not, this one is a very descriptive law. The significance of it is in this part that it allows the moral police from the propagation of vice and promotion of virtue, that they can use this to turn against women, particularly women activists, protesters and anyone who challenges their restrictions in any harshest possible way that they can because they will have a law in their hand to do that.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** Thank you for filling in the details of the entire picture or what it means living under the Taliban rule, particularly in areas where local Taliban commanders and officials do not have enough influence to slow walk, not implement, sabotage. The implementation of many of the edicts, which is indeed happening in various parts of the country. Ambassador Neumann, I want to turn to you now to your reports about the Taliban's foreign policy and its regional implications, how the region is responding to the Taliban, and on U.S. policy options looking forward, what U.S. policy is currently

and what are the pros and cons of alternatives? Ambassador Ronald Neumann is the president of the American Academy of Diplomacy.

Now, he has held a very distinguished career in U.S. foreign policy in the State Department when he served three times as Ambassador to Algeria, to Bahrain, and finally to Afghanistan between 2005 and 2007. He has been deeply involved with Afghanistan issues beyond that appointment. And I should also mention that Ambassador Newman's father was also a U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan. Ambassador Neumann held many other distinguished positions. I only mentioned one as deputy Secretary of state. So please over to you, Ron, on your thoughts, where the Taliban is in its own foreign policy and when the U.S. is in foreign policy toward Afghanistan.

**NEUMANN:** Vanda, thank you and thanks to Brookings for including me in this panel. And the really a level of discussion that one does not always get to in public battles. So, I appreciate that. Well, I'd like to start in reverse order in a sense, for one thing, because I think even though I'm completely out of government, I speak only for myself. I think I can talk about U.S. policy with somewhat more authority than I can about Taliban policy. And I think it's important to talk about this, first of all, by distinguishing between policy and strategy. This is getting very muddled in the public discussion. Simply because I think the US policy is actually quite clear. Strategy is nearly nonexistent. And there's a reason for that. Your policy is where you're trying to go. Strategy is how you get there.

So, the policy is actually pretty clear. Counterterrorism, first and foremost, given why we went to Afghanistan and then we try to prioritize everything. Stability, which involves an inclusive government because nobody believes the Taliban government can be or any government can really be stable in Afghanistan without being more inclusive. Some would translate that to mean democracy that may or may not be necessarily the way stability and inclusion works in Afghanistan. Certainly, a great focus on improving the lives of women generally, the provision of aid, humanitarian assistance and counter-narcotics. So those are all fine goals. And they're quite clear. The question is, how do you get there? Well, the US has almost no influence in Afghanistan anymore. It gave away all its policy tools when it decided to leave and leave the Taliban in charge.

And so, it has now a smattering of actions. Which go toward those goals, but none of which are going to be in the least bit adequate to achieving any of them. But that is not because there is a lack of a great idea out there to achieve permits or because of a lack of tools. So, it's also because Afghanistan is a political issue with the United States and you have the particular problem that. Policy tends to be fought in black and white, and Afghanistan is full of graves that make this very difficult. The two examples of that on aid. Diplomacy is not to help. Aid is delivered. Humanitarian assistance development is delivered through NGOs in the complex conditions of Afghanistan. It is not going to be possible to deliver aid through an extensive network of organizations and not have some degree of linkage. In the political context, if you say there is leakage, you are condemned. If you want no leakage, you can have no aid, which will leave a certain number of Afghans starving. But the nuance of that is very hard to sustain in a policy discussion.

You have the same kind of problem with several other issues, but you have you may have some degree of contact on counterterrorism. I don't know. It's not an issue which I could that's very highly classified. In any event, if you do, it's purely tactical and occasional. It's not strategic. You have a number of issues where the US has tried to use policy. There was a hope of some analysts that the desire of the Taliban for recognition and for greater assistance would lead them to allow us a measure of influence. It was an analytically sensible position to argue, which turned out to have the ability of being completely wrong. In fact, I would say. To my unhappiness that if you look internationally at the scene, the Taliban are there, resentful, are not being recognized, but they are gradually making progress. There are bachelor's but accredited Chinese, and the Chinese say they're not. The Russians have turned the embassy over to the Taliban.

The areas are now recognizing they're embarrassed. It respects creating trade relations. So, the overall movement of states is in the Taliban's favor, although at a crucial pace. The regional states have maintained a coherence with the United States and with the West, and that's part of the American policy of not recognizing the Taliban. But the coherence is based on different processes. The United States is absolutely not going to recognize the Taliban as long as women are being treated this way.



The regional states are generalized, much more concerned about implosion in Afghanistan, instability, terrorist movements and movement of populations and refugees. So, you have a superficial agreement on policy which does not fully represent a reality. There is in the Afghan diaspora a very strong residual demand that the U.S. somehow accomplish things which the U.S. cannot accomplish. I don't think it's going to change, and I don't think it's going to become any more realistic. Part of the. So, the challenge now for us is how does it maintain a certain level of aid without having that cut off? Can it do more to let the Afghan economy function without helping the Taliban directly? Because, frankly, if you don't have enough money to pay to feed Afghans, you are to let the economy function so that Afghans have jobs and can feed themselves.

That gets decades into banking restrictions. And then part of where we are now in policy is, I would say, a waiting game. We know of always we don't know a lot of them, but we know of a lot of fractures in the Taliban kind of things that to me was talking about detail. We know that the Amir is not going to live forever either because age and God will take him or somebody will help him out earlier. And we can assume that there will be. A contention for power. We have no idea at that point whether things will be better or worse. Could be worse, although that's getting harder. Could also be better. But when this kind of moment happens, when there is instability within that regime, disunity. That's a time we you need. United States needs to be able to maneuver and talk to parties. And that is the strongest reason why the United States should resist the view that it should break off all contact. Because and this is the issue, which is more and more discussed in several demonstrations in Washington, rather small lately with this.

But once you break off contact, it becomes politically extremely difficult to resurrect. And we've had that problem with Palestinians and others. So, you if you could maintain any level of content and raise it up, lower it down, handle it tactically, once you cut it off, you have to justify in the public political context resuming. And that becomes slow, difficult. And at a minimum, it will absolutely cripple you if you want to move quickly. So, it's important to maintain. As to the Taliban. They're doing you know, they're doing a fairly good job of continuing to assert that certain things are internal policies, that they are responsible government, that they are carrying out their roles, their obligations to the governments should recognize them and do more with them.

So publicly they protest a great deal against what is restricted. But at the same time, they're very slowly cutting away at the pressures on them. And I think in that sense, I don't know, but I would guess that they are probably not completely unhappy with where they. Stop there.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** Thank you very much, Ambassador Newman. This is great. I want to reiterate and give a little bit more detail to one point you made about humanitarian aid. If Western humanitarian aid, principally your money, the U.S. humanitarian aid is cut off. We're not talking about a few of dying. We are talking potentially about significant numbers. Over 90% of the population that's in poverty, at least 50% of the population depends on food aid. And to the extent that women are still getting some economic income, especially in families that are headed by women, this often the result of Western aid going in through NGOs, other delivery mechanisms. So, isolation comes with dramatic costs for the Afghan people and highly questionable effects, if any, on regime sustainability. Economic issues are one set of topics that I want to get in our conversation.

I want to start taking, however, the many questions that have come from the audience already. Thank you all or thank you very much to all of you who have submitted questions because I will attend. Some of them. I will be curating and picking among topics that we haven't covered. And let me stay on the US policy question and the 9/11 significance and go back to you, Tricia, for your reflections on. Over the horizon. Counterterrorism, a principal core axes of the Biden administration, was to extricate the United States from what they term endless wars to reorient U.S. Foreign policy away from the global war on terror, toward great power competition with China and Russia, and to an extraordinary degree. The Biden administration was successful in that project. Of course, it had to respond to issues such as Russia's egregious invasion of Ukraine. But even before the invasion, the whole orientation was not internal stability, not counterterrorism through local on the ground, U.S. involvement. But the radical foreign policy shift to Asia-Pacific to other issues. What are your views about the effectiveness of details of the over-the-horizon counterterrorism strategy?

**BACON:** Thank you for that question. I think that's a really important point. I think there's one aspect of it that we immediately have to sort of lay out there, which is that the threshold for action is much higher now than it was for many years after 9/11. The US has narrowed its perception in terms of

which groups it is willing to engage in direct action against and use the military tools that it has. So, there is all of this over the horizon capability. Approach to counterterrorism, but there's a real narrowing of when the US is seeing it as necessary to use that capability. There is them and over.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** The horizon means essentially airstrikes and missile strikes and drone strikes against particular targets.

**BACON:** Yeah, it primarily does essentially direct action from outside of the theater. You know, in Afghanistan this would be from a golf or from the sea or potentially from neighboring countries to use direct action such as air primarily airstrikes. Yes, absolutely. And, of course, it was used once in Afghanistan to kill Ayman al-Zawahiri in 2022. So, there are certainly targets that still merit that kind of action. But again, the threshold appears to be quite high to actually undertake that kind of action. At the same time, the U.S. clearly does also have some capability to monitor the situation in Afghanistan, as evidenced by the warnings the U.S. gave to both Iran and Russia of pending escape attacks. So, there is still that kind of counterterrorism cooperation that the U.S. is capable of, which is distinct from the over the horizon approach.

So, what I would say is the US is pretty constrained in its use of over the horizon capability, but it is still trying to engage in other forms of counterterrorism cooperation to mitigate threats coming from Afghanistan. The problem being, as I mentioned, that the international environment is much more problematic in terms of that kind of counterterrorism cooperation because of the strategic competition piece, the war in Ukraine and other more pressing issues and a lot of these relationships.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** And I would add here that Russian intelligence services and the Kremlin completely ignored U.S. warning about the croque the crocus attack. Tommy, please, let me go to you now. We have gotten quite a few questions about the treatment of ethnic minorities by the Taliban. You mentioned and Uzbek Taliban commander resigning just recently. Of course, the big breakthrough by the Taliban during the leadership of Mullah Mansour was that the Taliban expanded the tent beyond Pashtun act. That is an active and very effectively recruited, was by Tajik, Hazara, other dissatisfied militia actors in Afghanistan into the Taliban.

Where are we in the Pashtun domination versus ethnic inclusion in Afghanistan today? And how does the comparative ethnic minorities today compared to the 1990s?

**ASAY:** Well, the mastermind of Taliban's outreach to minorities or to northerners and central provinces was the second emir of the Taliban who was drawn in Pakistan. He was a pragmatist, Mullah Mansour. He was a businessman. He was a truly a guy who was quite a pragmatist when it comes to that. He's not there. We have a current Amir over who has who has built an Orwellian state. He's the big brother. And then there are ministries of truth and ministries of good and ministries of evil in all these different ministries that he has put. And then he has got a police state, a police operative in the form of GDI. Who is in charge of implementing his ideologies. And you have an Orwellian state in charge of a Kafkaesque population.

And in that Kafkaesque population who don't know why they're being treated this way and why they're being, you know, put in these all sorts of problems. Is the question of minorities. Now, if we look at the treatment of Taliban commanders who gave so much sacrifice to ensure that the emirate becomes what it is right now from Hazaras, from Uzbeks, from Tajiks, you will see that culture has a very different approach than Mullah Omar and so on. His approach is this way. I am the ideological and demigod who is in charge of implementing Sharia. And minorities here have a symbolic role. The power is concentrated. If you look at Taliban's, cabinet level appointments, governor, and then also core commander appointments, police chief appointments, 70% of these people are on the orders from local, not from great.

And then within that, if you look at it, based on the research that we did, more than 50% of them come from one particular tribe, that Maldives, Maldives do not have a history of ruling Afghanistan. It has been poor place and the burden. We have had a history of ruling Afghanistan. And the message that high dollar has been pushing is it's not only the pressure. It's not only the minorities, but even within the customers. He has segmented different Pashtuns, like the eastern Pashtuns or like the third tier Pashtuns. And then you have the provinces around Kandahar, which are Helmand, Farah, and those provinces of the second tier Pashtuns.

And then you have the resides within Kandahar who was in charge and they that so a Tajik commanders, Uzbek commanders today, actually one of them is allowed in are you will be resigned A prominent Uzbek commander. They have killed, if you remember at the beginning of the initial first six months of the emirate, there was a Hazara, a prominent Hazara commander, who rebelled because he did not agree with some of the policies. He was he was arrested at the beginning and then he was shot to be made as an example to other Hazara commanders.

So, minorities in Afghanistan have two choices, basically, both if there are Taliban within Taliban ranks or outside. Obedience. Or pay the price and have a symbolic role because they believe, especially the Kandahari Taliban, that they have been at the receiving end of a lot of the war that has been happening in the last 20 years. They have given so much sacrifice. Now, is there time for them to be rewarded for their sacrifices and the Tajiks, and that was bags and the Hazaras did not play a major role in the resurrection of the emirate. So, they should have the probably the most prominent Tajik or minority person in the Taliban's Emirate party facility in the chief of army staff. You don't find anybody about that. There is only symbolic, the creative type of roads.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** So, one dimension is the extent to which ethnic minorities are included in the Taliban, the ruling structures. And you have in fact spoken about the Pashtun-ization and just bastardization, really very narrow, tribal based leadership appointment taking place and the departure of ethnic minority, the departure or reshuffling of the Taliban ethnic minority commanders. The other dimension, of course, is that the Taliban has not accepted many of the powerbrokers, ethnic powerbrokers of the republic powerbrokers into this leadership structure. So that inclusion has not taken part of, and the Taliban have been deeply opposed to that idea. What about violence and kind of outright physical brutality against ethnic minorities? So, the 1990s, of course, were notorious for massacres of Shia Hazara people. What does it look like today in that aspect?

**ASAY:** So, if you compare the brutalities towards court or let's say Emirate policies, Emirate 1.0 in the 1990s versus Humira 2.0 in the current, the current that's in charge. Yes. One of the hallmarks of America 1.0 was the Shomali Plains massacre was the colon massacre of the family claims was. The copies are Parwana Provinces, where Massoud was fighting.

There was a retribution attack by the Taliban, where they even burnt the trees and let the law and took a lot of the women with them. And this is documented by the UN, which is there up on the websites they are calling a massacre that happened in Nigeria and central provinces against Hazaras. But right now, what is happening? The current policy of the AMA towards the minorities. It's not as bad as the 1990s, but it's more systematic and more legalized in a way in terms of discriminatory approaches, whether it's systematic targeting of former India staff officers and soldiers who are Tajiks or Uzbeks or Hazaras, if they were particularly in the commando and special forces, whether it's in terms of imposing certain limitations and the way they could celebrate, for example, or Shura, the, you know, the commemoration of what this animal was saying, you know, this whether it is how they could whether they could publicly preach their religion, that's all.

They've also confined them. If you look at the Emirates book, which is which is actually written by the current Supreme Court chief justice with a foreword by a Butler. And there are two things which is completely spelled out, that the religion of the emirate is Hanafi. So, all religious minorities need to either submerge or be or do their practices not publicly. And then the second thing is that whatever it is written in that book, that whatever commemorations or practices they do, it should be subject to the permissions and approvals of their. So, whether it's in terms of ideology, whether in terms of their practices, whether it's whether it's their celebrations, they need permissions and they need all sorts of restrictions and limitations are imposed on them. So, us to portray a society which is completely Hanafi. As well as completely defined within the and the holy Pashtun vision of hypothermia.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** Thank you. Excellent remarks and details. Orzala, let me turn to you. We received a set of questions about how to support life of ordinary Afghans, of course, including women and girls. And Ambassador Neumann had already spoken about some of the humanitarian aid being crucial, being distributed. What are the other mechanisms Afghan people or the international community is trying to go around the restrictions such as education over Internet, other dimensions of what is being done or what, in your view can be done?

**NEMAT:** Thank you. When it comes to what can be done, there is a lot that can be done and should be something that we should all commit to. One. The whole idea of continuation of humanitarian

assistance is critical because of a massive food insecurity and Afghanistan also being challenged by different climate aspects of crises such as, you know, drought in some places or unexpected floods and rains and landslides and earthquakes and so on. So the emergency in as well as different humanitarian actions is a must to be continued, but under very strict scrutiny that, as the Ambassador Newman mentioned, is leakages is not, you know, to an extent that everything ends in the hands of a minority, whether this is the Taliban authorities or the then the intermediary actors framed as, you know, community interlocutors and so forth.

So, the more accountability and transparency to humanitarian projects, the better and more effective. When it comes to education, I must say that two years on, from the systematic ban against girls education, there is no kind of online Internet-based or underground education that can replace that can address the dire need of formal education for Afghan girls. As I mentioned, there are workarounds because an absolute majority of people that I work with on a daily basis and people that we know through our years of working across Afghanistan, absolute majority of people, traditional, nontraditional, more conservative, less conservative, they don't accept this ban on education. They don't even know what is coming from. Because the leader, nobody knows who he is, what is his family background and where he comes from? Because even from Kandahar, people disagree with this. Said what this said, what Gates got the station.

So, because nobody accepted male and female are not satisfied or convinced that this is an Islamic decision, they know that there is some level of politics involved in this whole ban. There has been efforts to sort of like create some sort of a space to allow girls to go and use educational facilities. Unfortunately, it becomes a bit class based because those who can afford, for example, to pay for private courses, they can attend some of the private courses in certain provinces. But public universities, public education above the grade of six is still banned and it's problematic. So, on this particular front, while online and alternative educational initiatives needs to be supported systematically in more in a with a focus on quality, because now anyone is randomly just into this business of online education without attention to quality.

I think it's critical to also keep the push harder and harder in ways and in areas and platforms where it is possible to ensure that there is some level of, you know, flexibility from the Taliban side to allow its in particular on critical, crucial matters like the medical university. Yes, they are allowing midwifery, and I know that there are nurses going in attending in certain fields like nursing, dentistry, physiotherapy, midwife. These kind of trainings are allowed and permissible. But medical is critical and summed up to some well-respected doctors are coming up front and sharing their daily now like this is about the consequences of the years of war where we don't have enough female doctors and they say look if today we are facing with this situation to treat a woman who is very like modest and doesn't want a man to treat them, but they have no choice because there is no doctor to treat them with a woman. So, imagine a few years on when we faced with the consequences of these bans, what will happen? Another very important thing that is very individualistic.

We have a lot of active social media commentators and critiques of this and that in the other Afghans and Afghans. And through this platform, I call on all of them that they have to just to stop this accountability from themselves and just pick and choose through their own trusted networks, individual girls, and support their education. I think I will also not miss to call on, you know, the Fulbright and Chevening scholarships and any other government scholarships to dedicate instead of like completely neglecting Afghanistan from their list to dedicate their scholarships to girls only. We have extremely talented, you know, treasures. I didn't hit the country I work on daily basis with girls to help them to at least find some scholarships somewhere.

And unfortunately, in a lot of cases, what we have experienced so far is more talks and more public statements and less action. There are, of course, positive stories. 19 girls made it to Scotland with the, you know, continuing their medical studies. I think that's an excellent example that I wish many foundations, trusts and governments particularly and look into this, because if Afghanistan remains in the place that the Taliban are trying to headed towards, then the danger and the risks that are coming and emanating from there will face the whole world the same way that 911 was an indication of that. So, we have to join our hands together to sort of like look into solutions and following the existing opportunities that exist.



**FELBAB-BROWN:** Thank you very much for those details. Just one very quick follow up. So, one of the questions that we got in different guys, this is asking whether there is any evidence to the fact that Taliban leaders are sending their daughters to education in places like Qatar in the Middle East. Your quick reaction to that.

**NEMAT:** I mean, my immediate reaction is that, again, I go, according to public sources, the spokesperson of Taliban in Qatar, his daughters went to school in New York where he was based. So maybe my New Yorker friends or listeners to this can bring further evidence to this Taliban. Some of the Taliban leaders who actually have I mean, very few of the top leaders obviously have their families back to Kabul. But those whose families are back to Kabul, they send to women only universities, their girls, they used to send them, and they try to find ways so they cannot even convince their own female members of their families. But these are the kind of Taliban that will not sit with you and say that, yes, this is Islamic, this man is Islamic. They are on your side. They say it's un-Islamic, but what can we do?

We have to be obedient to our leader. But why this leader is doing this? That's why I'm saying this is not acceptable. The only thing that explain this ban is much more a type of an agenda that goes beyond Afghanistan to keep this territory, this geography in darkness, and make it available to use for all kind of activities that nobody can question. That is the only explanation that we sort of like come to conclusion to have. Other than that, it's nothing to do with Islam. It's nothing to do with culture, has nothing to do with the society. We all know how much desire is there from liberals to Badakhshan and from even very conservative, sort of like Pashtun areas in the east, almost all the way to, you know, like Nangarhar in Laghman, in Kunar, how they accept all kind of traditional conservative sort of like mindset to send their girls to hostels within the provinces like Nangarhar, hostile until the day of then, was full of girls from eastern regions coming in, attending universities from Kunar, from Nuristan, from Laghman.

So, because they believe in education and it's the same with Kandahar. Fathers travel from different districts to Kandahar City, really renting a house like a room or a flat where they can ensure that their daughter can go and get education. I mean, these are like firsthand experiences we have. So, the

society is absolutely fine with girls getting education to a higher level is just the mindset of a very tiny minority within the Taliban that even the Taliban themselves don't agree with it. And that's why there has to be like the pressure points has to be so like pushing to those particular elements to see a result.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** Thank you Orzala. Tricia, I want to come back to you in the sake about Pakistan. But Ron, you know, Arsalan made this very powerful plea. The international community has to commit itself to continuing humanitarian aid in practice. Most of the aid has been coming from the U.S. and the overwhelming majority from the United States. But of course, it's a different world that is still starvation in parts of Ethiopia. Somalia is going through starvation, the worst humanitarian crisis in the Democratic Republic in Congo and the most violence in many years. There's a lot of pressure on aid, not to mention Ukraine. Your thoughts on how to ensure that Afghanistan doesn't fall off the screen. I should also mention Haiti, but a more than half of the population is starving.

**NEUMANN:** Thank you, Vanda. Well, public pressure is extraordinarily important, but I think you need to start from the recognition that aid in Afghan to Afghanistan is likely to continue to decline. I don't think it's going to go away entirely. But the combination of budget pressures overall, the number of issues you raised, I think this is the likely political direction. I don't like it. I'm opposed to it. But I think that's where it's going to go. This has to probably have several different. Issues that it raises. One is there needs to be a redoubled effort to figure out how to let the Afghan economy function better without necessarily strengthening the Taliban government, for instance. There are legal transfers of money that are not being made because U.S. banks are petrified that they will find themselves in the crosshairs of government regulations and sanctions. So, U.S. banks are more imposing more sanctions than U.S. policy imposes.

That's a huge impediment for Afghan business. Secondly, I totally agree with Dr. Nima that online education is not a substitute for girls being back in school. But in the absence of girls being back in school, it is enormously important to support the online education efforts that are going on. Now there's a wide variety of them and they probably are of different qualities. I think some of them are very high quality. Others may be more questionable. There is a large problem overall, the donor

support for that education is falling away. It was strong in the beginning when Afghanistan was in line after the withdrawal. And as Ukraine has come up, particularly in issues pulling away donor support. And so, university programs that are launched for in house in country online education are struggling for money. So many others. So, people on the call who have friends know friends or have the ability to contribute to these causes really need to think about it if they care about these things because they may not be perfect.

But I tell you, I've been to calls with some of these girls who are doing online programs who've never been out of the country. Their level of English is fantastic. The optimism that they still retain is amazing. Their sense that this online education has kept open the door, no matter how small, a crack that keeps them from despair. These are really powerful things and donors are losing sight of it. You know, donors are a little bit like little kids playing soccer. They tend to all run after the same ball.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** I'm very glad that you mentioned the psychological aspect and then the psychological boost of the online classes, which of course one element of it is the actual learning. But the other element is just engagement outside of the family. That has become so difficult for many Afghan women and girls. Tricia, I want to come to you to Pakistan. You know, very diplomatic manner handled the issue of Pakistan. And I will be more explicit. But there are people who believe that Pakistan is getting is just come up once with TTP attacks after four decades supporting the Taliban intelligence weapons materiel, supporting some of the most vicious branches of the Taliban, like the Haqqani's.

But Pakistan has been very frustrated, has not been able to have not been able to direct the Taliban leadership in the way it assumed it would be directing the Taliban leadership. And this pulled out cards like sending a bag of gunmen, a fungus, only to find out that those cards don't work and in fact, halted sending back Afghan refugees, not because it's a brutal policy, but because it was not yielding any results of restart till lately and became concerned it would run out of refugees and killed yet another pressure tool. What are your thoughts about Pakistan's counterterrorism policies and do the rumors of the kind of ideas being floated about that if Pakistan does not start seeing more

responsiveness from the Taliban towards its interests, it might start engaging, supporting, cultivating, escape?

**BACON:** So, I think from a historical perspective, we know that when Pakistan has an Afghan client that is not producing results or is not compliant, they start to look for others. You know, the Taliban is a product of that approach. I think the problem for Pakistan right now is that there isn't really an alternative that it can support. I don't think that Pakistan has often have a dual track approach of supporting some militant groups while countering others. I escape, on the other hand, with supporting ICP would take that to a particularly illogical level given that escapees agenda in Pakistan is as robust as it is in other places, is conducted massive attacks there. And also, I escape is not a viable client. It is not a manageable client. It is not an organization that is willing to be a proxy for a government that is, in fact, its main brand in the region.

So, I think it's unlikely that that would be a fruitful way for Pakistan to go forward and would be a particularly pernicious effort if it were to do so and, in fact, really sort of counterproductive for its own interests. Having said that, I don't see a viable alternative to the Taliban at this point for the Pakistani government. It may try to cultivate certain factions of the Taliban more closely, particularly the Haqqani is a long-lasting client. But the Haqqani's are among those that have worked extensively with the Pakistani Taliban. So, I think that there is a particularly intractable situation where Pakistan is finding it doesn't really have the carrots or the sticks. It needs to change the Taliban's policy towards the Pakistani branch of the Taliban. So, I think that we're likely to see increasing violence in Pakistan by the Pakistani Taliban, coupled with, of course, growth in attacks in Baluchistan and the insurgency there, which both have the combination, could have a real destabilizing effect on Pakistan.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** And I would also add, of course, the stabilizing effect on the China-Pakistan relationship with Pakistan, long promising to China that it can continue its policy of dividing militant groups between the good ones that serve it's on the India interests and the bad ones, and managing them effectively not to impinge on Chinese security and economic interests. But Pakistan has been struggling with that, given the activities of CPP and actors coming in.

We are almost at the end, but I would be very negligent if we did not at all touch on a subject that deserves its own webinar, and that's the Afghan economy. This, of course is critical for the lives of Afghan people. We spoke about 90 plus percent of people being in poverty and having seen a far greater and more onerous levels of poverty than was the case on the Afghan Republic. The economy is, of course, crucial element of the sustainability of any regime and the government piece. In the remaining three minutes before I move toward closing the webinar and thanking everyone. Give us your thoughts on the economic development situation in Afghanistan and how they affect the regime's stability. Tammy. You do? We still have you. I think you better think.

**ASAY:** I'll make the best out of my Economic studies of Columbia University in three minutes. Sum it up for you. So, the emirate is trying to build what they say is an Islamic economy. The budget is with them yet It's a black hole. Nobody knows. He has completely monopolized the budget and he literally now hands over kind of works and handouts and there is no transparency in the budget. It's around two plus billion dollars of budget that they are using through recurrent revenues. But to Taliban's credit, Taliban is the only it's the only Afghan government which or Afghan entity that that is now in charge of Afghanistan that is not reliant on foreign aid and directly in terms of monetary policy.

They have maintained the stability of the Afghan currency, but that's on the back of that \$40 million that goes for foreign aid as a part of, you know, pumping into the economy for foreign aid organizations in Afghanistan. So, in terms of that, there are various different statistics. If you look in the recent World Bank report, there are certain it's an autocratic economy where they are dependent, they are trying to build a self-sufficient economy. They have this fascination, infatuation, almost too big media projects like any authoritarian bank regime, they started it pushed deeper. It didn't go anywhere because of environmental issues and because of also other projects. Today they went to for the third or fourth time to inaugurate Happy That Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and their pipeline.

So, they have the hallmarks of their economic policy is a very dark, kind of unaccountable budget held by the Amir. And the higher the monetary policy semi-successful in managing, you know, the foreign currency and the Afghan economy's value. And they have one currency's value, the Afghani. But that

is highly dependent on the money that's being pumped in on dollars to maintain the stability. But it is a closed economy. And like all Islamic groups, whether it's Muslim Brotherhood or others, if you look at it, they're good at finding. But there they have they're struggling to figure out with governance and the economy; it would be also a mess if I don't and if I don't contribute to Dr. Mehmet said. Discussion or the question that was addressed to Dr. Mehmet from one of your audiences in terms of the daughters of the Taliban leaders studying abroad, I would contribute that the deputy foreign minister by stating that his daughters study in the UAE, in Dubai, as we as we speak, Deputy Prime Minister of for Political Affairs, Molly Kibir's daughters study and quit in Rawalpindi. And if a mother, his daughters actually studied in Quetta, I can go on and on. But I think I would stop at those three examples of the double policy that the Emirate has when it comes to the rest of the population versus the leaders, sons and daughters education. Thank.

**FELBAB-BROWN:** Well, thank you so much Tamin Asay for your absolutely insightful remarks throughout our conversation, I'm delighted that you could join us. Equal thanks to Dr. Orzala Nemat for her but impressed in and still very on the ground engaged information and insights that she shared with us and her work on Afghanistan. Ambassador Neumann is also one of exemplary US policymakers really dedicated to following closely Afghanistan and supporting Afghanistan over many decades. Thank you for joining us today and your insights. And finally, enormous thanks also to Professor Tricia Bacon for contributing her extraordinary knowledge and nuance of terrorist issues around the world. And specifically, today, in our conversation on Afghanistan and Pakistan. All of our speakers are frequent writers, often commenting in the public domain. And those of you who are interested in terrorism in Afghanistan, in U.S. policy, I highly recommend following their work closely. Thank you very much to our audiences for joining us today. I am grateful that you are watching the programing of the initiative of non-state actors and of the Africa Security Initiative that I directed. We will have many more programs coming across the fall of different parts of the regions and different issues. Thank you and goodbye for now.