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AFGHANISTAN POLICY AT THE CROSSROADS

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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CONTENTS

Page

WITNESSES

Mr. Steve Coll, President, New America Foundation 11
J. Alexander Thier, J.D., Director for Afghanistan and Pakistan, United States Institute of Peace 24
Frederick W. Kagan, Ph.D., Resident Scholar, American Enterprise Institute . 36

LETTERS, STATEMENTS, ETC., SUBMITTED FOR THE HEARING

Mr. Steve Coll: Prepared statement 14
J. Alexander Thier, J.D.: Prepared statement 27
Frederick W. Kagan, Ph.D.: Prepared statement 42

APPENDIX

Hearing notice 72
Hearing minutes 73
The Honorable Howard L. Berman, a Representative in Congress from the State of California, and Chairman, Committee on Foreign Affairs: Prepared statement 75
The Honorable Gene Green, a Representative in Congress from the State of Texas: Prepared statement 77
The Honorable Dan Burton, a Representative in Congress from the State of Indiana: Prepared statement 78
The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly, a Representative in Congress from the State of Virginia: Prepared statement 83
Written responses from J. Alexander Thier, J.D., to questions submitted for the record by the Honorable Barbara Lee, a Representative in Congress from the State of California 85

AFGHANISTAN POLICY AT THE CROSSROADS

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 15, 2009

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 10:07 a.m., in room 2172, Rayburn House Office Building, Hon. Howard L. Berman (chairman of the committee) presiding.

Chairman BERMAN. The committee will come to order.

We welcome our witnesses, and I will give an opening statement, the ranking member will be recognized for an opening statement, as will the chair and the ranking member on the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia. Then members who are here at the time that Ileana and I finish our opening statements, who wish to make a statement, have 1 minute for opening statements. Just let the staff know and we will include all of those people and then we will go to our testimony.

I now yield myself time for an opening statement.

When the United States-led intervention in Afghanistan began 8 years ago, there was near unanimity in Congress and among the American people that this use of military force was fully justified. Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda lieutenants, the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, were operating in Afghanistan as the so-called "guests" of the ruling Taliban; we and our international partners went in to shut them down.

Within months, the Taliban were driven from power, and most members of al-Qaeda had been killed, captured or escaped across the border into Pakistan.

In the weeks and months following the intervention, there was considerable optimism that Afghanistan, after decades of exhausting and destructive war, might be ready for a fresh start. But over time, as our Nation's attention turned elsewhere, it seemed that our strategy there became to simply "muddle through."

With a substantial drawdown of our troops in Iraq on the horizon, and a worsening security situation in Afghanistan, that conflict has once again become front and center. However, in stark contrast to the days following 9/11, there is no consensus today on how the U.S. should address the challenges we face there. The purpose of this hearing is to help us consider the potential consequences of the various options that are now on the table.

In March of this year, the Obama administration unveiled a new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. The strategy centers on the need to disrupt and defeat al-Qaeda and prevent its return to Afghanistan. It also recognizes that, to quote President Obama, "the

future of Afghanistan is inextricably linked to the future of its neighbor, Pakistan." The $7.5 billion assistance bill for Pakistan that Congress just passed will help strengthen Pakistan's capability to combat terrorists who threaten its security.

Now, while keeping one eye on Pakistan, we must settle on the right approach for Afghanistan. That decision will be made against the backdrop of increasing violence in Afghanistan. American and coalition casualties are rising, Taliban tactics are becoming more sophisticated, and extremists are controlling an expanding swath of territory.

To make matters worse, the legitimacy of the current Afghan central government has been called into question following allegations of massive fraud in recent elections. This will inevitably make our job harder—and the Taliban's job easier—no matter what course we take.

Much of the debate right now centers on General Stanley McChrystal's reported request for a "surge" of approximately 40,000 additional American troops.

In his August 30 assessment, which reflects the input of one of our witnesses, Dr. Kagan, and other experts, General McChrystal makes a persuasive case that we should implement a "comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign," much like we did in Iraq, in which protecting the Afghan population is the highest priority.

Other key elements of the General's strategy include greater partnering with the Afghan security forces to improve their effectiveness, helping the Afghan Government become more accountable at all levels, and improving the command structure for coalition forces.

This proposed approach raises a number of important questions. First, does Afghanistan, which has a more dispersed and diverse population than Iraq, not to mention much more rugged terrain, lend itself to this sort of counterinsurgency campaign? Can such a strategy succeed without significant elements of the insurgency coming over to our side, as they did in Iraq? If not, what are the prospects for persuading the Taliban rank and file to lay down their arms? Does it make sense to place a significant number of additional troops in harm's way in an effort to prevent al-Qaeda from coming back to Afghanistan when the terrorist group already has a sanctuary in neighboring Pakistan, and an increasing presence in Yemen and Somalia? In the absence of a troop "surge," is there an alternative counterterrorism strategy involving some combination of drone strikes and special forces that could be employed to achieve the same goals?

Finally, what are the implications for Pakistan if we do not support the McChrystal proposal? Would Afghanistan's neighbor consider themselves better off?

To answer these and other important questions, we are fortunate to have a very distinguished panel here with us today, which I will introduce shortly. But before I do, let me turn to the ranking member, the gentlelady from Florida, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, for any opening remarks she might have.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. And certainly the issue being addressed in this hearing is an important one.

We have an impressive group of witnesses to share their expertise and recommendations on how to address the threats to United States security posed by al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. I had hoped, however, that administration officials would have finally made themselves available to testify on the implementation of our strategy in Afghanistan.

I would like to reiterate pending request for a full committee hearing, as soon as possible, with senior administration officials. Given the gravity of the situation in Afghanistan, it would be our preference that the Department of Defense and the Department of State make both General McChrystal and Ambassador Eikenberry available to testify before our committee, so that our chief diplomat in Afghanistan and our commander in the field can provide a complete account and description of the resources, programming and management of United States assistance to activities in Afghanistan.

As the President stated in his March speech on Afghanistan and Pakistan, the objectives of American policy in Afghanistan are clear. We want to create an Afghanistan from which al-Qaeda, the Taliban and their allies have been disrupted and destroyed.

He then outlined a civilian military counterinsurgency campaign to defeat al-Qaeda and Taliban in Afghanistan, including the emergence of a democratic government in Afghanistan that is able to secure itself from internal threats like the Taliban or the return of al-Qaeda. And it should have the support of the people, earned through the provision of a reasonable level of government services and reduced corruption, and be determined to never again provide a safe-haven for a militant extremist.

Such an effort requires effective planning, and this is especially true of resources. To prevail against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan, the administration must fully implement the strategy without any further delays. It has been 76 days since General McChrystal submitted his review to the administration requesting additional resources, and the clock continues to tick.

Delay endangers American lives, and I say this not just as a Member of Congress, but as a mother whose daughter-in-law proudly served as a Marine officer in Afghanistan. Delay allows the threat against our security interests to grow. As Bruce Riddell, who coordinated the administration's first Afghanistan-Pakistan policy review earlier this year, stated in a recent interview with the Council on Foreign Relations, and I quote, "At some point there is a cost to delay," and that cost comes in how our partners and how our enemies respond. Our NATO partners are already a bit squeamish.

I am also concerned, Mr. Chairman, about efforts to minimize the threat from the Taliban and the confusion over whether the United States should pursue an exclusively counterinsurgency or counterterrorism strategy. On the latter, Mr. Riddell—again, the individual hand-picked by the President to conduct its first interagency review of Afghan policy—also dismisses as a fairy tale and a prescription for disaster the notion that the Taliban could be separated from al-Qaeda or that al-Qaeda could be eliminated simply by bombing its leaders in Pakistan. Thus, a shift to a predominantly counterterrorism campaign using air strikes and the like is

clearly insufficient to beat back the threat to America's interests that the Taliban and al-Qaeda present.

We should not be short-sighted and consider U.S. strategy in terms of either an exclusively counterinsurgency or counterterrorism strategy. Often, counterinsurgency is not at odds with but complementary to ongoing counterterrorism operations.

In this respect, I would appreciate our witnesses' consideration of the following questions: Has the mission in Afghanistan been clearly articulated in terms of our strategic objective, our supportive objective? How are these being translated into programs?

How would you define the resource constraints that the United States is encountering in Afghanistan, and what are your recommendations for prioritizing both U.S. and international resources?

And finally, the Afghan elections have become a serious problem, but they are only a symptom of a far more serious disease. What are your recommendations for assisting the Afghans in improving both the quality of government and countering the corruption that has become endemic?

What are your recommendations for addressing the lack of unity of effort in NATO ISAF?

Additionally, what are your recommendations for matching the resources a given country can bring to the task to its political willingness to fight?

And finally, what are your recommendations for integrating the strategy for Afghanistan into a broader strategy to deal with the threat posed by global jihadist networks and provide for regional security and stability?

United States personnel in the field in Afghanistan must be given the resources they need to defeat our enemies. American lives, not just policies, are at stake.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman BERMAN. Thank you, Ms. Ros-Lehtinen.

And now I am pleased to recognize the chairman of the Middle East and South Asia Subcommittee, the gentleman from New York, Mr. Ackerman, for 3 minutes.

Mr. ACKERMAN. Thank you.

With apologies to Winston Churchill, I describe our position in Afghanistan as a mess in the middle of a muddle, mired in a morass. We can't walk away and we can't stay.

As has every Member of Congress who has been to Afghanistan, I have heard for the past 8 years that we have been making progress. So obviously now is the time for a new beginning and a fresh start.

The Taliban and al-Qaeda and Pakistan terrorist groups all acknowledge their cooperation and common alignment under the same radical and violent vision of Islam. But here in Washington, fine distinctions are offered as a basis for policymaking.

Our nation-building efforts have succeeded in creating an Afghan Government capable of stealing an election, but utterly unable to provide actual government services. We have paid $18 billion to create Afghan security forces that can't operate independently and whose annual costs approach that of Afghanistan's GDP. We have

helped create an Afghan national police force that is best known among Afghans for the crimes it commits.

And the failures on the U.S. side are even more egregious. There is reconstruction spending that has rebuilt nothing except a large ex-pat community in Kabul. There is pass-the-contract skimming by Beltway bandits who each simply take their cut, taxpayer money, before sub-, sub-, sub-, sub-, subcontracting out the work. There are oversized U.S. contracts so poorly designed that simply dropping cash out of a cargo plane would actually have been more efficient.

There was a 7-year effort to get Afghan farmers to just say "no" to drugs and "yes" to starvation. Amazing, that didn't work. This U.N. mission that doesn't actually appear to have any mission at all, and the list of failures could go on and on.

Although none of this is the fault of the current administration, all of it is now their problem to fix. And talk about fixing Afghanistan is really talking about two questions: How can it be fixed and are we capable of doing it?

So far there has been an enormous amount of attention and ink and airtime devoted to the singular and, frankly, secondary question of troop numbers. But it is far from clear, at least to me, that our problems in Afghanistan are primarily military. I have not heard any of the "how" on the political side, on the governance side, on the reconstruction side, on the economic side or on the international side.

I think I have seen this movie before. But I am waiting to see how we are going to change the ending.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman BERMAN. Thank you.

I have a list of five members who wish to make 1-minute statements. If anyone wants to be added, speak now; otherwise, we will cut it off. They are Sherman, Sires, Rohrabacher, Paul and Bilirakis.

Green, Lee, Klein. Okay.

The gentleman from California, Mr. Sherman, is recognized for 1 minute.

Mr. SHERMAN. We have to determine whether we are going to play defense or offense, whether we are going to try to meet our minimum national security objectives or whether we are seeking a democratic and prosperous Afghanistan. We should focus on the latter only if we have a strategy likely to succeed at a reasonable incremental cost.

First, we need to define our minimum national security objectives which should be two: Denying al-Qaeda facilities and safe-haven, which are not available to them elsewhere. But keep in mind, 9/11 was plotted, in part, in an apartment building in Hamburg. You are not going to be able to deprive al-Qaeda of a conference room; you can deny them a huge military facility out in the open, a training facility.

Second, we need to prevent the use of Afghan territory to destabilize Pakistan. In order to meet our minimal national security objectives, we may have to do less and do it longer. And that will be culturally difficult for the United States, but sometimes defending America means playing defense.

I yield back.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired.

The gentleman from—another gentleman from California, Mr. Rohrabacher.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

We are looking at a proposal to send between 10,000 and 40,000 new combat troops, American combat troops, into Afghanistan, and by definition, that means more Americans involved in doing the fighting. That is a strategy that will not work and will not change the situation in Afghanistan.

In Afghanistan there are plenty of people who are willing to do their own fighting, and until we get to them and get them on our side, we will lose in the end.

The Taliban was routed originally—when they were originally routed after 9/11, there were only 200 American troops on the ground. The Afghans are certainly willing to fight; they know how to do it.

Sending more U.S. combat troops will actually be counterproductive in many ways. What we need to do is make sure that we reach out to the Afghan people at a village level and spend a minuscule amount of the $31 billion that is being suggested in reaching out and trying to help them, rather than trying to send more U.S. troops to alienate them.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired.

The gentleman from New Jersey, Mr. Sires, is recognized for 1 minute.

Mr. SIRES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding today's hearing on such an important and pressing issue.

The eighth anniversary of the war in Afghanistan has come and gone. Thousands of our troops are still risking their lives each day in this country, yet a comprehensive plan for the future of this battle has not yet been written.

There are many complicated questions surrounding the debate over Afghanistan. How should the United States cooperate with a government after a fraudulent election? How can the United States execute a multinational mission when some international partners and U.S. citizens may be losing interest?

We must also work to better define how we will assess our actions in Afghanistan. How do we measure success in the country? How do we define failure? How will failure affect the future of the region and our safety at home?

We must pursue a plan that supports the creation of a secure and stable Afghanistan, a plan that looks beyond the current political failings and works toward a strong, democratic future. Only with a successful Afghanistan can our enemies by truly defeated.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired.

The gentleman from Texas, Mr. Paul, is recognized.

Mr. PAUL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

In the last month, we have had a pretense of having a debate about Afghanistan, but unfortunately, it is not much of a debate. We are deciding whether or not to send 40,000 or 80,000 troops over to Afghanistan. We can't even decide where the front lines are.

But the worst part of this is this is just déjà vu again, all about going to war needlessly. The same arguments we used in going into war against Iraq; that is, weapons of mass destruction and al-Qaeda, scare the people, it is in our national defense—it is in our national security interest to go there. And we continue.

The Taliban never did a thing to us. The Taliban—we were paying them money up until May 2001. They—they are not capable; even if they wanted to, they are not capable of touching us.

So we are over there pursuing a war, spreading the war, going into Pakistan. The American people don't want it. We are out of money. We can't afford medical education here, and we are demanding that we send 80,000, 40,000 troops to Afghanistan and expand the war.

It is time to end the whole mess.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired.

The gentleman from Texas, Mr. Green, is recognized.

Mr. GREEN. Mr. Chairman, I would like unanimous consent to place my full statement into the record.

Chairman BERMAN. Without objection, it will be included.

Mr. GREEN. Like my colleagues, I hope the President will make a decision soon to clarify our long-term goals. The security situation in Afghanistan is deteriorating. We have flawed election results. But unlike my colleague and neighbor from Texas, maybe it wasn't the Taliban that came on 2001, but they sure provided shelter for al-Qaeda. And we have created a number of enemies of our country there now.

So I think we need to do both. We need look at our troop levels, but we also need to build up the Afghan institutions so they can fight and protect their own country.

And with that, Mr. Chairman, I appreciate the time.

Chairman BERMAN. Thank you. The time of the gentleman is yielded back.

And the gentleman from Florida, Mr. Bilirakis, is recognized.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Ros-Lehtinen, thank you so much for calling this important hearing. And thank you to the witnesses for appearing and providing testimony.

As more American soldiers are facing greater perils and dying in higher numbers, I believe that the administration should be providing much-needed information about where we are and where we are going in Afghanistan. This uncertainty is very disconcerting. Our policy should be articulated clearly.

In August, I traveled to Afghanistan and had the honor of meeting with General McChrystal. He shared with me important information about our progress in fighting the Taliban and al-Qaeda, information that would benefit this committee and the American people. He has also provided a clear, blunt report that articulated an explicit course of action.

The White House should allow General McChrystal to testify before Congress soon. His testimony is essential to help Congress make informed decisions about our future in the region. We need to hear from General McChrystal to determine how we can achieve victory in Afghanistan and help our brave men and women who are fighting to accomplish their mission.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman BERMAN. The gentlelady from California, Ms. Lee.

Ms. LEE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman—and I thank the ranking member—for this hearing on Afghanistan, now facing its 9th year of violent and destabilizing conflict.

And I must preface this by saying that I come to this discussion from a different perspective than most of my colleagues. I voted against the authorization to use force in 2001, which I knew was a blank check to wage war anywhere around the world. Eight years later and reflecting on the rush to war in Afghanistan and the Bush administration's war of choice in Iraq, the cost to our national security and in American blood and treasure are undeniable.

President Obama inherited the quagmire in Afghanistan, and we must ask the hard questions about our mission there.

I believe that the President has rightfully committed himself to answering the fundamental question, Are we pursuing the right strategy? Is a military counterinsurgency strategy feasible or sustainable in Afghanistan? Does an open-ended United States military presence in Afghanistan best serve the United States and our national security?

If we answer those questions and really consider our resources, we hopefully will be able to pursue a different strategy.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentlelady has expired.

The gentleman from Florida, Mr. Klein, is recognized for 1 minute.

Mr. KLEIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I think the American people want to know what is the mission, what is the strategy. Everyone understands our national security is the most important thing, that American people on our soil are protected and our interests that are allied with us around the world are most importantly protected.

The issue, of course, is, how do you do this? I think one lesson learned from Iraq it is not just about one country's borders. This is not about Afghanistan. This is about Afghanistan and Pakistan and Somalia and Yemen and any other territory where there is not a strong government or the opportunity for terrorists to train and to threaten us.

So I do appreciate the fact that there is a policy of decision of bringing together and challenging assumptions, bringing together the political, the military, the intelligence and coming forward with a recommendation. We are going to discuss it, but I think the American people want to know what this strategy is and how it can best accomplish a true, safer country and national security.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired.

And the gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Connolly, is recognized for 1 minute.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I have a full statement to enter into the record with your consent.

The question of U.S. objectives in Afghanistan is now a major part of our national security debate. Is the war winnable? How do we define winning? Should we be involved in nation-building, and if so, to what end? Do we equate the Taliban with al-Qaeda in our

objectives? What are the consequences of a United States retreat in Afghanistan for the region and especially for Pakistan?

President Obama and the military leaders are now assessing the best way to meet our primary goals in Afghanistan. The identification of the imprecise potential menace that is the insurgent is the ultimate challenge. In the end, the United States must define clear goals, a clear timeline for achievement and a clear set of resources necessary to achieve its goals. Absent such clarity, I believe that Afghanistan potentially becomes another quagmire of nightmarish proportions.

I thank the chair.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired.

The gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Wilson, is recognized for 1 minute.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thank you for having this important hearing.

Particularly, I am interested in the issues about Afghanistan. My former National Guard unit, the 218th Brigade of the South Carolina Army National Guard, led by General Bob Livingston, served there for 1 year. I know firsthand, with the 1,600 troops from South Carolina, the largest deployment since World War II—and our troops were all over the country—that they saw the potential for the Afghan people in terms of the Army and police. They identified the Afghanis as their brothers and some very hopeful.

Additionally, I am very grateful. I am the co-chair of the Afghan Caucus, so I have had the privilege of visiting the country nine times. I have seen it emerge from rubble to the potential that it has. But its beginning was as the third poorest country on Earth.

So I am very hopeful that we either defeat the terrorists there or we will see them again here.

Thank you very much for your being here today.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired.

The gentlelady from California, Ambassador Watson, is recognized.

Ms. WATSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the hearing.

To date, we know that President Obama has stated that withdrawal from Afghanistan is not an option at this time. But what do we hope to accomplish in Afghanistan?

One goal is the elimination of the Taliban forces and the implementation of a working centralized government, representative of the Afghan people, a government that will effectively protect its people and defend itself. However, concern about corruption within the Karzai administration, as well as corruption of local leaders and various factions, seem to be working against any form of stability in government.

We need put Afghan forces on the front, our trainers and our people, who will provide resources, behind; and plan a schedule for getting out of that country, and let them defend their own borders while we defend the U.S.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I yield back.

Chairman BERMAN. The gentleman from New York, Mr. McMahon, is recognized for 1 minute.

Mr. MCMAHON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for holding this very important hearing.

As we know, since NATO took command of ISAF in 2003, the alliance has gradually expanded the reach of its mission, originally limited to Kabul, to cover Afghanistan's whole territory. Obviously, evolving missions require evolving strategies, and Mr. Chairman, I cannot see how we can commit 40,000 more American lives without that comprehensive strategy.

Although I cannot offer a concrete deliberation on the need for more troops, I can say this. What is in question right now in Afghanistan is not the number of troops, but what they will be doing in Afghanistan. Currently, about 20–25 percent of the Afghan police force resigns after recruitment; electoral fraud has tarnished the image of both the U.S. and the Karzai administration; and corruption and the drug trade have revitalized the Taliban. And yet we still have great faith in the Afghan people.

Therefore, it is imperative for us to come up with a strategy that is both winnable and just for the Afghan people.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman BERMAN. Thank you.

And I now would like to introduce our witnesses and hear from them. But before I do that, both the ranking member and at least one other member made reference to hearing from the administration.

My current thinking is that we definitely must do that, but that the appropriate time is after they have come out with a strategy. And then the appropriate people—and I think it includes General McChrystal—come before Congress, present their positions and the administration's positions, subject to questioning and challenges and all the things that are associated with such a hearing. I am open to changing my mind, but that is my current thinking.

Our first witness that I want to introduce is Steve Coll, president and CEO of the New America Foundation and a staff writer at the New Yorker magazine. For the past 20 years, Mr. Coll was a foreign correspondent and a senior editor at the Washington Post, serving as the paper's managing editor from 1998 to 2004.

Mr. Coll is the author of six books, including, "On the Grand Trunk Road: A Journey into South Asia" in 1994 and the well known "Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2001," published in 2004.

Mr. Coll's professional awards include two Pulitzer Prizes, the second of which was for his work on Afghanistan.

J. Alexander Thier is the director of Afghanistan and Pakistan at the U.S. Institute of Peace, co-chair of the Afghanistan and Pakistan working groups and co-author and editor of the newly released, "The Future of Afghanistan."

Mr. Thier was a member of the Afghanistan Study Group, co-chaired by General James Jones and Ambassador Tom Pickering, and co-author of its final report. Prior to joining USIP, Mr. Thier was the director of the Project on Failed States at Stanford University's Center on Democracy, Development and the Rule of Law.

From 2002 to 2004, Mr. Thier was a legal advisor to Afghanistan's Constitutional and Judicial Reform Commissions in Kabul. He also served as a U.N. and NGO official in Pakistan and Afghanistan from 1993 to 1996.

Frederick W. Kagan is the resident scholar and director of the Critical Threats Project at the American Enterprise Institute. His most recent publications, based on multiple trips to Afghanistan, focus on force requirements and analyses of how various groups and stakeholders in Afghanistan and Pakistan would respond to different United States policy scenarios.

As I mentioned in my opening statement, Dr. Kagan is one of the experts that contributed to General McChrystal's recent assessment. He is also widely credited as one of the intellectual architects of the Iraq surge as a result of the January 2007 paper he co-authored with General Jack Keane, entitled, "Choosing Victory: A Plan for Success in Iraq."

Previously, Dr. Kagan was an associate professor of military history at the United States Military Academy at West Point.

We are very pleased that you are here with us today.

And, Mr. Coll, why don't you start off?

STATEMENT OF MR. STEVE COLL, PRESIDENT, NEW AMERICA FOUNDATION

Mr. COLL. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, and thank you for this opportunity to testify.

I had prepared a lengthy written statement which——

Chairman BERMAN. I should say that all of the statements will be in the record in their entirety. We do want to hear from you and have time to make your points. But your entire testimony will be part of the record.

Mr. COLL. I appreciate that, and that statement covers some of the questions that members asked during the excellent round of opening statements about the potential of a counterterrorism strategy as against counterinsurgency and this question of sanctuary. So I would be happy to review those issues.

During my brief time, let me just review a couple of points that arise from my own field research and historical research. Let me start with a sense of what I think is at issue in the Afghan conflict.

I think, in my judgment, the United States has two compelling interests at issue in the conflict. One is the increasingly successful, but incomplete effort to reduce the threat posed by al-Qaeda and related jihadi groups and to finally eliminate the al-Qaeda leadership that carried out the 9/11 attacks.

The second is the pursuit of a South and Central Asian region that is at least stable enough to ensure that Pakistan does not fail as a state or fall into the hands of Islamic extremists.

I think more than that may well be achievable. In my view, I think most of the current commentary underestimates the potential for transformational changes in South Asia over the next decade or two, spurred by economic progress and integration. But there is no question that the immediate policy choices facing the United States in Afghanistan are very difficult, and almost any path carries considerable risk and uncertainty.

What I would like to review in my few minutes are two subjects, one, of the comparison that is often made between the choices facing the United States today and the experience of the Soviet Union during the 1980s; and secondly, the relationship between United

States policy choices in Afghanistan and Pakistan's own evolution over the next few years.

I think the situation facing the United States is much more favorable than that which faced the Soviet Union at any stage of its Afghan misadventure. I want to briefly explain why.

In a global and diplomatic sense, the Soviet Union failed strategically in Afghanistan from the moment it invaded the country. It never enjoyed much military success during the 8 years of direct occupation. Neither Soviet forces nor their client, Afghan Communist Government, ever controlled the Afghan countryside. And yet despite these failures, the Soviet Union and its successor client government led by President Najibullah, never lost control of the Afghan capital, major cities and provincial capitals or the formal Afghan state. It was only after the Soviet Union formally dissolved in 1991, and Najibullah lost the supply lines from Moscow that the mujahideen Islamist guerillas finally prevailed and seized Kabul.

The territorial achievements of the Najibullah government—no forcible takeover of the Afghan state by Islamist guerillas, continuous control of all the country's major cities and towns—might actually look attractive to the United States today as a minimum measure of success, and there is every reason to believe that the international mission can do much better than that.

Afghan public opinion today remains much more favorably disposed toward international forces in cooperation with international governments than it ever was toward the Soviet Union. The presence of international forces in Afghanistan today is recognized as legitimate and even righteous, whereas the Soviets never enjoyed such recognition and were unable to draw funds and support from international institutions in a meaningful way.

China today wants a stable Afghanistan. In the Soviet era, it armed the rebels.

The Pakistani army today is divided and uncertain in its relations with the Taliban and it is beginning to turn against them, certainly against elements of them quite forcefully. During the Soviet period, the Pakistan Army was united in its efforts to support the rebels.

And even if the number of Taliban active fighters today is on the high side of published estimates, those numbers are much smaller than the number of Islamic guerillas that fought Soviet and Afghan forces even in the late period.

The second issue I would like to briefly outline is the impact of American policy in Afghanistan on the tolerance and support of Islamist extremist groups, including the Taliban, by the Pakistani army and security services. Pakistan's use of Islamist militias as an asymmetric defense against India has been an important factor in the Afghan war both before 9/11 and after. However, the relationship between the Pakistani security services and Islamist extremist groups is not static or preordained.

Pakistani public opinion, while it remains hostile to the United States, has of late turned sharply and intensely against violent Islamist militant groups operating within Pakistan. The Pakistan Army, itself reeling as an institution from public skepticism, is proving to be responsive to this change of public opinion.

Moreover, the army civilian political leaders, landlords, business leaders and Pakistani civil society have entered into a period of competition and open discourse over how to think about the country's national interests and how to extricate themselves from the Frankenstein-like problem of Islamic radicalism created by their historical security policies. There is a growing recognition in this discourse among Pakistani elites that the country must find a new national security doctrine that does not fuel internal revolution and impede economic and social progress.

The purpose of American policy should be to create conditions within and around Pakistan for the progressive side of this argument among Pakistani elites to prevail over time. American policy over the next 5 or 10 years might also recognize that the ultimate exit strategy for international forces from South Asia is Pakistan's own success and political normalization manifested in an army that shares power with civilian leaders in a reasonably stable constitutional bargain and in the increasing integration of Pakistan's economy with regional economies, including India's.

Against this backdrop, a Taliban insurgency that increasingly destabilizes both Afghanistan and the border region with Pakistan would make such normalization very difficult, if not outright impossible, for the foreseeable future. Among other things, it would reinforce the sense of siege and encirclement that has shaped Pakistan's support for Islamist proxy militias in the past.

Conversely, a reasonably stable Afghan state, supported by the international community, increasingly defended by its own army and no longer under threat of coercive revolution by the Taliban, could contribute conditions for Pakistan's Government to negotiate and participate in political arrangements in Afghanistan and Central Asia that would address Pakistan's legitimate security needs in its own backyard by a means other than the use of Islamist proxies.

America's record of policy failure in Afghanistan and Pakistan during the last 30 years should humble all of us, I think. It should bring humility to the ways we define our goals and realism about the means required to achieve them. And I think it should lead us to emphasize political approaches over kinetic military ones, urban population security in Afghanistan over provocative rural patrolling and Afghan and Pakistani solutions over American blueprints.

But it should not lead us to defeatism or to acquiescence in a violent or forcible Taliban takeover of either country. We do have the means to prevent that, and it is in our interest to do so.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Coll follows:]

U.S. Interests and Policy Choices in Afghanistan

Statement by Steve Coll
President
New America Foundation

Before the Committee on Foreign Affairs
United States House of Representatives
October 15, 2009

The United States has two compelling interests at issue in the Afghan conflict. One is the ongoing, increasingly successful but incomplete effort to reduce the threat posed by Al Qaeda and related jihadi groups, and to finally eliminate the Al Qaeda leadership that carried out the 9/11 attacks. The second is the pursuit of a South and Central Asian region that is at least stable enough to ensure that Pakistan does not fail completely as a state or fall into the hands of Islamic extremists.

More than that may well be achievable – in my view, most current American commentary underestimates the potential for transformational changes in South Asia over the next decade or two, spurred by economic progress and integration. But there is no question that the immediate policy choices facing the United States in Afghanistan are very difficult. All of the courses of action now under consideration by the Obama Administration and members of Congress carry with them risk and uncertainty.

I would like to use the opportunity of this testimony to review and offer judgments about some of the arguments over U.S. policy choices in Afghanistan that are prominent around the deliberations of the Obama Administration and Congress. I would also like to highlight some serious risks to U.S. efforts in Afghanistan that are too often neglected in that discourse.

Washington hardly needs another opinion about the troops-or-no-troops debate, but so that you can evaluate my analyses with the appropriate grains of salt, I should indicate where I stand. To protect the security of the American people and the interests of the United States and its allies, we should persist with the difficult effort to stabilize Afghanistan and reverse the Taliban's momentum. This will probably require additional troops for a period of several years, until Afghan forces can play the leading role. However, that would depend on the answer to the question General Colin Powell's reported question, "What will the troops do?" As General McChrystal wrote in his recent assessment, "Focusing on force or resource requirements misses the point entirely." Instead, after years of neglect of U.S. policy and resources in Afghanistan, and after a succession of failed strategies both in Afghanistan and Pakistan, the United States, as McChrystal put it, has an "urgent need for a significant change to our strategy and the way that we think and operate." /1 While I cannot endorse or oppose McChyrstal's

specific prescriptions for the next phase of U.S. engagement in Afghanistan because I do not know what they are, I do endorse the starting point of his analysis, as well as his general emphases on partnering with Afghan forces and focusing on the needs of the Afghan population. I believe those emphases are necessary but insufficient.

Whether President Obama's policy involves no new troops, a relatively small number of additional forces focused on training, or a much larger deployment, we can be certain of one thing: American soldiers will continue to put their lives on the line in Afghanistan and the U.S. Treasury will continue to be drained in pursuit of U.S. goals there. We know this because President Obama has publicly ruled out withdrawal from Afghanistan as an option. Instead, within the Administration and prospectively in Congress, the question seems to be whether to pursue U.S. goals with the resources already invested, or to invest more in tandem with the adoption of a new strategy. It is important, then, to think through what U.S. interests in Afghanistan actually are and what means may be required to achieve them.

General McChyrstal and other senior military commanders have apparently recommended substantially increased U.S. troop levels in Afghanistan in order to stabilize what remains a weak and fractious Afghan state; to protect large sections of the Afghan population from Taliban coercion; to build up Afghan security forces; and to prevent the Taliban from forcibly seizing control of the Afghan government.

A number of credible objections have been made to this project. Some argue that the stabilization of even a weak Afghan state safe from Taliban control is beyond the capacity of the U.S. and its allies. Thus, according to Rory Stewart, in recent testimony before a Senate committee, "The fundamental problem with the [Obama Administration's] strategy is that it is trying to do the impossible. It is highly unlikely that the U.S. will be able either to build an effective, legitimate state or to defeat a Taliban insurgency…Even an aim as modest as 'stability' is highly ambitious." /2 Stewart has extensive direct experience of Afghanistan and his view is shared by some other credible regional specialists.

It is right to be skeptical of the abstract slogans of U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine and the enthusiasms of those in the West who define success in Afghanistan through their own political science terminology of legitimacy, rights and development. The Soviet Union defeated itself in Afghanistan by demanding, absurdly, that the country conform to its preconceived theories of revolution and state development. As the editors of a review of the Soviet war composed by the Russian General Staff put it, "Despite the Soviet Union's penetration and lengthy experience in Afghanistan, their intelligence was poor and hampered by the need to explain events within the Marxist-Leninist framework. Consequently, the Soviets never fully understood the Mujaheddin opposition nor why many of their policies failed to work in Afghanistan." /3 Similarly, the United States should be cognizant of its own potential blinders of ideology and preconceived interpretation. For example, while the development of counterinsurgency capacity and principles by the United States Army, as outlined in the recently ascendant field manual FM-34, is a generally positive development in U.S. Army doctrine, and those capacities

clearly have a role to play in U.S. military strategy in Afghanistan, it would be self-deceiving to believe that the Afghan war can now be "won" simply by "applying the manual," as the most ardent counterinsurgency advocates sometimes seem to argue.

To succeed, counterinsurgency approaches require deep, supple, and adaptive understanding of local conditions. And yet, as General McChrystal pointed out in his assessment, since 2001, international forces operating in Afghanistan have "not sufficiently studied Afghanistan's peoples, whose needs, identities and grievances vary from province to province and from valley to valley." To succeed, the United States must "redouble efforts to understand the social and political dynamics of…all regions of the country and take action that meets the needs of the people, and insist that [Afghan government] officials do the same." /4

This will be difficult at best, but it is not impossible. The international effort to stabilize Afghanistan and protect it from coercive revolution by the Taliban still enjoys broad support from a pragmatic and resilient Afghan population. Nor does the project of an adequately in tact, if weak and decentralized, Afghan state, require the imposition of Western imagination. Afghanistan between the late 18th century and the First World War was a troubled but coherent and often peaceful independent state. Although very poor, after the 1920s it enjoyed a long period of continuous peace with its neighbors, secured by a multi-ethnic Afghan National Army and unified by a national culture. That state and that culture were badly damaged – almost destroyed – by the wars ignited by the Soviet invasion of 1979 – wars to which we in the United States contributed destructively. But this vision and memory of Afghan statehood and national identity has hardly disappeared. After 2001, Afghans returned to their country from refugee camps and far flung exile to reclaim their state – not to invent a brand new Western-designed one, as our overpriced consultants sometimes advised, but to reclaim their own decentralized but nonetheless unified and even modernizing country.

Despite the manifold errors of U.S. and international policy since the Taliban's overthrow in 2001, a strong plurality of Afghans still want to pursue that work – and they want the international community to stay and to correct its errors.

Then, too, the difficulties facing the United States in Afghanistan today should not be overestimated out of generalized despair or fatigue. Consider, as one benchmark, a comparison between the position of the U.S. and its allies now and that of the Soviet Union during the 1980s.

In a global and diplomatic sense, the Soviet Union failed strategically in Afghanistan from the moment it invaded the country. Nor did it enjoy much military success during its eight years of direct occupation. Neither Soviet forces nor their client Afghan communist government ever controlled the Afghan countryside. And yet, despite these failures and struggles, the Soviet Union and its successor client government, led by President Najibullah, never lost control of the Afghan capital, major cities and provincial capitals, or the formal Afghan state. Only after the Soviet Union dissolved in late 1991

and Najibullah lost his supply lines from Moscow did his Islamist guerrilla opposition finally prevail and seize Kabul.

The territorial achievements of the Najibullah government – no forcible takeover of the Afghan state by Islamist guerrillas, continuous control of all the country's cities and major towns – might look attractive today to the United States as a minimum measure of success. And there is every reason to believe that the international community can still do better than that.

By comparison to the challenges facing the Soviet Union after it began to "Afghan-ize" its strategy around 1985 and prepare for the withdrawal of its troops, the situation facing the United States and its allies today is much more favorable. Afghan public opinion remains much more favorably disposed toward international forces and cooperation with international governments than it ever was toward the Soviet Union. The presence of international forces in Afghanistan today is recognized as legitimate and even righteous, whereas the Soviets never enjoyed such support and were unable to draw funds and credibility from international institutions. China today wants a stable Afghanistan; in the Soviet era, it armed the Islamic rebels. The Pakistani Army today is divided and uncertain in its relations with the Taliban, and beginning to turn against them; during the Soviet period, the Army was united in its effort to support Islamist rebels. And even if the number of active Taliban fighters today is on the high side of published estimates, those numbers pale in comparison to the number of Islamic guerrillas fighting the Soviet forces and their Afghan clients.

In other words, the project of an adequately stable Afghan state free from coercive Taliban rule for the indefinite future *can* be achieved, although there are no guarantees. The next question, however, is whether it *should* be pursued on the basis of U.S. interests, given the considerable costs, risks and uncertainties that are involved. Here, too, a number of credible objections must be considered.

One is the argument that a heavy U.S. military presence in Afghanistan focused on population security is not the best way to defeat Al Qaeda and may even be counterproductive. Counter-terrorism is "still Washington's most pressing task," write Steven Simon and Jonathan Stevenson in the current issue of *Survival*, but "the question is whether counter-insurgency and state-building in Afghanistan are the best means of executing it. The mere fact that the core threat to U.S. interests now resides in Pakistan rather than Afghanistan casts considerable doubt on the proposition....The realistic American objective should not be to ensure Afghanistan's political integrity by neutralizing the Taliban and containing Pakistani radicalism, which is probably unachievable. Rather, its aim should be merely to ensure that Al Qaeda is denied both Afghanistan and Pakistan as operating bases for transnational attacks on the United States and its allies and partners." /5

Apparently like some in the Obama Administration, they recommend a policy concentrated on targeted killing of Al Qaeda leaders by aerial drones and other means.

They acknowledge that a Taliban takeover of Afghanistan might aid Al Qaeda but argue that greater risks would flow from the failure or a U.S.-led counterinsurgency strategy.

This argument misreads the dynamics within Pakistan that will shape the course of U.S. efforts to destroy Al Qaeda's headquarters and networks there. Simon and Stevenson, for example, fear that the provocative aura of U.S. domination in Afghanistan would "intensify anti-Americanism in Pakistan" and by doing so ensure that the Pakistan Army would refuse to cooperate with American efforts to root out Islamic extremists previously cultivated by the Army and its intelligence wing, the Inter-Services Intelligence Directorate, or I.S.I. There are certainly risks along the lines they describe, but something like the opposite is more likely to be true.

The relationship between the Pakistani security services and Islamist extremist groups – Al Qaeda, the Taliban, sectarian groups, Kashmiri groups, and their many splinters – is not static or preordained. Pakistani public opinion, while it remains hostile to the United States, has of late turned sharply and intensely against violent Islamist militant groups. The Pakistan Army, itself reeling as an institution from deep public skepticism, is proving to be responsive to this change of public opinion. Moreover, the Army, civilian political leaders, landlords, business leaders and Pakistani civil society have entered into a period of competition and freewheeling discourse over how to think about the country's national interests and how to extricate their country from the Frankenstein-like problem of Islamic radicalism created by the Army's historical security policies. There is a growing recognition in this discourse among Pakistani elites that the country must find a new national security doctrine that does not fuel internal revolution and impede economic and social progress. The purpose of American policy should be to create conditions within and around Pakistan for the progressive side of this argument among Pakistani elites to prevail over time.

American policy over the next five or ten years must proceed from the understanding that the ultimate exit strategy for international forces from South Asia is Pakistan's economic success and political normalization, manifested in an Army that shares power with civilian leaders in a reasonably stable constitutional bargain, and in the increasing integration of Pakistan's economy with regional economies, including India's. Such an evolution will likely consolidate the emerging view within Pakistan's elites that the country requires a new and less self-defeating national security doctrine. As in the Philippines, Colombia, and Indonesia, the pursuit of a more balanced, less coup-ridden, more modern political-military order in Pakistan need not be complete or confused with perfection for it to gradually pinch the space in which Al Qaeda, the Taliban and related groups now operate. Moreover, in South Asia, outsiders need not construct or impose this modernizing pathway as a neo-imperial project; the hope for durable change lies first of all in the potential for normalizing relations between Pakistan and India, a negotiation between elites in those two countries that is already well under way, without Western mediation, and is much more advanced than is typically appreciated. Its success is hardly assured, but because of the transformational effect such normalization would create, the effects of American policies in the region on its prospects should be carefully assessed.

Against this backdrop, a Taliban insurgency that increasingly destabilizes both Afghanistan and the border region with Pakistan would make such regional normalization very difficult, if not impossible, in the foreseeable future. Among other things, it would reinforce the sense of siege and encirclement that has shaped the Pakistan Army's self-defeating policies of support for Islamist militias that provide, along with a nuclear deterrent, asymmetrical balance against a (perceived) hegemonic India.

Conversely, a reasonably stable Afghan state supported by the international community, increasingly defended by its own Army, and no longer under threat of coercive revolution by the Taliban could create conditions for Pakistan's government to negotiate and participate in political arrangements in Afghanistan and the Central Asian region that would address Pakistan's legitimate security needs, break the Army's dominating mindset of encirclement, and advance the country's economic interests.

American and international success in Afghanistan could also enhance the space for civilians in Pakistan who seek to persuade the Pakistan Army to accommodate their views about national security; for the United States to insist that Pakistani interests be accommodated in a pluralistic, non-revolutionary Afghanistan; and for Pakistani elites, including the Army, to have adequate confidence to take on the risks associated with a negotiated peace or normalization with India. Conversely, yielding unnecessarily to an indefinite period of violence and chaos in Afghanistan, one in which the Taliban may seek to take power in Kabul while continuing to operate across the border in Pakistan, will all but guarantee failure along all of these strategic lines.

There are narrower objections that should be registered about the "counterterrorism-only" or "counterterrorism-mainly" argument. It is probably impractical over a long period of time to wage an intelligence-derived counterterrorism campaign along the Pakistan-Afghan border if a cooperating Afghan government does not have access to the local population; if American forces are not present; and if the Pakistani state has no incentive to cooperate. This is exactly the narrative that unfolded during the 1990s and led to failure on 9/11 for the United States. Recent improvements in targeting Al Qaeda leaders in Pakistan seem to be a function, at least in part, of changing attitudes toward cooperation by the Pakistani civilian government and security services. These changes in turn are a function of the dynamic, complex internal Pakistani discourse sketched above. It is unlikely that an American willingness to allow Taliban hegemony in Afghanistan will result in greater cooperation from Pakistani intelligence; in fact, the opposite is more likely because, as in the past, some in the Pakistani security services seek such hegemony for ideological reasons, while others will likely see a need to protect their position with Islamist militias in order to defend against India in a volatile, heavily contested regional environment.

Also, if a problem in assuring Pakistan's stability lies in the country's anti-American attitudes (which may not be as important as Americans believe), then waging a prolonged war of assassination by flying robots within Pakistan's borders and without its government's participation, as some "counterterrorism only" advocates would prefer, does not seem a prescription for success. The goal of American policy in Pakistan should

be to create conditions in which this unattractive manifestation of unilateral American aerial and technological power is no longer unilateral – and control of such operations can be shifted to a responsible Pakistani government, without the fear that prevails currently in the U.S. government that Pakistani security officers will misuse targeting intelligence to protect Islamist allies.

Another objection to the U.S. investments in Afghan stability and population protection is that Al Qaeda is not in Afghanistan at all, or at least not meaningfully. A related argument is that it is pointless to take risks and make new investments to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a prospective A.Q. sanctuary because Al Qaeda can easily find other sanctuaries, such as in Somalia and Yemen, where no American counterinsurgency or stabilization project is realistic. Bin Laden's presumed current base in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan, near the Afghan border, according to Stephen Biddle, has no "intrinsic importance…no greater than many other potential havens – and probably smaller than many." /6 It is also argued by some that Al Qaeda is best understood as an organization, network or movement in which physical geography such as the F.A.T.A. is not a defining feature – in this view, hotel rooms in Hamburg, Germany, or rental houses near pilot training facilities in Florida are as fundamental to Al Qaeda's operational footprint as its headquarters and training camps along the Pakistan-Afghanistan frontier.

These are credible, serious arguments that accurately describe some of Al Qaeda's character as a stateless, millenarian terrorist group. But they misunderstand the history of Al Qaeda's birth and growth alongside specific Pashtun Islamist militias on the Afghan-Pakistan border. It is simply not true that all potential Al Qaeda sanctuaries are of the same importance, now or potentially. Osama Bin Laden and Ayman Al-Zawahiri have a thirty-year unique history of trust and collaboration with the Pashtun Islamist networks located in North Waziristan, Bajaur, and the Northwest Frontier Province of Pakistan. It is not surprising, given this distinctive history, that Al Qaeda's presumed protectors – perhaps the Haqqanni network, which provided the territory in which Al Qaeda constructed its first training camps in the summer of 1988 – have never betrayed their Arab guests. These networks have fought alongside Al Qaeda since the mid-1980s and have raised vast sums of money in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states through their A.Q. connections. These Pashtun Islamist networks possess infrastructure – religious institutions, trucking firms, criminal networks, preaching networks, housing networks – from Kandahar and Khost Province, from Quetta to Karachi's exurban Pashtun neighborhoods, that is either impervious to penetration by the Pakistani state or has coopted those in the Pakistani security services who might prove disruptive. It is mistaken to assume that Bin Laden, Zawahiri or other Arab leaders would enjoy similar sanctuary anywhere else. In Somalia they would almost certainly be betrayed for money; in Yemen, they would be much more susceptible to detection by the country's police network. The United States should welcome the migration of Al Qaeda's leadership to such countries.

Because there is no nexus on Earth more favorable to Al Qaeda's current leaders than the radicalized Pashtun militias in the Pakistan-Afghanistan border region, American

policy in the region must take special account of this specific, daunting political-military geography. As counterinsurgency doctrine correctly argues, the only way to penetrate such territory and disrupt or defeat insurgents, including outside terrorists like Al Qaeda's leaders, is to do so in partnership with indigenous forces that are motivated to carry out such a campaign because they see it as in their own interests. No such campaign is plausible if the Taliban rule Afghanistan. And no such campaign is plausible if Pakistan does not continue to receive the economic and political support from the international community that may lead its own elites to decide that they will be better off without the Haqqannis and other uncompromising Islamists than with them.

It is true, in a sense, that not all Afghan stability projects are created equal, from the perspective of an American-led campaign against Al Qaeda. Aghanistan's mountainous, Shiite-influenced central Bamiyan province, to choose an exaggerated example, may always be of marginal importance to Al Qaeda, just as it has long been less than decisive to successive Kabul governments. But to extrapolate such observations to argue that Afghanistan's national stability is only tenuously connected to Pakistan's stability defies history, demography and observable current trends. More Pashtuns live in Pakistan than in Afghanistan. Their travel and connections to international finance, proselytizing, criminal, and diaspora networks overlap. If the Taliban captured Afghanistan, this would certainly destabilize Pakistan by strengthening Islamist networks there.

It would also be mistaken to believe, as some in the Obama Administration have apparently argued, that a future revolutionary Taliban government in Kabul, having seized power by force, might decide on its own or could be persuaded to forswear connections with Al Qaeda. Although the Taliban are an amalgamation of diverse groupings, some of which have little or no connection to Al Qaeda, the historical record of collaboration between the Haqqanni network and Al Qaeda, to choose one example, is all but certain to continue and probably would deepen during any future era of Taliban rule in Afghanistan. The benefits of a Taliban state to Al Qaeda are obvious: After 9/11, the United States gathered evidence that Al Qaeda used Afghan government institutions as cover for import of dual use items useful for its military projects. Reporters with the McClatchy newspaper group's Washington bureau recently quoted a senior U.S. intelligence official on this subject: "It is our belief that the primary focus of the Taliban is regional, that is Afghanistan and Pakistan. At the same time, there is no reason to believe that the Taliban are abandoning their connections to Al Qaeda…The two groups…maintain the kind of close relationship that – if the Taliban were able to take effective control over parts of Afghanistan – would probably give Al Qaeda expanded room to operate." /6 This assessment is consistent with recent history.

The United States and its allies can stabilize Afghanistan; they should try; but they may fail. To avoid failure, it will be important to account for some risks that are often underestimated in the current policy debate.

These risks arise from a tendency in Washington to under-estimate the importance of Afghan politics to the outcome of any course of action selected by the Obama

Administration. Because President Karzai has disappointed international governments; because the recent presidential election was marred by fraud allegations; because politics in Kabul appears to be difficult and fractious; and because it is not an arena in which American leverage can be easily brought to bear, there is a tendency in Washington to whistle past Afghan political issues, or to give up on the subject altogether, and to focus on other policy corridors – counterinsurgency doctrine, military deployments, civilian efforts to build schools or highways or to provide agriculture training, anti-narcotics strategy, local governance. It sometimes seems that American strategy is being designed so that it can involve itself in everything *but* the problems of Afghan politics, national integration and reconciliation. But Afghan history argues that this would be an almost certain pathway to failure.

One example of this risk is embedded in the project of building a larger and more capable Afghan National Army and police force, for which there is currently much enthusiasm in Washington. The political-military history of Afghanistan since 1970 is one in which outside powers have repeatedly sought to do with Afghan security forces what the U.S. proposes to do now. It is also a history in which those projects have repeatedly failed because the security forces have been infected with political, tribal, and other divisions emanating from unresolved factionalism and rivalry in Kabul. Armies—especially poor, multi-ethnic armies, such as the one Afghanistan has—can only hold together if they are serving a relatively stable and unified national government. This has generally not been available to the Afghan Army since 1970.

Arguably, there are at least three cases during the last four decades in which programs to strengthen Afghan security forces to either serve the interests of an outside power or suppress an insurgency or both failed because of factionalism and disunity in Kabul.

During the nineteen-seventies, the Soviet Union tried to build communist cells within the Army in order to gradually gain influence. The cells, unfortunately, split into two irreconcilable groups, and their squabbling became so disabling that the Soviets ultimately decided they had no choice but to invade, in 1979, to put things in order.

Then, during the late nineteen-eighties, faced with a dilemma similar to that facing the United States, the Soviets tried to "Afghan-ize" their occupation, much as the U.S. proposes to do now. The built up Afghan forces, put them in the lead in combat, supplied them with sophisticated weapons, and, ultimately, decided to withdraw. This strategy actually worked reasonably well for a while, although the government only controlled the major cities, never the countryside. But the factional and tribal splits within the Army persisted, defections were chronic, and a civil war among the insurgents also played out within the Army, ensuring that when the Soviet Union fell apart, and supplies halted, the Army too would crack up and dissolve en masse. (I happened to be in Kabul when this happened, in 1992. On a single day, thousands and thousands of soldiers and policemen took off their uniforms, put on civilian clothes, and went home.)

Finally, during the mid-nineteen-nineties, a fragmented and internally feuding

Kabul government, in which Karzai was a participant for a time, tried to build up national forces to hold off the Taliban, but splits within the Kabul coalitions caused important militias and sections of the security forces to defect to the Taliban. The Taliban took Kabul in 1996 as much by exploiting Kabul's political disarray as by military conquest. The history of the Afghan Army since 1970 is one in which the Army has never actually been defeated in the field, but has literally dissolved for lack of political glue on several occasions.

None of these examples offers a perfect analogy for the present, but the current situation in Kabul does contain echoes of this inglorious history. Karzai's opportunistic and unscrupulous campaign for reëlection contains two overlapping patterns of political disunity that could undermine the effort to rapidly build up and deploy the Afghan Army during the next few years. The president assembled a coalition of warlords and war criminals in his campaign coalition. Some of these warlords, such as Abdul Rashid Dostum, an ethnic Uzbek, are the very same characters whose vicious infighting caused the Afghan Army to dissolve in the face of Taliban pressure during the nineties.

Also, the currently unresolved split between Karzai and Abdullah Abdullah, the opposition leader, could become a proxy for the national division between southern Pashtuns, from whom the Taliban draw their strength, and northern Panjshiri Tajiks, with whom Abdullah has long been affiliated (although one of Abdullah's parents is a Pashtun). If Karzai and Abdullah become virulently or violently at odds, it is easy to imagine a Kabul government divided from within by its warlords and undermined from without by the Taliban on one side and disaffected northern groups on the other. This is poor ground on which to build an army of illiterate volunteers while in a hurry.

To improve its chances for success, the United States and the international community must bring all of their leverage to bear to ensure the formation of a coalition government in Kabul that incorporates all of the meaningful sources of non-Taliban opposition and sets Afghan political and tribal leaders on a sustained, Afghan-led program of political, constitutional and electoral reform.

Some analysts have suggested invoking the Afghan institution of a *loya jirga* to host some or all of this continuous reform process. Whether that specific institution is selected or not, the spirit of this suggestion is critical – Afghans have many difficult but important political and constitutional issues to negotiate, and political business-as-usual will not carry these negotiations forward adequately at a time when the United States is risking blood and treasure in support of Afghan stability. Issues that require discussion and negotiation among Afghan leaders, both formal and informal, include the future of the electoral system, to ensure fraud on the scale alleged in the most recent election cannot recur; political party formation and activity; constitutional issues such as the election of governors and the role of parliament; and issues of national integrity such as the access of different ethnic, tribal and identity groups to government employment and opportunity in the expanding security services.

Political reform and Afghan-led negotiations of this type must be seen as fundamental to American policy in Afghanistan no matter what choices are made about troop levels and deployments. Such a process would be part and parcel, too, of national program of reconciliation and reintegration designed to provide ways for Taliban foot soldiers to find jobs and for their leaders to forswear violence and enter politics.

This emphasis on political stability through continuous Afghan-led negotiation and national reintegration, as opposed to grandiose state-building or policies premised on the pursuit of military victory by external forces, should not be seen as an adjunct wing of U.S. policy in Afghanistan, but as fundamental. It is clear that no realistic level of American and Afghan forces deployable in the foreseeable future can provide security to the population in every village of Afghanistan. Accepting this reality and developing a political-military strategy that best accounts for it will lead, inevitably, to support for Afghan-led political approaches at the national, provincial, district and sub-district level. This is how the late Gorbachev-backed government in Kabul achieved a modicum of stability in far less favorable circumstances.

America's record of policy failure in Afghanistan and Pakistan during the last thirty years should humble all of us. It should bring humility to the way we define our goals and realism about the means required to achieve them. It should lead us to choose political approaches over kinetic military ones, urban population security over provocative rural patrolling, and Afghan and Pakistani solutions over American blueprints. But it should not lead us to defeatism or to acquiescence in a violent or forcible Taliban takeover of either country. We have the means to prevent that, and it is in our interest to do so.

Notes:

1/ McChrystal, "Commander's Initial Assessment," August 30, 2009, Unclassified Version, p. 1-1.
2/ "Testimony of Rory Stewart," Senate Foreign Relations Committee, September 16, 2009
3/ Grau and Gress (eds.), *The Soviet-Afghan War*, p. xix.
4/ McChrystal, op. cit., p. 2-4.
5/ Simon and Stevenson, "Afghanistan: How Much is Enough?" *Survival*, October-November 2009.
6/ "Assessing the Case for War in Afghanistan," Statement by Dr. Stephen Biddle, Committee on Foreign Relations, United States Senate, September 16, 2009
7/ "Are Obama advisers downplaying Afghan dangers?" McClatchy Newspapers, October 11, 2009.

Chairman BERMAN. Thank you, Mr. Coll.
Mr. Thier.

STATEMENT OF J. ALEXANDER THIER, J.D., DIRECTOR FOR AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN, UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

Mr. THIER. Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member and members of the committee, I am Alex Thier, the director for Afghanistan and Pakistan at the U.S. Institute of Peace. Thank you for the opportunity to present my personal views about the way forward for the United States in Afghanistan.

My understanding of the potential and pitfalls of our policy choices in Afghanistan is based on intensive personal experience there over the last 16 years. Through 4 years on the ground during the Afghan civil war in the 1990s, I witnessed the impact of war, warlordism, Talibanism and abandonment by the West. But I also came to know another Afghanistan, replete with moderate, hard-working men and women who want nothing more than a modicum of stability.

Afghanistan is not some ungovernable tribal society doomed to permanent conflict. Even during the war, thousands of community leaders worked to resolve conflicts and improve living standards for their people.

We face four fundamental questions in Afghanistan:

Do we have national security interests in Afghanistan?

If so, do we have an effective strategy to secure and protect those interests?

Do we have the tools, resources and partnerships in place to implement that strategy?

And, finally, is it worth the effort and investment?

Ultimately, I believe that we do have a deeply compelling national security interest in Afghanistan and that our best strategy, albeit the best of a bad series of options, is to recommit ourselves to the stabilization of Afghanistan. As difficult as it will be to follow the promises we have made to the Afghans over the last 8 years, the alternatives are far more dangerous, dispiriting and unpredictable.

Despite setbacks, I believe that we know what success looks like in Afghanistan: When the path offered by the Afghan Government, in partnership with the international community, is more attractive, more credible and more legitimate than the path offered by the insurgents.

Do we have national security interests in Afghanistan? In my opinion, the answer to this first question is the clearest. We face a stark array of consequences from Afghan instability, including an emboldened al-Qaeda, the restoration of Taliban rule to some or all of Afghanistan and the return of civil war there, the fall of more Pakistani territory to extremists, the potential proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The United States and NATO would also suffer a credibility crisis if the Taliban and al-Qaeda can claim a military victory in Afghanistan.

So do we have an effective strategy to secure and protect those interests? I believe that the March 2009 strategy, which is aimed at stabilization and not just counterterrorism, is sound in theory. Stabilization requires simultaneously addressing security, governance and the rule of law and economic development.

But 4 years of deterioration in both Afghanistan and Pakistan has created a crisis of confidence among Afghans, Americans and other troop-contributing nations. Thus, I believe the question becomes whether we have the tools, resources and partnerships in place to implement that strategy. In other words, if we want to, can we stabilize Afghanistan?

This is the most difficult question to answer. In 2001, the answer seemed to be "yes," if we had made the necessary commitments.

But serious resources, including troops, aid, capacity-building efforts and political attention were lacking.

At the same time, the Afghan Government has not fulfilled its promise. No government that is unable to provide security and which is seen as corrupt and unjust will be legitimate in the eyes of the population. It is this illegitimacy that has driven Afghans away from the government and emboldened the insurgency.

To overcome these challenges, we must do four things with our Afghan partners. First, we must radically prioritize what we want to accomplish. For too long we have been doing too many things poorly instead of a few things well. In this critical year, it is essential to simultaneously scale back our objectives and intensify our resources.

Second, we must address the culture of impunity and improve governance there. Without a credible and legitimate Afghan partner, we cannot succeed no matter the scale of our investment. The United States must act aggressively, with its Afghan partners in the lead, to break the cycle of impunity and corruption that is providing a hospitable environment to the insurgency.

Third, we must decentralize our efforts to reach the Afghan people. A top-down Kabul-centric strategy to address governance and economic development is mismatched for Afghanistan, one of the most highly decentralized societies in the world. We must engage the capacity of broader Afghan society, making them the engine of progress, rather than the unwilling subjects of rapid change.

And finally, we must improve international coordination and aid effectiveness. The U.S. must use its aid to leverage positive change and must coordinate closely those efforts with our international allies.

Finally, all things considered, is the continuation or even expansion of the American engagement in Afghanistan worth the investment? I believe that the answer is "yes." The Afghan people and those who have lived and worked among the Afghans have not given up hope for a peaceful Afghanistan. They are not helpless without us, but they do rely on us for the promise of a better future, a promise that we have made repeatedly over the last 8 years.

I understand that remaining committed to the stabilization of Afghanistan is not easy. It will be costly in lives and taxpayer dollars. It is a challenging mission in every way, yet the alternatives, when examined honestly, are unbearably bleak. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Thier follows:]

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

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An independent institution established by Congress to strengthen the nation's capacity to promote peaceful resolution to international conflicts

Testimony of

J Alexander Thier
Director for Afghanistan and Pakistan
United States Institute of Peace*

before the

US House of Representatives
Committee on Foreign Affairs

"Afghanistan Policy at the Crossroads"
October 15, 2009

*The views expressed here are my own and not those of the United States Institute of Peace.

1200 – 17TH STREET NW, WASHINGTON, DC 20036-3011
TEL 202-457-1700 • FAX 202-429-6063 • TDD 202-457-1719 • WEB www.usip.org

"Afghanistan Policy at the Crossroads"
Testimony of J Alexander Thier, U.S. Institute of Peace

Mr. Chairman, ranking member, and members of the Committee.

I am Alex Thier, Director for Afghanistan and Pakistan at the U.S. Institute of Peace. Thank you for the opportunity to present my personal views on the way forward for the United States and Afghanistan.

My understanding of the potential and pitfalls of our policy choices in Afghanistan is based on intensive personal experience in the region over the last 16 years. Through four years on the ground in Afghanistan and Pakistan during the Afghan civil war in the 1990s, I witnessed the impact of war, warlordism, Talibanism, and abandonment by the West on Afghanistan and its neighbors. Afghanistan, its fabric of governance and society rent by war, became a breeding ground of Islamist extremism and global jihadists.

But I also came to know another Afghanistan, replete with moderate, hard-working men and women who want nothing more than a modicum of stability. Afghanistan is not some ungovernable, tribal society doomed to permanent conflict. Even during the war, thousands of community leaders worked to resolve conflicts and improve living standards for their people. After 2001, I worked with Afghan leaders intent on returning their country to the community of nations and creating a better future. Indeed, by some measures – growth of per capita income, access to basic health care and education, expansion of telecommunications – there have been some significant achievements over the last eight years. However, most of these advances are evaporating as Afghanistan's instability grows.

We face four fundamental questions concerning U.S. policy towards Afghanistan:

1) Do we have national security interests in Afghanistan?
2) If so, do we have an effective strategy to secure and protect those interests?
3) Do we have the tools, resources, and partnerships in place to implement that strategy?
4) Is it worth the effort and investment?

"Afghanistan Policy at the Crossroads"
Testimony of J Alexander Thier, U.S. Institute of Peace

Ultimately, I believe that we have deeply compelling national security interests, and that our best strategy – albeit the best of a bad series of options – is to recommit ourselves to the stabilization of Afghanistan. As difficult as it will be to fulfill the promises we've made to the Afghans over the last eight years, the alternatives are far more dangerous, dispiriting, and unpredictable.

Despite setbacks, I believe that we know what success looks like in Afghanistan: when the path offered by the Afghan government in partnership with the international community is more attractive, more credible, and more legitimate than the path offered by the insurgents.

Do we have national security interests in Afghanistan?

In my opinion, the answer to this first question is the clearest. We face a stark array of certain and uncertain threats emanating from the network of militant Islamist groups operating in the Afghanistan-Pakistan cross-border region. These include, but are not limited to, threats to the American homeland.

We continue to face a determined and resourceful enemy that sees this conflict in cosmic terms. Eight years after September 11, al Qaeda's leaders have evaded capture and have managed to plan, or at least inspire, significant terror attacks and numerous other plots in major Western cities. While the planning, funding, training, and recruiting for future attacks may not necessarily happen in the Afghan-Pakistan border region, increased operating space for militants in that region will make it both easier and more likely.

In addition to these concerns, the consequences of instability in the region are also potentially enormous: the restoration of Taliban rule to some or all of Afghanistan and the return of regional proxy battles; the fall of more Pakistani territory to extremists; proliferation of weapons of mass destruction; conflict between nuclear-armed Pakistan and India; the fraying of NATO; American isolationism and the global discounting of American power and reliability; resurgent Islamist movements in China and Central Asia, and the emboldening of both al Qaeda and the Iranian regime.

"Afghanistan Policy at the Crossroads"
Testimony of J Alexander Thier, U.S. Institute of Peace

Volatility in Afghanistan has a serious impact on Pakistan, and vice-versa. We maintain the fiction of the border, but the militants do not. They will use whatever territory is best available to them to accomplish their means. Between 1996 and 2001, al Qaeda had a virtually unfettered base in Afghanistan where they mixed ideologically, financially, and genetically with their Taliban hosts. From 2001 to 2009, the Afghan Taliban and elements of al Qaeda have been embedded in Pakistani militant culture and to some extent protected by elements of the Pakistani state. These elements have fed the growth of a virulent network of groups aiming to overthrow the Pakistani state, to gain access to weapons of mass destruction, to ignite internal sectarian conflict in India and conflict between India and Pakistan, to export jihad to other states in the region, and to attack the "far enemy" principally in the United States and the United Kingdom. It is also important to recognize that because every regional state has a stake in Afghanistan and Pakistan (notably India, China, Russia, Iran, and Uzbekistan), these states will continue to interfere in the politics of the region, especially if U.S. influence wanes.

Finally, the United States and NATO would also suffer a credibility crisis if the Taliban and al Qaeda can claim a military victory in Afghanistan. These factors are not independent variables – the lifespan of al Qaeda and Talibanism will be determined by the perceptions of populations of the region about the strength and righteousness of the militants. In 2001, the Taliban were not just weakened, but discredited. Similarly, the usefulness of NATO will be judged by the effectiveness and cohesiveness of the alliance in difficult circumstances.

Do we have an effective strategy to secure and protect those interests?

In March 2009, the Obama administration articulated a new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan that promises increased resources for both Afghanistan and Pakistan, intended to stabilize both countries and eliminate the threat of terrorist organizations with transnational ambitions from operating there. These increased resources include the full gamut of tools of American power, including military, intelligence, diplomatic, assistance, and private sector resources. Principle questions about these efforts concern the method, scale, and focus of these inputs.

"Afghanistan Policy at the Crossroads"
Testimony of J Alexander Thier, U.S. Institute of Peace

I believe this strategy, which is not fundamentally a narrow counter-terrorism strategy, is sound in theory. Stabilization requires simultaneously addressing security, governance and the rule of law, and economic development. In the current context, where a robust insurgency is challenging Afghan state authority around the country, we need the tools to protect the Afghan population while assisting the Afghans to build the foundation of a sustainable state-society relationship. Afghan leadership in this effort is not only important, it is necessary. Without a sound, effective, and legitimate Afghan partner driving the process – and absorbing the costs – there is no chance of success.

In practice, creating a viable, legitimate government out of the ashes of decades of conflict is a low-probability undertaking, even in the best of circumstances. Everything can, and will, go wrong. Internationals will do too much, crowding out indigenous initiative, or too little, leaving the green shoots of renewal to whither. International troops will be seen as aggressive occupiers, or as ineffectual and value-neutral, failing to contain spoilers. A strong domestic leader will rile factional, ethnic, or sectarian divisions and a weak one will fail to unify in divisive times. A failure to deal with past abuses by powerful actors will undermine the possibility for reconciliation in society, or digging up the past will prevent the possibility for a stable political settlement. Indeed, every one of these charges has been made in Afghanistan in the last eight years.

Meanwhile, this strategy is being rolled-out in a year of deep uncertainty in the region and in U.S. policy. This uncertainty, on top of four years of deterioration in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, is creating a crisis of confidence among Afghans, Americans, and other troop contributing nations. This lack of confidence extends to questions of the competence and legitimacy of the Afghan government; whether the U.S. and the international community have the right overall strategy in Afghanistan; whether we can implement this strategy successfully; and whether we are going to remain in Afghanistan until our strategic objectives are met.

This crisis of confidence has caused many, including some Congressional leaders and high-level administration officials, to ask whether we should abandon the

stabilization effort and instead focus more narrowly on destroying al Qaeda cells, mostly located in Pakistan. It is a deceptively attractive proposition: we do less and spend less to accomplish more. However, I think this perspective grossly underestimates the true threats to the United States posed by instability in the region, and grossly overestimates the ease of implementing an effective counter-terror strategy in the absence of a strong ground presence and reliable partners.

Do we have the tools, resources, and partnerships in place to implement that strategy?

In other words, even if we want to, can we stabilize Afghanistan? This is the most difficult question to answer. In 2001, the answer seemed clearly to be yes, if we made the necessary commitment. The Taliban, never popular with the majority of Afghans, collapsed rapidly, rejected even in their strongest bases of support. Dozens of nations offered material support and peacekeeping troops, and Afghan faction leaders were successfully induced to sign on to an uneasy but fair agreement that would govern a transition to stability.

But serious resources, including troops, aid, capacity building efforts, and political attention were lacking. In early 2002, there were 10,000 international forces in Afghanistan. Now there are in excess of 100,000. U.S. spending on the creation of a new Afghan National Army and Police – a centerpiece of our strategy from the start – was $191 million in 2002. The 2010 request is $7.5 billion.

At the same time, the Afghan government has not fulfilled its promise. No government that is unable to provide security to its population, and which is seen as corrupt and unjust, will be legitimate in the eyes of the population. It is this illegitimacy that has driven Afghans away from the government, and emboldened the insurgency. It is not so much that Afghans – even in the rural Pashtun heartland – have begun supporting the Taliban again, but that they are rejecting the government and are unwilling to bear risks to support it. The egregious fraud perpetrated in the August 2009 elections only serves to reinforce this cycle.

Thus, the focus of our efforts to stabilize Afghanistan should not be exclusively, or even primarily, military. Instead, the real key to success in Afghanistan will be

to reinvigorate critical efforts to promote Afghan leadership and capacity at all levels of society while combating the culture of impunity that is undermining the entire effort.

After eight years, even a fully resourced strategy is not guaranteed to succeed. Illicit power structures, including warlords, narco-mafias and other criminal networks have become entrenched and intertwined with corrupt government officials. Political patronage, at the heart of the recent election fraud, is more powerful than those promoting reform. And our own record of delivering effective assistance programs does not always inspire confidence. A fraction of each dollar allocated actually makes it to the end user, and sometimes even then fails to have the desired impact. Positions funded to train Afghan police go unfilled, and some civilians sent out to mentor senior Afghans are far less qualified than those they are sent to assist.

To overcome these challenges, and our own limitations, we must do four things with our Afghan partners to rebalance our efforts: 1) radically prioritize what we want to accomplish; 2) address the culture of impunity and improve governance; 3) decentralize our efforts to reach the Afghan people; and 4) improve international coordination and effectiveness.

Prioritize: For too long we have been doing many things poorly instead of a few things well. In this critical year, it is essential to simultaneously scale back our objectives and intensify our resources. The U.S. and its partners should focus on security, governance and the rule of law, and delivery of basic economic development with a strong emphasis on agriculture.

Address Impunity and Improve Governance: Without a credible and legitimate Afghan partner, we cannot succeed no matter how significant the investment. The U.S. must act aggressively with its Afghan partners in the lead to break the cycle of impunity and corruption that is dragging all sides down and providing a hospitable environment for the insurgency. A few key steps should be taken immediately after the election to set a clear tone for the next Afghan government. First, the Afghan President should make a major speech indicating zero tolerance for corruption and criminality. Second, this demonstration of leadership should

be accompanied by the empowerment of an anti-corruption and serious crimes task force, independent of the government agencies it may be investigating. The international community must devote intelligence and investigative support, as well as the manpower to support dangerous raids. In the first few months, several high profile cases including the removal and/or prosecution of officials engaged in criminality, including government officials, should be highly publicized. The U.S. should approach this mission with the same vigor as other key elements of the counter-insurgency campaign. Finally, the U.S. must put real effort into strengthening Afghan institutions that will be responsible for these matters over the long haul, giving them the capacity and tools they need to lead.

Decentralize: A top-down, Kabul-centric strategy to address governance and economic development is mismatched for Afghanistan, one of the most highly decentralized societies in the world. The international community and the Afghan government must engage the capacity of the broader Afghan society, making them the engine of progress rather than unwilling subjects of rapid change. The new formula is one where the central government continues to ensure security and justice on the national level and uses its position to channel international assistance to promote good governance and development at the community level.

Improve Aid Effectiveness: The U.S. must use its aid to leverage positive change, and must closely coordinate these efforts with international allies. This should include not just information sharing, but serious operational planning with Afghan government and allied officials. One critical point of leverage is to channel more aid through Afghan government institutions with stringent accountability mechanisms such as "dual key" trust funds that enable Afghan initiative while retaining oversight of spending. It is also essential to move spending to the provincial and local level, to build capacity of sub-national institutions and put more control over development resources into the hands of the recipients.

"Afghanistan Policy at the Crossroads"
Testimony of J Alexander Thier, U.S. Institute of Peace

Is it worth the effort and investment?

All things considered, is the continuation, or even expansion, of the American engagement in Afghanistan worth the investment?

I believe that answer is yes. The Afghan people, and those who have lived and worked among the Afghans, have not given up hope for a peaceful Afghanistan. In every part of the country there are Afghans risking their lives to educate and vaccinate children, to monitor elections and investigate war crimes, to grow food for their communities. They are not helpless without us, but they rely on us for the promise of a better future – a promise we have made repeatedly over the last eight years.

I understand that remaining committed to the stabilization of Afghanistan is not easy. It will be costly, in lives and taxpayer dollars. It is a challenging mission, in every way. Yet the alternatives, when examined honestly, are unbearably bleak. It is hard for me to imagine watching the Taliban's triumphant return to Kandahar, or Kabul – sending Afghanistan back to the dark days of forced illiteracy for girls and public stonings. Are we prepared to witness Afghanistan's women parliamentarians fleeing the country and thousands of our colleagues going into exile or face the consequences of having collaborated with the Americans? Will we stand by and observe the abandonment of hope as the next phase of the civil war begins and all our effort is swept away? And if future terror attacks are traced back to the Afghanistan-Pakistan border, or Pakistani nuclear materials are stolen, how will we respond if asked: did we do everything we could to prevent it?

Chairman BERMAN. Thank you.
And Dr. Kagan.

STATEMENT OF FREDERICK W. KAGAN, PH.D., RESIDENT SCHOLAR, AMERICAN ENTERPRISE INSTITUTE

Mr. KAGAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member, members of the committee. Thank you for holding this hearing.

I want to just start by——

Chairman BERMAN. Pull the microphone just a little closer.

Mr. KAGAN. Sorry. How is that?

I want to start by noting the one good thing about this debate is that it has not been a partisan debate in this town. And I think that stands in more contrast to the nature of the debate that we had over the Iraq war, which was unfortunately toxic because of its partisan nature.

Here, I think that we have an effort collectively really among people who disagree to come to some general understanding of the problem, and I think that it is a very healthy development in our discussion of strategy.

I agree with a great deal of what—actually, almost all of what my colleagues said. And what I would like to do is, first of all—Mr. Chairman was kind enough to mention my participation in the initial assessment group—to say that although I was honored to serve as a member of that group, I am not speaking for General McChrystal, I am not channeling General McChrystal, I am not leaking on behalf of General McChrystal, I haven't spoken to General McChrystal about this. These are my own thoughts.

Having said that——

Chairman BERMAN. In other words, this is General McChrystal's testimony?

Mr. KAGAN. Right. Oh, well, I see that disclaimer didn't work.

Having said all of that, what I am actually going to do is read a bunch of things from the actual assessment that was leaked by the Washington Post and a couple of other recent studies and pieces, because I think that we have really—it is a dense document, the assessment is. It is a very complicated. Afghanistan will give you a headache if you think about it for 30 seconds. And a lot of press reports have highlighted or asserted things about the assessment that I don't think accurately reflect what General McChrystal is trying to do, even apart from the fact that what is publicly available is a redacted draft. So forgive me while I read a few sections from it to highlight some of the key aspects of this strategy.

First of all, under "Objectives," if you ask, What does General McChrystal think that his objectives are? he lays them out very clearly. President Obama's strategy to disrupt, dismantle and eventually defeat al-Qaeda and prevent their return to Afghanistan has laid out a clear path of what we must do. That is the objective that General McChrystal is trying to achieve, and I don't see in this document a mission statement or objective other than that, except for the ISAF mission statement. Because General McChrystal is a NATO commander, and NATO has given ISAF a mandate and the mission is,

> "ISAF, in support of the Government of Afghanistan, conducts operations in Afghanistan to reduce the capability and will of the insurgency, support the growth and capacity and capability of the Afghan national security forces and facilitate improvements in governance and socioeconomic development in order to provide a secure environment for sustainable security that is observable to the population."

General McChrystal adds,

> "Accomplishing this mission requires defeating the insurgency, which this paper describes as a condition where the insurgency no longer threatens the viability of the State. The Government of Afghanistan must sufficiently control its territory to support regional stability and prevent its use for international terrorism."

Those are the objectives at which this strategy aims, at least according to this assessment document and what General McChrystal has said. And I think that accusations or assertions that this somehow really is an attempt to build Valhalla in South Asia and has gotten that he has gone off the reservation and moved away from the President's mandate are unfounded.

I think it is important to understand the degree to which General McChrystal himself highlights the need to get Afghan forces into this fight and turn this fight over to Afghan forces as quickly as possible. He says,

> "The objective is the will of the people. The Afghans must ultimately defeat the insurgency. We cannot succeed without significantly improved unity of effort, and protecting the people means shielding them from all the threats. Ideally, the AMSF must lead this fight, but they will not have enough capability in the near term, given the insurgency's growth rate. In the interim, coalition forces must provide a bridge capability to protect critical segments of the population. The status quo will lead to failure if we wait for the AMSF to grow."

I believe this is an assessment that was based on a large amount of staff work that was done within the Intelligence Community, within Kabul, with CSTC–A, which runs—the training command that oversees the Afghan forces and with our commanders on the ground. I believe that it is a correct assessment.

I think that General McChrystal is making it clear, and he has made it clear repeatedly, that he does not desire or intend to have American forces waging this war indefinitely into the future; and he does support the notion of transitioning responsibility for the conflict to the Afghan security forces as rapidly as it is possible. But his assessment is, it is not now possible to do that in the circumstances as they exist.

Speaking to the question of al-Qaeda's involvement, which I think is important because it comes up periodically, the assessment addresses the issue and says,

> "Al-Qaeda and associated movements based in Pakistan channel foreign fighters, suicide bombers and technical assistance into Afghanistan and offer ideological motivation, training and financial support. Al-Qaeda's links with the Haqqani network,

> which is an element of the Taliban, have grown, suggesting that expanded Haqqani control could create a favorable environment for al-Qaeda and associated movements to reestablish safe havens in Afghanistan."

There are people who have made arguments that a return of the Taliban government would not, in fact, lead to a return to al-Qaeda. But I have to say, looking at the evidence, there is a real danger in cherry-picking intelligence in order to support an assertion like that, because I believe that the mass of the evidence suggests otherwise, even if people can isolate individual instances that would seem to say so.

It is also important to recognize that the assessment was developed on the assumption that the elections would be fraudulent, at least to some considerable degree. And in the assessment it notes, "The recent presidential and provincial council elections were far from perfect and the credibility of the election results remains an open question."

I think it no longer is an open question. This clearly was a fraudulent process that has harmed the legitimacy of the government. But that was an element that I believe was factored into the assessment that General McChrystal has produced, by which I mean it is not a new development which would justify or require necessarily rethinking the entire approach or starting over.

The points about prioritization of effort that my colleagues have made and many other people have made are very well taken. ISAF strategy previously and the strategy of the international aid community had really been very much spreading forces and resources more or less at random around the country, vaguely trying to tie them to population centers but without clearly articulating why any particular area was more important than any other particular area.

The strategy that General McChrystal is working on is designed specifically to address that precise problem, that until you have identified which areas really matter and what you need to do about them, you can't come up with any meaningful assessment of resources that is anything other than infinity.

So, to read a couple of sections from the report:

> "ISAF's operations will focus first on gaining the initiative and reversing the momentum of the insurgency. ISAF will prioritize available resources to those critical areas where the population is most threatened. ISAF cannot be strong everywhere. ISAF must focus its full range of civilian and military resources where they will have the greatest effect on the people. This will generally be in those specific geographic areas that represent key terrain. ISAF will initially focus on critical high population areas that are contested or controlled by insurgents, not because the enemy is present, but because it is here that the population is threatened by the insurgency.
>
> "Based on current assessments, ISAF prioritizes efforts in Afghanistan into three categories to guide the allocation of resources."

What follows is a section that has been redacted, quite appropriately, because we don't need to tell the enemy exactly how we

are going to be prioritizing our efforts. But this was the beginning of a clear statement of the prioritization of effort within the country to focus on the areas that matter rather than attempting to deal with every problem everywhere.

General McChrystal also noted in his assessment something else that is very important, which is that we are not going to solve this entire problem all at once. And we have to recognize that it will develop over phases. He says:

> "We face both a short- and a long-term fight. The long-term fight will require patience and commitment, but I believe the short-term fight will be decisive. Failure to gain the initiative and reverse insurgent momentum in the near term, next 12 months, while Afghan security capacity matures, risks an outcome where defeating the insurgency is no longer possible."

I agree with that assessment. I do believe that we are at this moment losing the war in Afghanistan. I believe that if we do not send sufficient forces to reverse the insurgency's momentum, the war will be lost long before there is any prospect of bringing Afghan forces or local security forces to bear on the problem.

General McChrystal also noted: Our campaign in Afghanistan has been historically under resourced and remains so today. Success will require a discrete jump to gain the initiative, demonstrate progress in the short term, and secure long-term support.

And here he is referring also to the psychological effect, I believe, of the commitment of a significant, potentially decisive amount of U.S. force rather than what looks like a grudging parceling out and incremental approach of U.S. forces that will allow the enemy to believe that successful enemy operations can deter the U.S. from sending the next force packet. I believe that was important in Iraq, and it is important here.

And I want to highlight this culture of poverty. All of a sudden we have gone from a situation where everyone who has been to Afghanistan has seen how desperately poor that theater is in terms of resources, how hard it is to move around, how you have—I certainly noticed this—how you have majors and lieutenant colonels working on your travel arrangements instead of specialists and sergeants, because there aren't enough specialists and sergeants to go around. The way that that organization is run, it is church rat poor, and it has been for a long time. And I think that we really need to keep that in mind as we think about the prospect of nickel and diming that command over troop requests. Because this isn't Iraq, this isn't a highly developed theater with lots of capabilities and lots of things, lots of people lying around not doing anything. Everyone in Afghanistan is working five jobs. It would be nice if we could get them down to working four jobs.

I would like to just point out quickly that the British Prime Minister, of course, has now laid out his strategy, and he has already committed to the counterinsurgency approach and made very clear that Britain's objective is to defeat the insurgency by isolating and eliminating the leadership.

I think we need to think about the alliance consequences of choosing another strategy. Those of you who have read Dexter Filkins' recent article in the New York Times magazine, you will

find some very useful insight into McChrystal's thinking also about the role of counterterrorism. He says killing insurgents in Iraq worked there only because it was part of a much larger effort to not only defeat the insurgency but also to build an Iraqi state that could stand on its own. He noted if we are good here, it will have an effect on Pakistan; but if we fail here, Pakistan will not be able to solve their problems, which I also believe is true.

And there were three quotes that Dexter Filkins reported from locals, that echoed with me very much from conversations that I had had with many Iraqis when we were discussing the surge, or when we were implementing the surge early on in 2007. One of the Afghans said, "You guys, you come to help and then you leave. The Afghan people are not 100 percent sure that you are going to stay. They are not sure they won't have their throats cut if they tell the Americans where a bomb is."

Separately, an old man with a long beard stepped forward. "We are afraid you are going to leave this place after a few months," the old man said, "and the Taliban will take their revenge."

Lastly, "Everyone in Garmsir sees that you are living in tents, and they know that you are going to be leaving soon. You need to build something permanent, a building, because your job here is going to take years. Only then will people be persuaded that you are going to stay."

We heard many similar comments in Iraq. If you want to get local people to fight for you, you have to persuade them that you will be there for them.

Which leads me to my last point, which is a look, a brief look at the Kerry-Lugar bill, which is now so much in debate in Pakistan, from a different perspective. I think that the language that is in that bill requiring Pakistan to comply and requiring our agencies to report on Pakistani compliance, which is really what the language is with our desires, is perfectly reasonable and appropriate. And I think we have got ourselves caught in the middle of a Pakistani political firestorm that has little to do with the specific language in the bill.

But I would like to focus on something else in that bill. The following sentences are in that piece of legislation:

> "The U.S. intends to work with Pakistan to strengthen Pakistan's counterinsurgency and counterterrorism strategy to help prevent any territory of Pakistan from being used as a base or conduit for terrorist attacks in Pakistan or elsewhere.
>
> "Under the 'security assistance' title, the purpose of assistance under this title is to work in close cooperation with the Government of Pakistan to coordinate action against extremist and terrorist targets. Pakistan has made progress on matters such as preventing al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and associated terrorist groups such as Lashkar-e-taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed from operating in territory of Pakistan, including carrying out cross-border attacks into neighboring countries."

I am sorry, we have to certify that it has done that.

> "The President shall develop a comprehensive interagency regional security strategy to eliminate terrorist threats and close safe havens in Pakistan, including by working with the

> Government of Pakistan and other relevant governments and organizations in the region and elsewhere to best implement effective counterinsurgency and counterterrorism efforts in and near the border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan, including the FATA, the NWFP, parts of Baluchistan, and parts of Punjab."

And, lastly,

> "Agencies are obliged to provide an evaluation of efforts undertaken by the Government of Pakistan to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qaeda, the Taliban, and other extremist and terrorist groups in the FATA and settled areas, eliminate the safe havens of such forces in Pakistan, prevent attacks into neighboring countries."

I would ask: How can we insist that the Pakistanis conduct operations like that while we say that we are not going to do the same things on the Afghan side of the border which is under our security responsibility and directly impacts their ability to do those things?

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Kagan follows:]

American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research

Prepared Statement of Frederick W. Kagan,

Resident Scholar and Director of the Critical Threats Program,

American Enterprise Institute

House Foreign Affairs Committee

"Afghanistan Policy at the Crossroads"
October 15, 2009

Frederick W. Kagan /American Enterprise Institute / FKagan@aei.org

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"To defeat an enemy that heeds no borders or laws of war, we must recognize the fundamental connection between the future of Afghanistan and Pakistan--which is why I've appointed Ambassador Richard Holbrooke . . . to serve as Special Representative for both countries." That "fundamental connection" between Afghanistan and Pakistan was one of the important principles President Obama laid out in his March 27, 2009, speech announcing his policy in South Asia. It reflected a common criticism of the Bush policy in Afghanistan, which was often castigated as insufficiently "regional." It also reflected reality: The war against al Qaeda and its affiliates is a two-front conflict that must be fought on both sides of the Durand Line.

Now, however, some of the most vocal supporters of the regional approach are considering--or even advocating--a return to its antithesis, a purely counterterrorism (CT) strategy in Afghanistan. Such a reversion, based on the erroneous assumption that a collapsing Afghanistan would not derail efforts to dismantle terrorist groups in Pakistan, is bound to fail.

Recent discussions of the "CT option" have tended to be sterile, clinical, and removed from the complexity of the region--the opposite of the coherence with which the administration had previously sought to address the problem. In reality, any "CT option" will likely have to be executed against the backdrop of state collapse and civil war in Afghanistan, spiraling extremism and loss of will in Pakistan, and floods of refugees. These conditions would benefit al Qaeda greatly by creating an expanding area of chaos, an environment in which al Qaeda thrives. They would also make the collection of intelligence and the accurate targeting of terrorists extremely difficult.

If the United States should adopt a small-footprint counterterrorism strategy, Afghanistan would descend again into civil war. The Taliban group headed by Mullah Omar and operating in southern Afghanistan (including especially Helmand, Kandahar, and Oruzgan Provinces) is well positioned to take control of that area upon the withdrawal of American and allied combat forces. The remaining Afghan security forces would be unable to resist a Taliban offensive. They would be defeated and would disintegrate. The fear of renewed Taliban assaults would mobilize the Tajiks, Uzbeks, and Hazaras in northern and central Afghanistan. The Taliban itself would certainly drive on Herat and Kabul, leading to war with northern militias. This conflict would collapse the Afghan state, mobilize the Afghan population, and cause many Afghans to flee into Pakistan and Iran.

Within Pakistan, the U.S. reversion to a counterterrorism strategy (from the counterinsurgency strategy for which Obama reaffirmed his support as recently as August) would disrupt the delicate balance that has made possible recent Pakistani progress against internal foes and al Qaeda.

Pakistani president Asif Ali Zardari, army chief of staff General Ashfaq Kayani, and others who have supported Pakistani operations against the Taliban are facing an entrenched resistance within the military and among retired officers. This resistance stems from the decades-long relationships nurtured between the Taliban and Pakistan,

which started during the war to expel the Soviet Army. Advocates within Pakistan of continuing to support the Taliban argue that the United States will abandon Afghanistan as it did in 1989, creating chaos that only the Taliban will be able to fill in a manner that suits Pakistan.

Zardari and Kayani have been able to overcome this internal resistance sufficiently to mount major operations against Pakistani Taliban groups, in part because the rhetoric and actions of the Obama administration to date have seemed to prove the Taliban advocates wrong. The announcement of the withdrawal of U.S. combat forces would prove them right. Pakistani operations against their own insurgents--as well as against al Qaeda, which lives among those insurgents--would probably grind to a halt as Pakistan worked to reposition itself in support of a revived Taliban government in Afghanistan. And a renewed stream of Afghan refugees would likely overwhelm the Pakistani government and military, rendering coherent operations against insurgents and terrorists difficult or impossible.

The collapse of Pakistan, or even the revival of an aggressive and successful Islamist movement there, would be a calamity for the region and for the United States. It would significantly increase the risk that al Qaeda might obtain nuclear weapons from Pakistan's stockpile, as well as the risk that an Indo-Pakistani war might break out involving the use of nuclear weapons.

Not long ago, such a collapse seemed almost imminent. Islamist groups operating under the umbrella of the Tehrik-e Taliban-e Pakistan (TTP), led by Baitullah Mehsud until his recent death, had occupied areas in the Swat River Valley and elsewhere not far from Islamabad itself. Punjabi terrorists affiliated with the same group were launching attacks in the heart of metropolitan Pakistan.

Since then, Pakistani offensives in Swat, Waziristan, and elsewhere have rocked many of these groups back on their heels while rallying political support within Pakistan against the Taliban to an unprecedented degree. But these successes remain as fragile as the Pakistani state itself. The TTP and its allies are damaged but not defeated. Al Qaeda retains safe-havens along the Afghan border.

What if the United States did not withdraw the forces now in Afghanistan, but simply kept them at current levels while emphasizing both counterterrorism and the rapid expansion of the Afghan security forces? Within Afghanistan, the situation would continue to deteriorate. Neither the United States and NATO nor Afghan forces are now capable of defeating the Taliban in the south or east. At best, the recently arrived U.S. reinforcements in the south might be able to turn steady defeat into stalemate, but even that is unlikely.

The accelerated expansion of Afghan security forces, moreover, will be seriously hindered if we fail to deploy additional combat forces. As we discovered in Iraq, the fastest way to help indigenous forces grow in numbers and competence is to partner U.S. and allied units with them side by side in combat. Trainers and mentors are helpful--but their utility is multiplied many times when indigenous soldiers and officers have the opportunity to see what right looks like rather than simply being told about it. At the current troop levels, commanders have had to disperse Afghan and allied forces widely in an effort simply to cover important ground, without regard for partnering.

As a result, it is very likely that the insurgency will grow in size and strength in 2010 faster than Afghan security forces can be developed without the addition of significant numbers of American combat troops--which will likely lead to Afghan state failure and the consequences described above in Afghanistan and the region.

The Obama administration is not making this decision in a vacuum. Obama ran on a platform that made giving Afghanistan the resources it needed an overriding American priority. President Obama has repeated that commitment many times. He appointed a new commander to execute the policy he enunciated in his March 27 speech, in which he noted: "To focus on the greatest threat to our people, America must no longer deny resources to Afghanistan because of the war in Iraq." If he now rejects the request of his new commander for forces, his decision will be seen as the abandonment of the president's own commitment to the conflict.

In that case, no amount of rhetorical flourish is likely to persuade Afghans, Pakistanis, or anyone else otherwise. A president who overrules the apparently unanimous recommendation of his senior generals and admirals that he make good the resource shortfalls he himself called unacceptable can hardly convince others he is determined to succeed in Afghanistan. And if the United States is not determined to succeed, then, in the language of the region, it is getting ready to cut and run, whatever the president and his advisers may think or say.

That is a policy that will indeed have regional effects--extremely dangerous ones.

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Frederick W. Kagan /American Enterprise Institute / FKagan@aei.org

Chairman BERMAN. Thank you. Thank all of you. And I yield myself 5 minutes. And that 5 minutes, I must remind myself as well as my colleagues, includes my question and the witness' answers.

I would like to turn part of my rhetorical questions into real questions. Can we achieve these objectives without significant elements of the insurgency coming over to our side? And if we can't, is that a realistic prospect to persuading elements of the Taliban to lay down their arms?

And while Dr. Kagan has spoken to it, I would like to hear the other two witnesses address the alternative view that there is a counterterrorism strategy involving some combination of drone strikes and special forces that could be employed to achieve the goals of the mission that was outlined last March.

Mr. THIER. I think that the first question, the question of political reconciliation in Afghanistan and the opportunity to attempt to bring some of the insurgents over, is a critical and often overlooked component of how we need to approach the situation in Afghanistan. The U.N. and others put out these maps where they show the increasing insecurity creeping across the country, the sort of red tide of Taliban influence. What is most significant about that map is that 4 years ago, 3 years ago, many of those areas that are today dangerous were not. They were solidly pro-government, or at least were not causing problems.

And when we think about this question of reconciliation, we have to think about what it is over the last 4 or 5 years that has caused some people who were either pro-government or at least neutral to go over to the other side.

And I believe that a lot of the foundation of that is not about the strength of the Taliban or the attractiveness of the Taliban message, but the failure to present a government that appeals to the interests of those people; or, at worst, the presentation of a government that actively discourages those people through corruption.

And so I think that there is a lot that can be done maybe not to get Mullah Omar and Hamid Karzai on the deck of an aircraft carrier, but to get a lot of the mid-level insurgent commanders, people who have more recently begun the fight against the government, to come over to the other side. And I think that there are multiple-level inducements that can accomplish that.

If you look at the history of factional negotiation in Afghanistan, one of the things that people always point out is that Afghan factions routinely change sides. It happened constantly during the civil war. This is because ultimately people are looking for who they think the winner is going to be, and looking out for their self interest. And so I think that there is a lot that can be explored there.

The only caveat that I would add is that this does really have to be Afghan-led and supported by the international forces. But it has to be Afghan-led. And in order to do that, the Afghan Government needs to have a much more——

Chairman BERMAN. It wasn't in Iraq.

Mr. THIER. It wasn't in Iraq.

Chairman BERMAN. Afghan-led.

Mr. THIER. Or Iraqi-led. Right.

Chairman BERMAN. I mean Iraqi-led.

Mr. THIER. I believe in this case that the reason that it needs to be Afghanistan-led is that I don't think that there is an Anbar Awakening-like situation waiting to happen in Afghanistan. I think that these are micro-political disputes in different provinces that require intensive knowledge of what is going on in that area; of what tribe and what subtribe is aggrieved, and why; who is the governor? And I think that that is, frankly, something that the Afghans are much more capable of handling. We have to support that. But I think that it has to be Afghan-led.

Just to turn briefly to the question of the drones, I don't believe that without resources on the ground we are able to support a policy. The way that those policies function successfully is when you have people on the ground, local people who provide you intelligence and who support that policy. I think the idea that somehow we are going to get the insurgents when they pop their heads out of the cave or get al-Qaeda when they pop their heads out of the cave is misguided. You may be able to get a few people. You are also likely to kill civilians through that model.

I ultimately believe that if we are going to see stability in Afghanistan, we have to be there on the ground supporting the Afghan people and developing their capacities.

Chairman BERMAN. In the last 3 seconds that are left, do you have a different view? And if you do, I will come back on the second round. I withdraw the question because my time has expired, and we have—the bells have gone off. We have three votes on the floor. I will recognize the ranking member, then we will recess and come back.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. There have been reports that the administration is considering a counterterrorism strategy that would tolerate the Taliban returning to power in Afghanistan. The Washington Post noted that White House officials are suggesting that the United States treat the Taliban as Hezbollah in Lebanon. We have seen how well that has worked out.

If such an approach is adopted, do you believe that the Taliban would actually deny al-Qaeda sanctuary in Afghanistan? Do you not agree that acceptance of the Taliban further endangers U.S. interests and allies in the region?

Also, according to one of the theories reportedly being considered by the administration, only al-Qaeda poses a strategic threat to U.S. national interests but we must defeat an element of the Taliban to defeat al-Qaeda. How can we logically separate the two in terms of policy but not of strategy?

And finally, Dr. Kagan, could you elaborate on the role that Iran is playing in Afghanistan, particularly the Iran Revolutionary Guard Corps? And how is our approach to Iran's nuclear program affecting Iran's activities in Afghanistan? Thank you, gentlemen.

Mr. COLL. On the question of the Taliban's return to power and whether or not it is plausible to imagine that they would not accommodate al-Qaeda, my own judgment is it is not plausible to assess that they would keep al-Qaeda out. The Taliban, of course, are a diverse organization with diverse leadership groups, and so all Taliban assessments are not the same. But of the main leadership groupings, the Quetta Shura, led by Mullah Omar and his advisers

and colleagues, has a long record of collaboration with al-Qaeda. They certainly have diverse views about whether that collaboration has been good for them or not. And there is a debate within them that might create opportunities to separate one group of leaders from another. But there is no record that their judgment has been that they should break with al-Qaeda.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, Mr. Coll. Mr. Thier? Just take any one of those.

Mr. THIER. I will just respond briefly. Having watched the Taliban take over Afghanistan for the first time in the 1990s and watching how they grew together with al-Qaeda, they are genetically mixed with al-Qaeda as well as ideologically mixed with al-Qaeda. There have been intermarriages. It is very difficult for me to believe that suddenly the Taliban are going to become an anti-al-Qaeda force and prevent al-Qaeda from coming in. I don't think there is any evidence to support that. And we can't be certain that they will. But anybody who suggests otherwise I think is making it up.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you, sir. And Dr. Kagan, if you could address that and also the Iran issue.

Mr. KAGAN. Yes. I agree absolutely, not only is there no reason to think that the Taliban would resist al-Qaeda, there is no evidence I think that they would, nor is there any evidence at all that they could keep al-Qaeda——

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. So tolerating the Taliban in any form back in Afghanistan is not a good thing.

Mr. KAGAN. It would be almost certain to provide al-Qaeda with renewed safe havens that we would not be able to access.

The Hezbollah analogy is particularly bizarre, because Hezbollah is a part of the Lebanese Government, Hezbollah has accepted the political process in Lebanon. It is also a global international terrorist group that absolutely does pose a threat to American interests. And it is very strange when people say that it doesn't. But it is, actually when you think about it then in that way, in no way like the Taliban. So I don't understand the basis for that comparison.

Iran is playing a very complicated game in Afghanistan, as it does everywhere. It is backing all sides. It has been paying Karzai heavily. It paid Abdullah heavily. It would pay everyone. But it has been—and we have this from much open source reporting—it has been training Taliban fighters in camps in Iran. It has been facilitating the movement of weapons, some high-end weapons but not very many, and suicide bombers, into Afghanistan. It is my belief that the Iranians aim to develop a series of Taliban groups along their frontier that are loyal to Tehran in large part as a way of defending themselves against the coming collapse that they see, and, frankly, that I think they desire. Because the one thing that the Iranians make clear on a regular basis is that they want us out of Afghanistan as quickly as possible.

Ms. ROS-LEHTINEN. Thank you. And lacking administration officials, we have to look at news reports that say some inside the White House have cited Hezbollah, the armed Lebanese political movement, as an example of what the Taliban could become. And

they see Hezbollah as not a threat to the United States. So that is certainly frightening. Thank you.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentlelady has expired. The hearing will recess for probably 20 minutes.

[Recess.]

Chairman BERMAN. The committee will come to order. I recognize the gentleman from Massachusetts, Mr. Delahunt, for 5 minutes.

Mr. DELAHUNT. I thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just have some very simple questions. The strategy, as outlined in news accounts and from the public source or open source information that you have, what would the cost be? You know, we have been talking about whether the strategy makes sense. Can the three of you give just a rough estimate what the cost to the American taxpayers would be?

Mr. Coll, could we start with you? Take a wild guess.

Mr. COLL. You know, I am afraid, sir, I have no basis to make an accurate estimate of that sort.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Okay. Mr. Thier?

Mr. THIER. Obviously, it is probably useful to break down the civilian and military cost components. I believe that the military—and Fred may know better than I would—is probably roughly on the order of magnitude of about $60 billion a year, with increased forces.

Mr. DELAHUNT. So add in the component of the civilian side, reconstruction.

Mr. THIER. On the civilian side, I can say that the most significant part of our civilian side spending is on spending to build the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police. The administration's 2010 request for that spending is $7.5 billion. In addition to that, there is probably roughly another $1.5–2 billion for other civilian-side efforts.

So my guess would be that it is probably about 50–10, maybe $50 billion on the military side and $10 billion on the civilian side, based upon figures I have seen.

The Congressional Research Service actually puts out some excellent figures on aid totals to Afghanistan, going all the way back to the 1980s, that are very instructive.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you. Dr. Kagan?

Mr. KAGAN. Congressman, I am not an expert on defense budgeting, so I won't hazard a guess on the record. I am sorry.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Okay. I think clearly we are hearing from our constituents in terms of the costs of the wars, plural. We are obviously in the midst of a debate regarding health care reform. I have a memory that one of the advisers to President Bush made an estimate, I think it was Mr. Lindsey, of some $50 billion, and that obviously was inaccurate as it turned out to be. So I was interested to hear your opinions.

You know, we talk about, what does success look like? And Dr. Kagan, you indicated that you thought Iran had an interest in our failure, if you will. First of all, am I correct when I say that initially Iran was supportive in our efforts against the Taliban, and historically they have had issues with the Taliban?

Mr. KAGAN. Yes. Traditionally, Iran has been skeptical of elements of the Taliban, although Iran also supported——

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you. And just one final quick question. What would losing look like?

And I start with Dr. Coll. And by this I mean would it be to the advantage of the neighbors—Russia, Iran, Pakistan, all of the neighbors in the area—if all of a sudden there was an American withdrawal? Would they be pleased with that? Would they be happy with that, Dr. Coll?

Mr. COLL. Only Iran would find it in its interests to see the United States fail entirely in Afghanistan and leave the region. I think the other countries you listed would prefer a stable Afghanistan. Although some of them are ambivalent about that being associated with American strategic success, they nonetheless don't want chaos.

Mr. DELAHUNT. And yet this is despite the history between the Iranian Government and the Taliban. They would be pleased with a Taliban——

Mr. COLL. My own view is there is no unitary decision-maker in Iran. So there are aspects of the Iranian establishment, the civilian Foreign Ministry and so forth that have a view that the benefits of stability in the neighborhood outweigh the costs of American success. But I think most of the weight of Iranian decision-making has more recently concluded that in this period of encirclement and confrontation with the United States, they need—the benefits of American failure outweigh the costs of instability.

Mr. DELAHUNT. Thank you.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired. The gentleman from California, Mr. Rohrabacher is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. The cost estimate for sending a significant number of new United States combat troops into Afghanistan is between $30 billion and $40 billion. Now, after 9/11, when we only had 200 troops on the ground at the time that the Taliban were routed—but they did arrive with suitcases full of money as well as working to try to support those people in the Northern Alliance who just naturally would have been against the Taliban—why is it not a better strategy for us to buy the good will of the tribal and ethnic leaders of Afghanistan, which we could easily do with a minuscule amount of that $30–40 billion, provide villages with a local clinic, give local leaders enough money to help their local people? Why is that not a better strategy than spending $30–40 billion and sending in more combat troops so that the United States combat troops will do the fighting rather than the village militias and the tribal and ethnic leaders who have traditionally fought and won the battles in Afghanistan?

Mr. KAGAN. Congressman, the reason why I believe that the strategy that you are advocating would fail is because when you look at the conditions on the ground within Afghan society, within the villages that you are talking about, and the balance of power on the ground in a lot of these localities, this isn't 2001. The situation right now is that you have—you have now had 4, 5 or 6 years

in some places of consistent Taliban effort to establish its control and influence over the local population.

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Let me stop you there because I have limited time. No, they have had 5 or 6 years of incompetence and corruption from a national centralized government that we have forced upon Afghanistan. But if we would reach out to those villages—and I have been in Afghanistan at that level—if we would reach out to those tribal and ethnic leaders, those village leaders, rather than trying to force them to succumb to the orders of a corrupt government which they have not even voted for—the system that is set up in Afghanistan, they don't even vote for their local Congressmen there. They don't have local representatives. We have foisted this on them. And of course they don't like what we have to offer, and they are listening to the Taliban.

No, the Taliban haven't come in and coerced them. We disarmed them, we disarmed the Northern Alliance, and then we tried to force a local government and local governance type of society into a mold where a Federal system, where a national army and national controls were going to take precedent over local powers and local decision-making. We have lost because of that. Now, just sending 30–40,000 more troops in, American combat troops, isn't going to change their frame of mind.

Mr. KAGAN. Congressman, may I address that based on General McChrystal's assessment?

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Yes.

Mr. KAGAN. There is a large component of the assessment and, I believe, of the strategy that aims to do more or less precisely what you are advocating in the sense of going below the level of the central government, recognizing that provincial governors and district subgovernors are not representative of their people, working overtime to address that; because I do think we need to press the Afghan Government to make those leaders elective positions and address this, but in the meantime to use military—U.S. forces, military and civilian, to establish relations with local tribal elders, local leaders, understand their concerns, shield them when necessary from the predatory government, and in other circumstances shield them from the Taliban is a core pillar, I believe——

Mr. ROHRABACHER. Let me just note they can do the fighting. The Afghan people are the most courageous people and brave people I have ever met. They are capable of fighting. We disarmed the Northern Alliance after the Taliban were kicked out in order to establish this central system. We are paying the price for that right now. We need to rearm local leaders. And we need to buy their good will by rebuilding their country, which we promised to do and never did after the Russians, nor after they helped us defeat the Taliban.

I am giving a special order on this tonight for an hour if anybody would like to take a look at it. You are all invited. Thank you.

Chairman BERMAN. This portion of the gentleman's time is expired. The gentleman from California, Mr. Sherman, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. SHERMAN. Thank you. I wonder whether we have failed in Afghanistan. We have prevented Afghan territory from being used for another major attack against the United States, and we have

disrupted al-Qaeda there. What we failed to do is to achieve those objectives at a cost that the American people are willing to sustain over a long period of time. And as Mr. Rohrabacher points out, we achieved considerable success in Afghanistan; not the kind of total success that brought peace and security to every village, with, as he describes it, 400 men on the ground.

The question here is: Why Afghanistan? History, that is where al-Qaeda happened to be. History, we have spent 10 years there. Therefore, it is the most important place because that is where we have been. But putting aside history, why is Afghanistan more strategically important, more necessary in the war against international terror than Somalia, aside from its proximity to Pakistan? I will ask Mr. Coll.

Mr. COLL. I think all al-Qaeda sanctuaries are not created equal. The history of the relationship between al-Qaeda's leaders and principal international operators and the Pashtun Islamist militias along the Pakistan-Afghan border goes back 20 years; it is intimate; and indeed Haqqani, who is now one of the main Taliban faction leaders, provided the territory and the security where al-Qaeda organized its first training camps in 1988. So I would welcome the migration of al-Qaeda's leaders from that border area to Somalia or Yemen. I don't think that they would remain fugitives for very long in those places. So I do think that there is something very distinctive about this political military territory.

Mr. SHERMAN. But that is true of both sides of the Pakistan-Afghan border.

Mr. COLL. It is.

Mr. SHERMAN. Not drawing a distinction between Afghan Pashtuns and those in Pakistan.

Let me move on to the next question. Is it true that our local commanders are prohibited from cutting deals with local warlords, et cetera, and must at every political stage go through the Kabul government? Mr. Coll?

Mr. COLL. I don't know the answer to that.

Mr. SHERMAN. Okay. Why do we pay less money to Afghan soldiers than the Taliban pays to their soldiers? And what would be the effect if we doubled pay, which would be by far the cheapest thing we could possibly do of all the things we are considering doing in Afghanistan? Dr. Kagan?

Mr. KAGAN. Well, we could certainly increase the pay. We can recruit as large an Afghan Army as you want right now. The constraint on that has been the unwillingness, first, of the Bush administration, and then of this administration, to commit to larger end strength goals for that army. The problem is not that we can't find the troops for it.

Mr. SHERMAN. I am not even saying the army has to be larger. Right now we recruit them, we train them, they outbid us.

Mr. KAGAN. But we are only going to be dealing with the 134,000 people that we are talking about, whatever their salaries are.

Mr. SHERMAN. Yes. But I mean we recruit them, we train them, Taliban gets their services, we go recruit somebody else. It is like we are the farm system.

Mr. KAGAN. With respect, sir, that is not the way it works with the Afghan National Army. The Afghan Police are corrupt and in-

filtrated, but the Afghan National Army has been fighting with very little infiltration very effectively against the Taliban.

Mr. SHERMAN. And very little desertion?

Mr. KAGAN. Desertion rates are—I don't want to quote numbers off the top of my head. I would characterize them as reasonable in this kind of conflict.

Mr. SHERMAN. Can we achieve the nondestabilization of Pakistan and prevent Afghanistan from being a launching pad for attacks against the United States without achieving peace and security and prosperity throughout all of Afghanistan's provinces? I will ask for a very quick answer from all three witnesses.

Mr. THIER. I think the answer to that is I am not sure about all of Afghanistan's provinces, but fundamentally if the political balance in Afghanistan remains with the Taliban, then I think that it will be impossible for us to prevent the destabilization either of Afghanistan or, indeed, of Pakistan.

Mr. SHERMAN. I didn't even ask it. Obviously, if the Taliban—it looks like my time has expired.

Chairman BERMAN. Yes, it has. The gentleman's time has expired. And the gentleman from Texas, Mr. Paul, is recognized.

Mr. PAUL. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. It seems like we have had now a war going on for 8 years, into the 9th year, and from the discussion it looks like we are searching for a justification for it. What is the reason we are there? I think we got the cart before the horse. We have been fighting all this time, and it means that it isn't a management problem, it is a policy problem of how we got there, why we are there, and what we are doing. And besides, this type of debate about management, I can't imagine this type of debate going on in World War II. You know, we knew who enemy was, we declared war, the President said he is the Commander in Chief, told the Congress what he needed.

Now that isn't an argument for the Congress not paying attention, it is an argument against the way we go to war. And it looks like we have accepted this notion that perpetual war leads to perpetual peace. And we satisfy the military industrial complex and the special interests and all these motivations just to stay in war, endlessly.

But even these 8 years, I don't see where the success is. Men die, thousands of Afghans are displaced and die. It costs $0.25 trillion and we are still finding out what are we there for? Oh, if the Taliban takes over, who we used to get along with quite well, if they take over, all of a sudden al-Qaeda is going to be there and there is going to be another 9/11. This is making the assumption that 9/11 couldn't have occurred without these training camps in Afghanistan. Do you think those 19 guys went over there and did push-ups in those camps? There is no way. There is no way they were there doing those things.

The report when they studied 9/11 they said, well, there was a lot of planning going on in Germany, a lot of planning going on in Spain. And there were—15 of them were Afghans. I mean if somebody really wanted to, I will bet they could have talked the American people into bombing Saudi Arabia. I mean, 15 were Saudis. I imagine under those circumstances the American people and the

Congress could have been talked into bombing Saudi Arabia under those conditions.

So I just don't see how we can continue to do this and come up with any sensible policy, because we never challenge, we never question whether preemptive war is a good strategy. And this is what this is all about, preemptive war. Starting wars, saying it is preventative.

But this is a completely un-American approach to fighting wars, because under the original system, the people got behind the war, declared the war, knew who the enemy was, and we didn't come up with these strategies. Do we need 40,000 or 80,000 people? And who should we give the money to? Should we give it to this group?

Why don't we ever ask the question—and this will be the question that I will leave with you—why don't we as a Congress and the administration, the former administration as well as this one, why don't we ask the question, what is the motivation for somebody to attack us? And I don't think it is ever really asked, because I think there is a different answer than the assumption, oh, they hate us. They hate us for our freedoms and our wealth and this. And I don't believe that for a minute.

I think the people in Afghanistan, the large majority, no matter what the reports are from the administration, our puppet administration, most people want us out of there. They don't want us in Pakistan. The people in Pakistan don't want us there. People in Iraq don't want us there. It is occupation.

So my question is: Why is that never talked about or why is it dismissed so easily, if indeed you study and you find out that people who are willing to sacrifice their life to make a point—it is because we are seen as foreign occupiers, just as the Soviets were seen as foreign occupiers, just as we joined those individuals who wanted to throw out the foreign occupiers in the past.

And yet now we are. We learned nothing from history, both ancient history or even recent history. Why don't we pay more attention to the true motivations behind somebody who wants to commit suicide terrorism against us? Anybody care to answer?

Chairman BERMAN. In 20 seconds.

Mr. KAGAN. Congressman, in 20 seconds I can only tell you that some of us do pay a great deal of attention to what the ideology is that drives al-Qaeda and affiliated groups to try to attack us. It has been articulated in tremendous detail in multiple books. It goes beyond not liking us because of our wealth and a variety of other things, and it has to do with the struggle within Islam that they see us participating in, whether we are present there or not. It is a very, very sophisticated strategy. It is a very, very sophisticated ideology. And it is extremely clear on what their intentions are, and why.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired. The gentlelady from California, Ms. Lee, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Ms. LEE. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I see that I am not alone with my concern for an increase in troop level for Afghanistan. Mr. Rohrabacher, Mr. Paul and others are really, I think, laying out some of the same concerns that I have. So I am glad this is beginning to become bipartisanship.

Let me ask you—because I am clear that some believe that without a real credible and legitimate Afghan partner we really can't succeed. And we have also heard that we must turn things around within the next 12 months or face failure. So let me just ask you if that is realistic. Can we turn things around in terms of a level of reform within the Afghan Government within the short term? And is that enough to provide the Afghanistan people with a legitimate alternative to the Taliban?

And then secondly, I would like to ask—and any of the panelists can respond—about the poppy fields and the farmers. And in fact, is there enough focus on ensuring an alternative agricultural product and economic development strategy for farmers?

Mr. THIER. Let me take the first question, because I think it is very poignant. It was famously said about Vietnam that it was not a 10-year war but ten 1-year wars. And I think that when you look at the application of strategies to reform the Afghan Government and to create greater degrees of capacity and legitimacy, to think about those challenges in 1-year terms is quite dangerous, because this is very difficult and intensive work.

I have been working with the Afghan Government for the last 8 years on trying to reform the justice system and develop a new system of rule of law and the constitutional process. I think that the good news is that among the Afghans, there is a constituency for reform. There are a lot of people who very avidly want to improve their own capacity and to improve the capacity of the government and of society to deal with the challenges that they face.

But at the same time, even in the best of times in Afghanistan, which is one of the poorest countries in the world, that government administration was always weak and fairly underdeveloped. And I think that the response to your question is that we can do significant things in 1 year to improve the situation. We can't expect dramatic results in 1 year.

Eight years ago I was part of a group that met with State Department officials, United Nations officials, NATO officials, to talk about how to move forward in Afghanistan. And one of the recommendations that we had was to invest in a civil service academy, to invest in the training of Afghans so that 3, 4 years down the line, they would be able to take over the sorts of things that we were looking at the United Nations to do. Unfortunately, that academy still doesn't exist.

Now, we can lament the failures of the last 8 years, and it is important to recognize them, but we stand here today thinking about how to create a better future for Afghanistan, and it is still possible to invest in these things.

Ms. LEE. So does an increase of, say, 20, 30, 40,000 troops, do you see at the end of a year the progress had been made so that we can begin to exit out of Afghanistan?

Mr. THIER. I believe that apart from the troops, we need to focus much more intensively on this effort to create government accountability and capacity, particularly at the subnational level. And so my concern and the work that I have done is much more focused on how we do that and how we use the capacity that exists in Afghanistan toward our common ends. And so that is how I would answer it.

Ms. LEE. Dr. Kagan.

Mr. KAGAN. I would like to echo those concerns and say you have put your finger on a very important number of questions. And I think that something has to be stated very clearly here. The administration—you have a declassified version of General McChrystal's strategy basically. I am not aware that there is a declassified version or even a classified version of Ambassador Holbrooke's strategy or Ambassador Eikenberry's strategy or the Secretary of State's political strategy for dealing with this situation. And that is a gap. And we need to know what the administration's political strategy in this crisis is going to be.

Of course it is not in General McChrystal's plan, because it is not his remit to develop a political strategy. I believe that you can develop a political strategy. I believe this administration could do so. And I believe that doing so could be transformative, although probably not in a year.

But I think that as we challenge, as we get involved in this debate, the question of 40,000 or 80,000 troops and so forth is not really the question that we should be focusing on. General McChrystal has done his homework. This is what is required to do what he needs to do. What we need to see is the homework for the rest of the effort, which is the political strategy to go along with this.

Ms. LEE. Thank you. If I get a second round, I would like to get a response to the poppies.

Chairman BERMAN. Okay. Thank you. The time of the gentlelady has expired. The gentleman from Florida, Mr. Bilirakis.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Dr. Kagan, as a result of having been on the ground with General McChrystal in Afghanistan for the last several weeks, I know you have got particularly good insight as to the focus of the report.

Because there has been much said about nation building, often with negative connotation, I am wondering if you could share with us the difference between nation building and the counterinsurgency plan that has been articulated by General McChrystal in his report.

Mr. KAGAN. Absolutely. And you raise a key point there. The objective of General McChrystal's strategy is not to build up the nation of Afghanistan. The objective of General McChrystal's strategy is to defeat insurgent organizations linked with al-Qaeda in order to achieve the President's objectives and maintain regional stability. In order to conduct an effective counterinsurgency campaign, you have to address the problems of illegitimacy of the government that fuel insurgency. And it is important to note in the discussion in this town people have gotten a little confused. The legitimacy of the government is not an input into a counterinsurgency campaign. It is the output of a counterinsurgency campaign. If the government were seen as legitimate, you wouldn't have an insurgency.

So what an insurgency campaign has to do is to build a certain degree of legitimacy. Because if you want to ask the question, Could we prevent al-Qaeda and the Taliban from returning to Afghanistan without establishing any kind of stable or driven Afghan Government, the answer is sure. How many American troops do you want to keep there for how long?

If you actually want us to be able to leave Afghanistan at some point and leave it in a condition where it will not once again become a safe haven for terrorists and destabilize Pakistan, then you have to be looking at establishing some kind of government that has basic legitimacy. And that is the objective, that is what I think the objective should be of our strategy. And I think if you read the assessment, it is pretty clear that that is where General McChrystal is headed as well.

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Thank you. I have one more question. General McChrystal's report warned about India becoming too involved in Afghanistan, presumably because such involvement antagonizes Pakistan. And from the testimony we also know that Pakistani intelligence services still consider some Taliban groups to be an asset and that the ISI provides support to the Taliban.

At the same time, India would like to get more involved in the effort to stabilize Afghanistan. Like us, India sees the Taliban as an extremist threat that will undermine Afghanistan and the region. So what is the United States doing and what should we do about India's efforts to play a role in the Afghan stabilization effort?

Mr. COLL. I think that question points to the centrality of what Fred was saying earlier about the need for a really ambitious and creative and hardworking political strategy that encompasses these regional competitions as they play out in the war.

I think the specific answer is that there is a role for India in Afghanistan and supporting its stability. The problem is as much optics as substance. But it requires conditions in which the legitimate concerns of the Pakistani Government and Army about the presence of Indian forces in Afghanistan can be dealt with in a political context, in a diplomatic, negotiated context in which we pay attention to their concerns, but insist that they be resolved through peaceful negotiations, not through the support of proxy militias. And that is achievable. I think that was the reason why the administration brought the Presidents and the delegations from Pakistan and Afghanistan together in Washington earlier this year, tried to start a process that they hoped would build confidence and address this very question. But that has to be sustained. It has to be worked every day. It is very complicated. It is not easy. But it is where the heart of some of the structure of instability is located in this conflict.

Mr. THIER. If I can add to that, I think that it is important to have a historical perspective about Afghanistan. Afghanistan has not always been at war. And when it is at peace, it is because the regional competition that Steve alluded to becomes regional cooperation. And what we need to foster much more for Afghanistan is an environment of regional cooperation.

One of the reasons that Pakistan originally supported the creation of the Taliban was because they wanted to open the land route through Afghanistan to be able to trade with Central Asia, the Middle East and Europe, a route that had been closed for decades due to the presence of the Soviet Union.

Similarly, the Iranians and the Pakistanis, as well as the Indians, have a tremendous amount to gain from potential regional economic cooperation.

And so I think that if we think about the problem of regional competition in Afghanistan in a way that we can help to foster the ways that that becomes regional cooperation—and certainly the Indians play a key role in that—then everybody will benefit.

An example of that is the pipeline deal between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, Pakistan, and now India. It may not go forward, but it establishes the basis for potential regional cooperation which puts everybody in support of Afghan stability instead of putting everybody in support of proxies that cause Afghan instability.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired. The gentleman from Virginia, Mr. Connolly, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I am going to ask a series of questions and beg for concise answers. What, Mr. Coll—we will start with you—bottom line, what is and/or should be the United States objective in Afghanistan?

Mr. COLL. An Afghan Government that is stable enough to prevent coercive revolution by the Taliban and that is aligned with the American project of dismantling al-Qaeda.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Mr. Thier?

Mr. THIER. I like Steve's answer.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Dr. Kagan.

Mr. KAGAN. Works for me.

Mr. CONNOLLY. All right. Well, that sounds like a reasonable goal. But you are talking about a country that in terms of even a sense of national identity, literacy, the writ of a central government being able to go into remote parts of a very challenging geography—historically, you cited a previous era in which such a government arguably existed, but that is a long time ago, and an awful lot of history has intervened. It sounds to me like nonetheless—I was there in February—that sounds like a tall order. Is that an achievable objective within some kind of realistic time frame?

Mr. COLL. I believe it is. I believe that absent the momentum that the Taliban have gained in the last 18 months, as one of your colleagues pointed out earlier, that minimum condition has already been achieved by the international community in Afghanistan. It is a question of sustaining it and developing it in a way that doesn't require a large investment of international combat troops.

That is the question. Is that achievable in a reasonable time, a transition to an Afghan state and an Afghan security forces that can carry this forward? I believe it is. I believe there are risks in all directions. But the risks of not attempting it, not making those investments, are greater than the risks of undertaking it.

Mr. THIER. I believe that the Afghan state has to reflect Afghan society. There is no question that Afghanistan is capable of stability. And the way that they have achieved that in the past is through a condominium of having a weak but coherent central government that takes on certain tasks, attempts to establish a monopoly over violence, and does the big sorts of projects that can't be done at the local level, such as building major roads and those sorts of things.

At the same time, you have Afghan society that even through the years of war continued to orchestrate and generate its own capacity

to do small-scale work, to improve irrigation, to build schools and things like that.

And so simultaneously focusing on those bottom-up capacities and creating an Afghan Government that can do the big parts, I think is a formula for stability in Afghanistan.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Dr. Kagan?

Mr. KAGAN. In the interests of being concise, I will agree with both of my predecessors.

Mr. CONNOLLY. Okay. Let me then start with you on this follow-up question. Again, that all sounds good, but we now—let me give you a devil's advocate point of view. We now have a government that is delegitimized because of fraudulent elections. We have former U.S. Ambassadors and now former U.N. officials so claiming, whether right, wrong, or indifferent, the damage is done in the eyes of the international community and arguably for a lot of Afghans. You know, a stable Afghan Government, we don't have it right now, and we have got a central government that all too often in Afghanistan itself is seen as not much more than a plutocracy, you know. And when they show up, it is to shake you down, not to protect you.

And so it seems to me that given the current reality, the United States does not have a partner, a viable partner that would meet the conditions you all have laid out.

Dr. Kagan?

Mr. KAGAN. Running quickly through the points. I would say first of all, this Afghan Government was losing legitimacy long before the elections because it wasn't providing services to people and was seen as a plutocracy. The elections are data point in legitimacy for this government, but they were not dispositive to its legitimacy before and they won't be dispositive going forward. Afghan people will look to see what this government is doing. Is it now doing what it needs to do? Absolutely not. And we have to address that. There is reason to believe historically that we can do this because we did it in a parallel situation in Iraq where the problem was not so much plutocracy, although Lord knows there was that too.

The problem was you had officials in the Iraqi Government actively running death squads that were fueling the sectarian civil war. We were able to address that problem. And you don't have that going on anymore, which has allowed Iraq to move forward. I believe that a modification of that approach can succeed in Afghanistan if it is properly resourced both on the military side and on the civilian side.

Mr. COLL. One point very quickly. This election—the allegations of fraud are very serious. But things are not as bad as American discourse sometimes reflect. Consider the opposition leader. He has not thrown a rock through a single window, there is nobody in the streets, there is still a very pragmatic attitude in Kabul. They want an opportunity to negotiate their own way forward and their own reform package. And I think that is conceivable.

Mr. CONNOLLY. I thank the chair. Thank you all.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired. The gentleman from South Carolina, Mr. Wilson, is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. WILSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I would like to commend our three witnesses today. This is one of the best hearings I have been to in my 8 years here. It is remarkable because, Mr. Thier, as you pointed out, people are not making up facts. All three of you are being very candid. I have been here and heard made up facts. So thank you. In the context, I want to point out that I agree very much with President Barack Obama. He gave a speech to the veterans of foreign wars in Phoenix on August 17th, just virtually 2 months ago this year and he said but we must never forget this is not a war of choice. This is a war of necessity. Those who attacked America on 9/11 are plotting to do so again.

If left unchecked, the Taliban insurgency will mean an even larger safe-haven from which al-Qaeda would plot to kill more Americans. So this is not only a war worth fighting, this is fundamental to the defense of our people. President Barack Obama further stated, going forward, we will constantly adapt to our tactics to stay ahead of the enemy and give our troops the tools and equipment they need to succeed. And at every step of the way, we will assess our efforts to defeat al-Qaeda and its extremist allies and to help the Afghan and Pakistani people build the future they seek. And I just want it clear that I just think the President was right on point just 2 months ago virtually today.

I would like to thank Dr. Kagan for being here. He and his wife have been very brave to spend an extraordinary amount of time in Afghanistan. Your vision has proven correct and I appreciate it. I would like to ask you after months of insisting that the Taliban and al-Qaeda were interlocked, the administration now appears to be reversing its stand on the subject. Is it a false distinction to make up that we can separate the Taliban from al-Qaeda or that we can bribe Taliban militants as the President is said to be considering?

Mr. KAGAN. The Taliban and al-Qaeda are multiple groups. There is not one Taliban. There are multiple Taliban groups for that matter. But I think, as Steve pointed out, they are linked genetically as well as ideologically. And you can go back and read the discussion. There is an al-Qaeda and Afghanistan organization by the way. It is very small. It is not a major threat. But it did lay out very articulately several months ago exactly how it fits itself into the Taliban command structure within Afghanistan to fight against Americans.

No, I don't think that these groups can be separated from one another or bribed or anything in the context of an American withdrawal that they will paint as the most significant humiliation of American arms in half a century or longer and that will powerfully fuel their arguments for the inevitability of their success.

Mr. WILSON. And it is just so frustrating. We have been to hearings before where you would think that Taliban and al-Qaeda had membership cards with photo IDs and membership lists and they have regular conventions and meetings. Thank goodness you are here today. Thank you. Mr. Thier, I want to let you know The Institute of Peace—I have had the privilege of working with your organization in Iraq and in Afghanistan and it makes a difference. For you and Mr. Coll, we have taken steps to expand the Afghan national security forces to be self-reliant and laid the fight against

the insurgency. How do we measure the unit progress and activity? In doing so, how do we determine which units are successful or not?

Mr. THIER. Thank you. And I should say I thank the U.S. Congress for its support of the U.S. Institute of Peace. I think that our ability to assess the progress of the Afghan national Army and the Afghan national police should be based on performance. In other words, outcomes as opposed to outputs. We don't want to count the number of people that we have put through training programs. We want to see how effectively they are able to operate. In that sense, I think we have a good-news/bad-news story. On the army side, we have seen tremendous willingness of the Afghan military to fight cohesively. They are not independent yet, but some of the units are working toward that.

On the police side unfortunately we have the opposite. From the beginning of the creation of the Afghan national police, they were a problem force. And as they have grown, that hasn't improved. The U.S. Institute of Peace has a report out recently about the problem of police reform and I could go on longer if given the opportunity.

Mr. WILSON. And I would like to point out that it is so inspiring to me when I meet with the military officers, these are former mujahideen successful against the Soviets, General Wardak. And so I have great faith in their future. Thank you.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired. The gentlelady from California, Ms. Woolsey.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you to our wonderful panel. You know a lot more than many of us do, but we also have some places we want to probe. Earlier this year, along with Congresswoman Lee and many other members, I sent a letter to the White House asking for clarification on policies for Afghanistan. And today, sadly, many of the issues have yet to be resolved. We still lack a clear mission or timeline, the projected financial and human costs are unknown and the role of the U.N. and other international partners is undefined. The cost of indecision obviously is very high and we don't want to rush to judgment. But after 8 years, I don't think we are hardly rushing to anything in Afghanistan regarding policy. I would hope that somewhere in this policy discussion—and this is what I would like you—because I want to change this a little bit so we are not all asking exactly the same question.

I would like to discuss a little bit changing the investment we make and the efforts we are taking in Afghanistan from 80 percent military, 20 percent humanitarian and economical help to maybe reversing that. Your opinions, what would that do? I consider that smarter security. And where would we get if we still kept a presence but put most of our effort into humanitarian and economic help? And the help I believe the Afghan people really want. Start down here with Dr. Kagan.

Mr. KAGAN. What I would like to do is actually reframe the way you have established the dichotomy a little bit. Not so much in terms of funding, but in terms of effort. There is not a war in Afghanistan because Afghanistan is poor. This is not about poverty. That is not why they are fighting. And we are not going to develop

our way out of this war. In fact, unfortunately, that was actually a large part of the strategy after 2001. It was relatively peaceful and the development agencies came in and they did what development agencies do. And that did not prevent the resurgence of the Taliban despite their efforts and there was a lot of international money that went into that. It wasn't just American money. What Afghans are looking for is not so much development projects. What they are looking for is governance. What they are looking for is security first of all, rule of law, a justice system that is functional. Those are the things that they demand from their government that they are not getting. And we have not paid remotely enough attention to addressing those concerns over the last 8 years at any time. And I would submit that if we don't start paying a lot of attention—and I think General McChrystal understands this and the embassy understands this. But if we don't really start paying attention to that, then the military strategy by itself will not succeed.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Let us just go up the line and—okay?

Mr. COLL. I would agree with Fred's comments and just would emphasize that since 9/11, since 2001, since the fall of the Taliban, we have had some success with our military efforts and some success with our development efforts. But over time those investments have deteriorated because we failed to grapple with sustainable Afghan politics. And that is for Afghans, of course, to lead, but for us to support and recognize as central. Development cannot proceed in a roads and dams model in a country like Afghanistan. And now, especially after this election, there has got to be an extraordinary concentration on national reconciliation and reintegration projects that are Afghan defined but that are primarily political.

If we go back to building roads and dams and define our economic and humanitarian support that way, we are just going to repeat the cycle that led us to this intersection.

Ms. WOOLSEY. Well, Mr. Thier, maybe you can add a dimension to this. Can we force good governments through the military? I mean, isn't there a smarter way to do this?

Mr. THIER. I think the answer is no. I agree very much with the premise of your question. And I think even counterinsurgency says that 80 percent of the challenge should be a civilian and not a military challenge. I think one of the fundamental problems that the United States faces is that we have so many resources on the military side and yet our civilian capacity to undertake these challenges at USAID and in the State Department are far under resourced. And so I do think we need to rebalance our efforts if we are going to be more effective on the civilian side. And I think that is absolutely right because ultimately these questions of security don't revolve around guns but revolve around broader issues.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentlelady has expired. The gentleman from Nebraska, Mr. Fortenberry is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding this hearing. I believe this hearing is actually a forerunner to a much larger and aggressive debate that actually should be happening right now in Congress. And I thank you, gentlemen, for appearing today. Mr. Coll, you stated that the stability of Pakistan is key to the stability of Afghanistan. Dr. Kagan, you reversed it or empha-

sized the stability of Afghanistan actually key to the stability of Pakistan. So clearly, we have got two essential variables in this geopolitical equation. What is the likelihood that those will converge in a timely manner for us to reach these objectives with minimum loss of life and with ultimately a sustainable Afghani society and a sustainable Pakistani society?

The second question I am going to have after this one is what is the international resolve here. This is not a U.S. problem alone. You hear a few weeks ago several—I think it was 6—Italian soldiers were tragically killed and I think it was the prime minister who said it is time to come home. You have heard some rumors perhaps that the Canadians are under reconsideration here. The British are sending in 500 additional troops. That is nice. But we are looking at the potential of 40,000 more. I want your perspective on what is the international community's resolve and why there continues to be this disproportionate burden sharing by the United States in light of what is at stake for stabilization not only in that arena, but really for the future of the stabilization of not just Afghanistan, but the entire international community?

Mr. KAGAN. I would like to just start by highlighting an interesting fact about the moment in history that we stand at right now from the standpoint of a war that is a two-front war that occurs on both sides of the Duran Line. Pakistan has made remarkable progress in its fight against its own internal Taliban groups which are connected in complicated ways even though they are separate from the Taliban groups that we are fighting. And it is really—over the last 8 months, when you look at the operations that the Pakistan military has conducted in Bajaur and Mamund areas in the northern FATA in Swat, clearing the TTP out of there and the TNSM out of there. Now they appear to be mobilizing for a major clearing operation in South Waziristan.

The enemy in that area has only one place to go and that is Afghanistan. And they will find American forces and Afghan forces on the other side of the border able to address any possibility they might have of establishing a real safe-haven where the Pakistanis can get at them. Your question is very timely. But the short answer is, if you were going to pick any time over the last 8 years to say, well, this is hopeless, the Pakistanis won't do their part and we need to just leave, this would be exactly the wrong moment to do it. Because the last thing we want to do right now is undercut the resolve of the Pakistani Government to go after an organization that fundamentally threatens its stability and is linked with organizations that aim at us and threaten the stability of the entire region right as they are gearing up to go after it and when they need our help to do it.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Thank you. Mr. Coll, did you want to respond to that? Plus the other question is the international community's resolve in this regard.

Mr. COLL. I agree with what Fred says and I would only add there is a discourse underway among Pakistani elites in their constitutional system about how to fashion their national security doctrine and define their interests. They created the Frankenstein monster of the Taliban in substantial respects. They are now having a debate about whether they should unplug that machine and

try to normalize relations with India, modernize, join the international community. If they are confronted with a long-running Taliban insurgency in both their own country and across the board in Pakistan, they are unlikely to make the choices that I think are in their own best interest, but also in ours. So I do think it is a critical time and I do believe that a stable Afghanistan is a necessary component of that evolution.

International resolve has been sort of zigzagging since 2001. The pattern is familiar. Anglo American countries like Canada have taken more casualties per capita than at any other conflict in their history since Korea, I think, is correct in Canada's case. The Afghan war looms very large in these countries. And I think in the case of the Canadians and the Australians and the Brits, we should be as impressed by their resolve as we are concerned about sort of the politics of easy defeatism in some other capitals.

I do think NATO as an institution will recognize—recognizes that its future and its interests lie in persistence if Americans are leading and that if we do lead, we will find an adequate array of partners to get through this next 3 or 4 years.

Mr. FORTENBERRY. Thank you.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentleman has expired. The gentlelady from Texas, Ms. Sheila Jackson Lee.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Chairman, to the ranking member, this is a crucial hearing. And I thank the individuals, witnesses who have come. As a member, I would almost want a couple of hours on this can I guess we will have to continue to self-educate ourselves. I have engaged with Afghanistan. I co-chair the Afghan caucus with one of my colleagues and started with Afghan probably shortly after the 2002 war, if you will, beginning in 2002. And seeing some progress where women were elected as parliamentarians, where schools were open, and, of course, we don't see that as we speak. But there is also something called collateral damage, what, 40,000 plus troops, just because of the nature of war will do. There is the question of building a generation of haters of the United States because of that collateral damage.

And there is a question of whether or not there is even a real exit strategy that we can contend with. We know that the White House is engaging in that. I thank you, Dr. Kagan, for acknowledging the treasure if you will of the Pakistani people and what the Pakistani military is attempting to do. I hope that as they are debating the enhanced Pakistan legislation that they will recognize that we are in partnership with them even though we respect the sovereignty of the Parliament and I hope that the military doesn't feel that it has to continue to undermine the efforts to help the Pakistan people. I hope they understand that we respect their sacrifice. But my question with the backdrop of Vietnam and the idea that Afghans are quite different from the Iraqis, let me ask you, Mr. Thier, because I am seeing the word—I have not Googled you, but I am seeing "peace" and I am not understanding your perspective on this. How do you define Taliban?

Mr. THIER. Well, I think that is an interesting question, of course, because the Taliban is a myriad of groups. We have the Taliban that we saw ruling Afghanistan in the 1990s and then we have what has emerged as what many people refer to as the neo

Taliban, which is a network of insurgent groups, including Mullah Omar's Taliban as well as Hekmachar and——

Ms. JACKSON LEE. And they are like spinoffs, correct?

Mr. THIER. Yes, they are spinoff groups. And of course——

Ms. JACKSON LEE. And they are people who have fathers and brothers and husbands in villages that may be called Taliban?

Mr. THIER. Indeed.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Because of their particular beliefs.

Mr. THIER. And one thing that you hear——

Ms. JACKSON LEE. And they may be leaders in their villages and they may not be intending to do harm to the United States?

Mr. THIER. Well, I think it would be wrong to say that anybody who is now associated with the Taliban is directly an enemy of the United States, but that is not to say that the Taliban leadership and the overall ideology of the Taliban isn't fundamentally opposed to our security interests.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. That is fair enough. That is leadership. We are talking about adding 40,000 more troops per General McChrystal. And the sense I get of the three witnesses here, that there is not a divide amongst you. My concern is that very point, that Taliban in some instance, the leadership is untoward and wants to do harm. But they are also maybe characterized and I am not a Ph.D. Expert on this, but maybe characterized as neighbors. What will be the impact of an insurgent action that has enormous collateral damage, juxtaposed against Afghans who fought for 20 years and would have fought longer, Russia, and I think Russia was the last group standing. And I am going to end my question here so I can get an answer from Mr. Coll and Dr. Kagan. There is no exit strategy and we have collateral damage and all we are creating is another unending war. Dr. Kagan?

Mr. KAGAN. Congresswoman, the strategy is a strategy that has an exit strategy. It may or may not succeed. But it is not a strategy for an endless war. It is a strategy that——

Ms. JACKSON LEE. May not succeed. Thank you. Mr. Coll. I am sorry—is that correct? Am I saying it correctly? You only have 23 seconds.

Mr. COLL. Close enough. Yes, I think there is an exit strategy which is to transfer authority to the Afghan national security forces and withdraw from combat as quickly as possible.

Ms. JACKSON LEE. And I thank you. And I would appreciate if that was our first approach, that we ramped up the diplomacy, that we did counterterrorism and not insurgency, that we trained the Afghans, that we got a better government because I can tell you what General McChrystal, with all due respect, is proposing is an unending war that will never end or we leave in defeat. I yield back.

Chairman BERMAN. The time of the gentlelady has expired. We are going to have votes very soon. But I think we will have time for our—Mr. Burton, you are recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. BURTON. My colleague, Mr. Inglis, would like some time. So I am going to try to cut this short. First of all, I would like to ask you, Mr. Chairman, about you working with Representative Skelton, chairman of the Armed Services Committee, to try to get Gen-

eral McChrystal before the committee. I think it would be very important to hear——

Chairman BERMAN. Will the gentleman yield?

Mr. BURTON. Yes, sir.

Chairman BERMAN. I spoke to that I think when you were not in the room. My thinking now is that they definitely should be here, but I think it should come after the administration has made its decision, and that becomes the basis for questioning and challenging and all of that. So I think that is the logical time frame. And once that decision is made, that is our first order of business is to make that happen.

Mr. BURTON. I understand the Chief Executive makes that decision, but I would differ with you on having him here before. But that is your decision. You are the chairman. I would also like to ask you how you are coming along with your very fine bill that deals with sanctions on Iran. I think you said we are going to have it done in August, September——

Chairman BERMAN. No, no, no. You know what I said. I said October.

Mr. BURTON. Okay. What is today's date, Mr. Chairman?

Chairman BERMAN. It is 2 weeks before the date of the markup.

Mr. BURTON. Thank you, sir. I am looking forward to that. Let me just say to the witnesses, I really appreciate your being here and I think you acquitted yourselves very well today. I just want to ask a question. Where are the Taliban and al-Qaeda getting their money? Are they getting it from the Persian Gulf states? Are they getting it from people in Pakistan, Saudi Arabia? Where are they getting their money?

Mr. KAGAN. Yes, they are getting their money from many sources and this is a very important point that goes to the question that was raised earlier about the opium trade. They do receive—I believe that they receive trade from Arabs outside of the region. They do receive assistance from the Pakistani elements of the Pakistani military I believe. But a key source of revenue for them is local taxation. And that is, in fact, the way that they make their profit off of the opium trade, which is important.

Mr. BURTON. They get a rake-off from that?

Mr. KAGAN. Is not a rake-off. It is taxes. And they will go down and tax the locals. And they make a lot of money off of that.

Mr. BURTON. You say there are elements in the Pakistani Government that are giving money to the Taliban. The government is supposed to be fighting the Taliban in the military. Can you give us more of an insightful view into that real quickly?

Mr. KAGAN. Sure. The Pakistani Government is fighting two Taliban groups that have been threatening it, the TTP and the TNSM in the FATA and the northwest frontier province. They support, I believe, that the Pakistani elements—the Pakistani military supports the Quetta Shura Taliban under Mullah Omar and Haqqani network operating in eastern Afghanistan. So there are different Taliban groups and the Pakistani military has taken different approaches to dealing with them.

Mr. BURTON. Well, you would say that the Pakistani Government and the military are supportive of our efforts over there in total?

Mr. KAGAN. On balance, the policy of the Pakistani Government and the military and their strategy is supportive of our efforts. I think there are elements within the military that are not supportive of the efforts.

Mr. BURTON. With Iran on the west and Pakistan on the east, I sure hope that you fellows' assessment is correct in that we are making the right move and I hope the President does make his decision very quickly. And with that, Mr. Chairman, I would like to submit my entire statement for the record and yield my time to Mr. Inglis, and plus he can have his time as well.

Chairman BERMAN. Mr. Inglis for 6 minutes and 51 seconds.

Mr. INGLIS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. There is a cloud of illegitimacy surrounding the Karzai government because of the elections. Is it possible to rehabilitate them, his leadership? And if so, how do you do that?

Mr. COLL. I will take a quick pass at it. I am sure Alex has something to say. You can't sugarcoat this fraud. The allegations are very serious and they betray substantial investments of American blood and treasure in places like Helmand where the Marines have been over the last 15 months. It seems that great numbers of votes there were manufactured by the President, at least according to the U.N.'s data.

Yes, it is possible to rehabilitate this process because there is a broad appetite among Afghans for their own reform process and it is possible to I think use American influence to bring all of the parties to that reform process. President Karzai, the opposition leader Abdullah, other unsuccessful candidates for President and the agenda for that reform process has to be ambitious. It has to include constitutional questions like the role of Parliament against the presidency, whether or not governors should be elected, whether or not political parties should be allowed to compete and should also include electoral reform.

How do you prevent this from happening again? How do you strengthen the Afghan institutions that attempted to hold this election but were apparently betrayed by those who were criminally determined to steal it?

Mr. THIER. I think we really have a two-part strategy of improving the accountability and performance of the Afghan Government. The first is a "work with Karzai" strategy and the second is a "work around Karzai" strategy. I think the work with Karzai strategy requires us to do a lot more to hold his government accountable. For instance, as a result of this election, obviously there are hundreds, if not thousands of people working for the Afghan Government who perpetrated this fraud. There has to be a demonstration of accountability in this process if Karzai wants to claim that these people did that of their own initiative, which is what he said. Then he has to be the one to stand up to make sure that there is accountability.

I would extend that not only to the election but beyond that, allegations about his brother's involvement in the drug trade, allegations about other high level government officials. There needs to be a very serious approach to corruption. The work around Karzai strategy is both at the national level and subnational level. There are some very good ministers in Afghanistan. I know that you have

been over there. You may have met with some of them. There are some people who are doing very good work, who have done a lot to deliver assistance, particularly the ministry of agriculture, rural rehabilitation and development.

These are people who are committed. And we can continue to work with them intensively and in fact put more of our resources into their ministries to allow them to succeed. The final step of that is to work much more intensively at the subnational level. You have governors out there. You have elected provincial councils who will do much better if they have the capacity and resources to channel resources to their population, to cut out the bottleneck that exists in Kabul and to deliver resources at the local level. Just like in our own system, it is people at the local level who understand best what they need and how to get it done. And we need to do a lot more of that in Afghanistan if we want to be more effective at delivering assistance and cutting out some of the problems that have existed at the central government level.

Mr. INGLIS. Dr. Kagan, does it require a do-over of the election?

Mr. KAGAN. It doesn't require a do-over of the election necessarily. First we have to see what the actual result is and we are still waiting on the Afghans to tell us. And I think it is important that we respect the Afghan process. But we also—frankly, the illegitimacy, or potential illegitimacy, of the election gives us also an opportunity, if we choose, to use it and if we develop an articulated clear political strategy to do so. Karzai knows that he has been weakened by all of this. He knows that he has to be very concerned about the question of American support for him. That it is not taken for granted and he knows, I believe, that he is unable to govern that country. It is not even clear to me that he can stay alive in that country without American support. In this context, that provides us with an opportunity to insist upon a series of fundamental reforms in the way the Afghan Government functions as my colleagues and others have described as part of a package in return for the aid and assistance that we give to the Government of Afghanistan.

And I think we need to do that. And I think we really need to press the administration to explain what its political strategy is and how it intends to mitigate the negative consequences of this which I think it can and to gain the benefits that are potentially there. And if I could just add one point that is often lost in this discussion. The United States troops are not going into Afghanistan to kill people and blow things up. First of all, we don't need troops to do that. If you want to do that, we can do that from the air. The troops are going in to interact with local population to reassure Afghans of our commitment, to gain intelligence from them, but also to help them work through precisely these governance issues. And this is a role that American troops played in Iraq, it is a role that they have played in Afghanistan where they have been resourced adequately and given the mission and it is a role that they will play essentially in support of a larger political strategy that addresses this gap between the local people and their leaders and this government.

Mr. INGLIS. Does geography conspire against Afghanistan in the creation of a central government such that—it depends on where

you are as to whether you need one. I wonder if my observation is correct. In other words, if you are in some remote valley, really you don't much need a central government if you have tribal leaders that can help adjudicate conflicts, why do you need a Federal courthouse? And, in fact, it is the legitimacy of that Federal courthouse may be questioned, especially if it comes from the metropolitan areas. So you end up with—or I like the idea of Federal courthouses in the United States. We have a wonderful country. I wonder if that is the case there.

Chairman BERMAN. Our problem is we have less than 5 minutes to make this vote. My problem is, I don't want to miss votes. I want to ask another round of questions and I don't want to keep you here for another 30 minutes. So I am going to give up my round of questions. Would you give up the answer to your last point?

Mr. INGLIS. I would be happy to give up the answer.

Chairman BERMAN. And thank you guys very much for coming. It has been very interesting. I think I do want to say for the record we made an earnest effort to get some respected figures who have a different view than the three of you, notwithstanding your different backgrounds and all that have on some of this and none of them could make it at this time. But we did make that effort and I just wanted the record to reflect that. And I think your testimony was great and I appreciate it very much. The hearing is adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 1:03 p.m., the committee was adjourned.]

APPENDIX

Material Submitted for the Hearing Record

FULL COMMITTEE HEARING NOTICE

Committee on Foreign Affairs

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515-0128

Howard L. Berman (D-CA), Chairman

October 9, 2009

TO: MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

You are respectfully requested to attend an OPEN hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, to be held in **Room 2172 of the Rayburn House Office Building:**

DATE: Thursday, October 15, 2009

TIME: 10:00 a.m.

SUBJECT: Afghanistan Policy at the Crossroads

WITNESSES: Mr. Steve Coll
President
New America Foundation

J. Alexander Thier, J.D.
Director for Afghanistan and Pakistan
United States Institute of Peace

Frederick W. Kagan, Ph.D.
Resident Scholar
American Enterprise Institute

By Direction of the Chairman

The Committee on Foreign Affairs seeks to make its facilities accessible to persons with disabilities. If you are in need of special accommodations, please call 202/225-5021 at least four business days in advance of the event, whenever practicable. Questions with regard to special accommodations in general (including availability of Committee materials in alternative formats and assistive listening devices) may be directed to the Committee.

COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS

MINUTES OF FULL COMMITTEE HEARING

Day *Thursday* **Date** *10/15/09* **Room** *2172 RHOB*

Starting Time *10:06 a.m.* **Ending Time** *1:02 p.m.*

Recesses *1* (*11:19* to *11:53*)

Presiding Member(s) *Howard L. Berman (CA), Chairman*

CHECK ALL OF THE FOLLOWING THAT APPLY:

Open Session ☑
Executive (closed) Session ☐
Televised ☑
Electronically Recorded (taped) ☑
Stenographic Record ☑

TITLE OF HEARING or BILLS FOR MARKUP: *(Include bill number(s) and title(s) of legislation.)*
Afghanistan Policy at the Crossroads

COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:
Se attached

NON-COMMITTEE MEMBERS PRESENT:
n/a

HEARING WITNESSES: Same as meeting notice attached? Yes ☑ **No** ☐
(If "no", please list below and include title, agency, department, or organization.)

STATEMENTS FOR THE RECORD: *(List any statements submitted for the record.)*
n/a

ACTIONS TAKEN DURING THE MARKUP: *(Attach copies of legislation and amendments.)*

RECORDED VOTES TAKEN (FOR MARKUP): *(Attach final vote tally sheet listing each member.)*

Subject	Yeas	Nays	Present	Not Voting

TIME SCHEDULED TO RECONVENE _____
or
TIME ADJOURNED *1:02pm*

Doug Campbell

Doug Campbell, Deputy Staff Director

Attendance - HCFA Full Committee Hearing
Afghanistan Policy at the Crossroads
Thursday, October 15, 2009 @ 10:00 a.m. , 2172 RHOB

Howard L. Berman (CA)
Gary Ackerman (NY)
Brad Sherman (CA)
William D. Delahunt (MA)
Diane E. Watson (CA)
Russ Carnahan (MO)
Albio Sires (NJ)
Gerald E. Connolly (VA)
Michael E. McMahon (NY)
Gene Green (TX)
Lynn C. Woolsey (CA)
Sheila Jackson-Lee (TX)
Barbara Lee (CA)
Shelley Berkley (NV)
Joseph Crowley (NY)
Jim Costa (CA)
Ron Klein (FL)

Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, (FL)
Christopher H. Smith (NJ)
Dan Burton (IN)
Dana Rohrabacher (CA)
Ron Paul (TX)
Jeff Flake (AZ)
Joe Wilson (SC)
Jeff Fortenberry (NE)
Ted Poe (TX)
Bob Inglis (SC)
Gus Bilirakis (FL)

October 15, 2009

Verbatim, as delivered

Chairman Berman's opening remarks at hearing, "Afghanistan Policy at the Crossroads"

When the U.S.-led intervention in Afghanistan began eight years ago, there was near unanimity in Congress and among the American people that this use of military force was fully justified.

Osama bin Laden and his al-Qaeda lieutenants, the perpetrators of the 9/11 attacks, were operating in Afghanistan as the so-called "guests" of the ruling Taliban; we and our international partners went in to shut them down.

Within months, the Taliban were driven from power, and most members of al-Qaeda had been killed, captured, or escaped across the border into Pakistan.

In the weeks and months following the intervention, there was considerable optimism that Afghanistan, after decades of exhausting and destructive war, might be ready for a fresh start.

But over time, as our nation's attention turned elsewhere, it seemed that our strategy there became to simply "muddle through."

With a substantial drawdown of our troops in Iraq on the horizon, and a worsening security situation in Afghanistan, that conflict has once again become front and center.

However, in stark contrast to the days following 9/11, there is no consensus today on how the U.S. should address the challenges we face there.

The purpose of this hearing is to help us consider the potential consequences of the various options that are now on the table.

In March of this year, the Obama Administration unveiled a new strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The strategy centers on the need to disrupt and defeat al Qaeda, and prevent its return to Afghanistan.

It also recognizes that, to quote President Obama, "the future of Afghanistan is inextricably linked to the future of its neighbor, Pakistan."

The $7.5 billion dollar assistance bill for Pakistan that Congress just passed will help strengthen Pakistan's capability to combat terrorists who threaten its security.

Now, while keeping one eye on Pakistan, we must settle on the right approach for Afghanistan.

That decision will be made against the backdrop of increasing violence in Afghanistan.

American and coalition casualties are rising, Taliban tactics are becoming more sophisticated, and extremists are controlling an expanding swath of territory.

To make matters worse, the legitimacy of the current Afghan central government has been called into question following allegations of massive fraud in the recent elections.

This will inevitably make our job harder – and the Taliban's job easier – no matter what course we take.

Much of the debate right now centers on General Stanley McChrystal's reported request for a "surge" of approximately 40,000 additional American troops.

In his August 30 assessment, which reflects the input of on of our witnesses, Dr. Kagan, and other experts, General McChrystal makes a persuasive case that we should implement a "comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign," much like we did in Iraq, in which protecting the Afghan population is the highest priority.

Other key elements of the General's strategy include greater partnering with the Afghan security forces to improve their effectiveness, helping the Afghan government become more accountable at all levels, and improving the command structure for coalition forces.

This proposed approach raises a number of important questions.

First, does Afghanistan, which has a more dispersed and diverse population than Iraq, not to mention much more rugged terrain, lend itself to this sort of counterinsurgency campaign?

Can such a strategy succeed without significant elements of the insurgency coming over to our side, as they did in Iraq?

If not, what are the prospects for persuading the Taliban rank and file to lay down their arms?

Does it make sense to place a significant number of additional troops in harm's way in an effort to prevent al Qaeda from coming back to Afghanistan when the terrorist group already has a sanctuary in neighboring Pakistan, and an increasing presence in Yemen and Somalia?

In the absence of a troop "surge," is there an alternative counterterrorism strategy involving some combination of drone strikes and special forces that could be employed to achieve the same goals?

Finally, what are the implications for Pakistan if we do not support the McChrystal proposal? Would Afghanistan's neighbors consider themselves better off?

To answer these and other important questions, we are fortunate to have a very distinguished panel with us here today, which I will introduce shortly.

But before I do, let me turn to the Ranking Member, the gentle lady from Florida, Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, for any opening remarks that she might have.

Statement of Congressman Gene Green
"Afghanistan Policy at the Crossroads"
House Committee on Foreign Affairs
October 15, 2009

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for holding today's hearing, and I'd like to welcome our panel.

The President will soon announce a new strategy for U.S. efforts in Afghanistan, so it is both important and timely that we meet here today to discuss what lies ahead.

First, we must first clarify our long-term goals in Afghanistan. Then there are several competing factors that must be considered when developing a strategy for reaching those goals.

The security situation in Afghanistan has been deteriorating for some time now. Compounding this problem, the August 20th elections have cast doubt on the Afghan government's legitimacy due to widespread allegations of fraud.

The Independent Election Commission and the U.N.-backed Electoral Complaints Commission are in the process of reviewing the election results, but will a final resolution come out of it?
In this context, today's hearing is a good opportunity to discuss how much emphasis should be placed on U.S. force levels versus support for Afghan institutions or both.

The Obama Administration's March 2009 strategic review focused heavily on building Afghan governance. Yet General McChrystal's recent recommendations rely more on increased troop strength.

Whichever course is taken in Afghanistan, we must make sure that our NATO allies are equally committed and willing to contribute resources.

Similarly, we should take a clear look at the Afghan army's ability to assume ultimate responsibility for their nation's security.

I look forward to hearing our witnesses' testimony on these matters.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, and I yield back.

Opening Statement
Congressman Dan Burton
Committee on Foreign Affairs
October 15, 2009

Afghanistan Policy at the Crossroads

Mr. Chairman, thank you for calling this hearing and I welcome all of our distinguished witnesses.

The resurgence of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan is a subject that is daily showing up in headlines and constantly on the minds of both Americans and citizens of our allied nations. Although the United States and its Afghan and coalition allies inflicted a devastating military defeat on the Taliban regime and its al-Qaeda allies back in 2001, the Taliban has regrouped and made a significant comeback in recent years.

We can spend our time today debating the hows and whys of the Taliban's resurgence, or we can spend our time confronting and eliminating this threat before it undoes all of the hard-won

progress made in Afghanistan. I prefer that we do the latter. While I disagree with the President on many foreign policy questions, I do believe that President Obama was right a few months ago when he declared, "[The conflict in Afghanistan] will not be quick, nor easy. But we must never forget: This is not a war of choice. This is a war of necessity. ... This is fundamental to the defense of our people."

The old adage goes, "it is always darkest before the dawn." In 2006 and 2007, when voices were shrieking about the unpopularity of battle and demanding immediate withdrawal from Iraq, a difficult choice was made to press on and with greater force than before. It was this decision, along with the determination of our brave men and women in the armed forces and the superb leadership of General Petraeus, which ultimately turned the tide and brought Iraq to greater stability.

In Afghanistan we are in the midst of what I hope is the darkest period of this war; and the voices of defeat are once again

rising to shout about the unpopularity of battle and demand immediate withdrawal. Withdrawal from Afghanistan is not an option. If the Taliban is allowed to regain control of the country, the security of the world will be at a much higher risk, and the reputation of the United States and NATO will take years to recover. As a collective defensive military alliance, NATO rightly invoked Article 5 following al-Qaeda's 9/11 attacks on the United States. The Alliance must now follow through on that invocation and continue to deny al-Qaeda a safe haven in which to operate by winning in Afghanistan.

Though some make the inaccurate comparison of Afghanistan to Vietnam, and others describe it as "The Graveyard of Empires," those who live and work in Afghanistan know better. Victory is possible. Our counterinsurgency forces are more experienced and more knowledgeable than they ever have been, and our enemy is despised by the great majority of the Afghan people.

Victory is possible but it will not come easily. There is nothing easy about war, and especially this new type of counterinsurgency effort that requires our troops to get out into the field and do everything they can to gain the support of the populace and help them to rebuild.

General Stanley McChrystal is on the ground in Afghanistan; he understands the situation and the challenges. He is President Obama's handpicked Commander, and he believes that we need to redouble of efforts in Afghanistan. President Obama finally got around to speaking directly with General McChrystal recently; I would urge the President to listen carefully to what the General has to say and heed his advice. I would also urge the President to allow General McChrystal to come and testify before Congress so that we may better understand the situation on the ground.

We must go "all-in" and do what is required to provide security, gather intelligence, establish courts and schools, and

build much needed infrastructure. We can't repeat the mistakes of the 1990's in Somalia focusing on counter-terrorism, instead of counter-insurgency, as Vice President Biden has suggested. As witness testimony from Mr Coll makes clear, we tried this approach in the '90's & it gave us 9-11.

As it has already been said a hundred times before, success in Afghanistan is crucial for success in Pakistan; where the real threat of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of terrorists is on the forefront of everyone's mind. This is a war of necessity and as such, we must commit the necessary effort in order to be victorious.

Afghanistan is a crucial front in the global struggle against the al-Qaeda terrorist network and Islamic radicalism. If we do not defeat this threat, Afghanistan will be plunged back into a state of fear and tyranny, and once again become the worldwide breeding and training ground of terrorism.
Thank you.

The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly (VA-11)

HCFA Full Committee Hearing: Afghanistan Policy at the Crossroads
Thursday, October 14, 2009
10am

The question of US objectives in Afghanistan is now a major part of our national security debate. Is the war winnable? How do we define winning? Should we be involved in nation-building; and if so, to what end? Do we equate the Taliban with al Qaeda in our objectives? What are the consequences of a U.S. retreat in Afghanistan for the region, especially in Pakistan?

The President's appointment of Ambassador Holbrooke as the Special Envoy for both Afghanistan and Pakistan acknowledged Pakistan's unique role in addressing the war. The U.S. cannot dismantle al-Qaeda or stabilize Afghanistan without addressing the porous Afghanistan-Pakistan border, the accessibility of Pakistan's tribal areas as a refuge for militants, and competing factions within Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency.

There have been accusations that Pakistan cultivates Islamist militants—such as members of Lakshar-e-Tayyba—on its eastern border with India. According to news reports, there has been cooperation between Afghan militants and members of Pakistan's intelligence agency. In July of 2008, *the New York Times* reported that U.S. intelligence officials even confronted Pakistani officials with evidence of this. Pakistan's relationship and historic rivalry with India also affect any potential resolution of the war in Afghanistan. Pakistan's ambivalence toward the Taliban is of growing concern to many of us in Congress.

The U.S. relationship is undergirded by the Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act of 2009, a bill which authorizes up to $1.5 billion a year for five years for economic assistance. The U.S. has, to date, committed $7.5 billion in economic assistance to Pakistan. The reaction in Pakistan to this bill has been mixed, and again raises questions about the bilateral relationship.

But Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan is nuanced as well, and each state has its own interests. Pakistan wants the government of Afghanistan to pledge to abide by the Durand Line—the border agreed to by Afghanistan and British India in 1893. There are also as many as 3 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan, whom Pakistan plans to repatriate to Afghanistan. There is also an unclear role for Iran, a state whose relationship with the West is complicated by its potential nuclear ambitions and increasingly audacious and reckless missile tests.

There are multiple challenges within Afghanistan's borders as well. The lack of infrastructure in Afghanistan, coupled with an illiteracy rate of 80% and a weak national identity, make the development of civil society difficult. Questions also remain as to whether democracy can be imposed in a top-down approach. Outside observers of Afghanistan's recent elections were more than skeptical of the Karzai win. Electoral fraud now threatens to undermine the U.S. rationale for nation-building, such as it is, and to further damage any credibility the central government may have had with its own people.

U.S. military leaders are assessing the best way to meet our primary goals in Afghanistan. The identification of the "imprecise, potential menace" that is the insurgent is the ultimate challenge.[1] In the end, the U.S. must define clear goals, a clear timeline for achievement, and a clear set of resources necessary to achieve its goals. Absent this clarity of purpose Afghanistan becomes another quagmire of nightmarish proportions.

[1] Phrase used in David Galuga's *Counterinsurgency Warfare: Theory and Practice.*

HCFA Full Committee Hearing:
Questions for the Record

Afghanistan Policy at the Crossroads
Thursday, October 15, 2009
10:00 a.m.

Response from J. Alexander Thier, J.D., United States Institute of Peace

Rep. Barbara Lee

Question:

Pending Troop Increase/Costs

I have serious concerns regarding a comprehensive military counterinsurgency strategy which, according to moderate estimates would require hundreds of thousands of troops and at least a decade of sustained, large-scale military operations.

The President recently cited the increasing costs of deploying additional soldiers, which are approaching $1 billion per year for every 1,000 troops. Even if such a strategy were feasible, the question remains: How much will it cost and how will we pay for it?

What do you estimate would be required in terms of total troop levels and the duration of such an expansive military commitment?

Answer:

I am not a military strategist and am unable to answer how many troops are required and for what duration for a successful counterinsurgency strategy in current conditions in Afghanistan.

Question:

Given Afghanistan's historical reputation as "the Graveyard of Empires," and the well-documented failure of the British and Russians to impose governance and stability through outside military force, what reason is there to believe that United States counterinsurgency efforts will yield a different outcome?

Are there lessons we can take from these past experiences?

Answer:

If the United States attempts to impose governance and stability in Afghanistan, it

is unlikely to succeed. Our engagement in Afghanistan can only succeed if it is a partnership in support of an Afghan-led process with an Afghan government that is legitimate in the eyes of its people. Prior failures, for example of the Soviets, have been due to the imposition, by force, of a regime and/or ideology that was rejected by a vast majority of the Afghan people. In contrast, US engagement in Afghanistan since 2001 has been in support of goals clearly shared by the vast majority of Afghans, even those in areas most affected by the insurgency. The growing lack of confidence in the Afghan government and its international partners has not been due to what they have promised to deliver, but due to what they have failed to deliver - the very security, justice, and economic opportunity that has been promised for eight years. A well-resourced stabilization strategy that can deliver on these basic promises will see broad Afghan support - as there was between 2001-2005 - for continued US engagement.

Question:

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace has cited the mere presence of foreign troops as "the most important element driving the resurgence of the Taliban."

How will an increasingly expanded role for U.S. troops in Afghanistan, over a period of at least another decade, impact our ability to win hearts and minds in Afghanistan and counter Anti-American sentiment that fuels extremist recruiting efforts in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and elsewhere?

Answer:

I disagree with the assessment of individual analysts at CEIP who make this claim. The presence of foreign troops was welcomed by a vast majority of Afghans in 2001, and according to opinion surveys such as those done annually by the Asia Foundation ("A Survey of the Afghan People") continues to have support. People in Afghanistan judge the presence of US and international forces more by what they deliver rather than a reflexive xenophobia. All people around the world will deeply resent foreign troops if they are seen to be working against their own national interests.

Question:

In your opinion, is there the potential for us to shift into the role of the occupier in the minds of Afghan civilians?

Answer:

As per the above response, our presence in Afghanistan will be judged by what we accomplish, or fail to accomplish, with our Afghan partners. If the US is seen to be acting against the interests of a majority of Afghans, either supporting an illegitimate government or failing to support a legitimate one, the US will increasingly be seen as occupiers.

Question:

Development/Diplomacy
The most recent Supplemental Appropriations bill to pass Congress in June reflected a continuing imbalance, roughly 8-1 in this case, between military activities and diplomatic and development efforts.

Can you elaborate on the importance of these two pillars of United States foreign policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan?

Answer:

US efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan must have a primarily civilian focus. This means focusing on good governance, poverty reduction and economic opportunity, political stability, and addressing issues of injustice at the root of conflict. While military support may be essential to address insecurity that makes the other elements impossible to address, this cannot be the central emphasis of our effort in either country.

Question:

What is the regional role of diplomacy in Afghanistan? Do China, India, Russia, Iran, or others have a role to play and how can the United States better engage with these actors?

Answer:

Long-term stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan requires regional cooperation to address some of the root causes of conflict and insecurity. Regional actors have tended to act through proxies to achieve short-term advantage over other rivals, rather than working in concert to balance interests. The threat of spreading militancy, damaging opium traffic, and the promise of trade and energy cooperation that would open the land route from South Asia to Europe and the Middle East are strong reasons for potential regional cooperation that would value stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan over destabilizing competition.

Question:

Election/Corruption
General McChrystal has referred to the Afghan government as "riddled with corruption" and asserted that this has given the people of Afghanistan "little reason to support their government." This assessment has only been reinforced by the widespread fraud which characterized the August elections.

Can the United States expect to make significant progress in Afghanistan with a government partner that appears incapable of reform?

Answer:

The problems within the Afghan government may present some of the gravest obstacles to success there. Ultimately, without a coherent and positive vision of Afghanistan's future as an alternative to the insurgency, ethnic, regional, and ideological tensions may have the effect of overwhelming the potential for stability. The current government is losing the battle to inspire Afghans to struggle to support their stability. It is critical that the US and its Afghan partners take meaningful steps in the next months to demonstrate that the Afghan government will be accountable and capable.

Question:

What specific steps can the United States take to improve governance within an Administration that not only seems unwilling to root out corruption, but in some cases actively fostering it?

If the Administration does not improve can we succeed?

Answer:

The US must act aggressively with its Afghan partners in the lead to break the cycle of impunity and corruption that is dragging all sides down and providing a hospitable environment for the insurgency. A few key steps should be taken immediately after the election to set a clear tone for the next Afghan government. First, the Afghan President should make a major speech indicating zero tolerance for corruption and criminality. Second, this demonstration of leadership should be accompanied by the empowerment of an anti-corruption and serious crimes task force, independent of the government agencies it may be investigating. The international community must devote intelligence and investigative support, as well as the manpower to support dangerous raids. In the first few months, several high profile cases including the removal and/or prosecution of officials engaged in criminality, including government officials, should be highly publicized. The US should approach this mission with the same vigor as other key elements of the counter-insurgency campaign. Finally, the US must put real effort into strengthening Afghan institutions that will be responsible for these matters over the long haul, giving them the capacity and tools they need to lead.

Question:

I have heard from the panelists that "without a credible and legitimate Afghan partner, we cannot succeed." I have also heard that we must turn things around in 12 months or face failure.

Is it at all realistic to think we can achieve a level of reform within the Afghan Government in the short-term that would provide the Afghanistan people an alternative to the Taliban?

Answer:

It is realistic to believe that with strong Afghan leadership we can begin to change negative perceptions in the next year, and build upon that in subsequent years. Improving the capacity of the Afghan Government is a longer-term effort, but must be fully resourced today in order to have an impact in two to three years.

Question:

What is the current strategy of the United States to curb drug trafficking and the dependence on poppy production in Afghanistan?

How does this strategy differ from the strategy over the previous eight years, and have we seen any differing or significant results thus far?

Answer:

I am unable to answer this question in detail based on data currently available to me.