



IPI MIDDLE EAST & STATEBUILDING PROGRAMS POLICY FORUM
“AFGHANISTAN AFTER THE SURGE: TALIBAN REINTEGRATION AND RECONCILIATION”

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Transcript edited by IPI

Chair:

Mr. Warren Hoge, *Vice President for External Relations, International Peace Institute*

Speakers:

Mr. Andrew Exum, *Expert on US military strategy, fellow at the Center for New American Security and former advisor to General Stanley McChrystal in Afghanistan*

Mr. Michael Semple, *Expert on the Taliban, fellow at the Harvard Carr Center and former deputy to the EU Special Representative in Afghanistan*

WARREN HOGE:

Good afternoon. I'm Warren Hoge, IPI's Vice President for External Relations, and I'm pleased to welcome you to this policy forum on "Afghanistan After the Surge: Taliban Reintegration and Reconciliation." The issue that we are here to discuss is one that is at the center of world concern, at the top of the world's headlines, and judging by this turnout, very much on the minds of people in this international community.

The aim of this forum is to examine the new strategies for stabilizing Afghanistan that emerged from the meeting held in London in late January, attended by Afghan President Hamid Karzai, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, and more than 70 foreign ministers of countries involved in Afghanistan.

Monitoring it for IPI was Nur Laiq, our Senior Program Officer for the Middle East, who, on her return from London, wrote an analysis for the IPI website. In her essay, she identified the central outcome of that meeting as a plan for a future handover of security to Afghans, province-by-province; an eventual withdrawal of international troops combined with—and this is pretty much the subject of our meeting today—combined with an ambitious program for Taliban de-radicalization and reintegration that would use economic incentives to encourage Taliban members to give up their arms and cut ties with al-Qaida. Since then, reintegration and reconciliation have become buzz words when talking about Afghanistan,

as has the word “surge” which describes President Obama’s commitment of 30,000 more American troops, and the US and NATO led military offensive that has begun with the capture and return to Afghan government control of Marja, a Taliban stronghold in Helmand Province.

US officials say that reconciliation needs to go hand-in-hand with security success. Richard Holbrooke, the US Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan told the Reuters News Agency that, “Discussions on a political level are going to reflect battlefield realities.”

Speaking of buzz, and speaking of Pakistan, a lot of talk has arisen about what role Islamabad might play in any reconciliation effort following the arrest in Karachi of the Afghan Taliban’s military commander Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar. To speed the process of reconciliation, President Karzi’s planning a peace loya jirga this spring, and there is a new meeting expected of some of the people who met in London in January.

To reassure Afghans that the United States will not abandon them, American officials have pledged to stay in the liberated areas and prevent the Taliban from returning. But to reassure wary Americans that the US will not get trapped in Afghanistan, President Obama has also had to set a date for the beginning of the American withdrawal, and this has created doubt among many Afghans that he will be able to fulfill the first pledge.

History indicates that successful reconciliation is possible when the government and its outside supporters are doing well militarily against insurgent forces, and providing security and improved living conditions for the population in the areas cleared of insurgents. But Afghanistan has its own confounding history, both ancient and recent, that makes that process difficult and unpredictable.

To help us understand more about it, we have two distinguished speakers with great experience in the area. Their full biographies are printed with the list of participants that you have in your chairs, but let me introduce them briefly.

Andrew Exum, on my right, is a fellow with the Center for a New American Security, and has served with the US Army in Afghanistan, and been a civilian advisor to General Stanley McChrystal, the current top commander of US forces in Afghanistan. Michael Semple is a leading expert on the Taliban, the Pashtun tribes and Afghan politics, who has worked in Afghanistan since 1989.

As I said at the outset, we are all keenly interested in hearing from you both, and Andrew, I’m going to ask you please to start it off.

ANDREW EXUM:

Sure. Well first off let me thank IPI and especially Warren and Nur for this invitation. I accepted almost immediately, because in Washington as well as New York, we have a lot of these think-tank type events and public lectures, and I think the one I’ve learned from the most over the past 12 months was one featuring Michael on a subject very similar to this; talking

about reconciliation in Afghanistan. I've also learned a lot from his writings including this elegant little volume that was published by USIP; so I am here as much as a student as a lecturer I guess.

I should start out by saying that I'm not—by training at least—an Afghanistan expert. I served in Afghanistan in 2002 and again in 2004, but that was at the lower tactical levels. I returned as a civilian advisor as Warren mentioned, and in 2009 at the beginning, when General McChrystal first took command there.

When I was 25, I had just invaded my second country without knowing anything about the population, culture, language or local history. I figured I should rectify that, so I spent most of the past six years actually in the Arabic-speaking world, and that's where my Masters Degree was and my doctoral dissertation work. I guess my only bonafides for knowing anything about Afghanistan comes from the fact that I'm from East Tennessee—which doesn't mean anything to the foreigners here—but Americans will recognize that I'm by birth an expert in lawless, mountainous regions plagued by heavily-armed religious fundamentalists.

I'm going to approach this subject with a degree of caution, and I'll approach it as a security studies generalist with a specialization in low-intensity conflict, and at least a familiarity with some of the conflict dynamics in Afghanistan. The central question I've been asked to tee up is whether or not the current surge in Afghanistan is compatible with the reconciliation process. My answer is yes. I believe that it is compatible and it's probably also very necessary. This conclusion is based on not just my understanding, such as it is, of the dynamics of the conflict in Afghanistan, but also what the broader literature has to tell us about the dynamics of civil wars and insurgencies.

Counter-insurgency is what the US and its allies are waging in Afghanistan and is a form of warfare that has its roots in 19th century imperial conflicts in northern Africa and elsewhere. I'm not sure that the United States is pursuing empire in Iraq and Afghanistan; if we are guarding Chinese oil in Iraq and Chinese copper in Afghanistan, it is a clever new form of empire. It is probably better likened to a form of what the French theorist [inaudible] would call counter-warfare and I'll get into that in just a bit.

Describing Afghanistan as an insurgency or as a counter-insurgency campaign is problematic, right? All conflicts are sui generis and counter insurgencies are no exception, and insurgencies are no exception. The insurgency, such as it is in Afghanistan, is taking place in a pretty complex conflict environment. If you just look at Helmand Province for example, yes, you've got this Taliban-led insurgency against the government of Afghanistan from our perspective, or against Western occupation from their perspective. But it's also layered down on tribal rivalries as well as the drug trade, most especially in southern Afghanistan.

Talking about Afghanistan as an insurgency has limited utility. Nonetheless, I think some of the dynamics apply. Sir John Kiszely talks about—when he talks about the way insurgencies look, he describes it as a staircase, and at the top of the staircase you have the actual insurgents themselves. Below them you have kind of the enablers; maybe the bomb-makers, maybe the logisticians. Below them you may have lower-level enablers; lookouts for example, or informants. Below them you have the neutral population, and below them then you have the population that is loyal to the government or to the third party.

Bad counterinsurgency warfare—in other words, pretty harsh enemy-centric counterinsurgency tends to turn that staircase into an escalator. Better population-centric counterinsurgency warfare tends to turn that staircase into an escalator but going down, and I'll talk about that a little bit more, but that's kind of why counterinsurgency campaigns are necessarily population-centric; because the enemy—or rather the insurgent—needs the population to do certain things. At the very least he needs the population to be quiet; better, he would like the population to enable or join the insurgency.

Counterinsurgents, meanwhile, also focus on the population for largely the same reason, but also because in insurgencies, often times the insurgent is fluid, whereas the population is fixed. It's difficult to identify sometimes the insurgent, but it's easier to identify the population.

These are kind of pragmatic reflections by practitioners who have served in civil wars and have fought insurgencies, but coming from things not just as a former practitioner, but now a social scientist I guess, I'd have to say, that academics were kind of like the old joke about the French bureaucrat. It's not enough to understand how it works in practice; you have to understand how it works in theory. For this I'll rely on some of the work that's been done by Stathis Kalyvas and others on the nature of civil wars and insurgencies, and this comes into play, and this will tie into our greater conversation that we're going to have about Afghanistan specifically.

When we think about loyalty—in insurgencies or in civil wars—we tend to think the loyalty is endogenous. We look at going into a civil war, or going into an insurgency, you have one side that supports one side; one side that supports another side; but the reality is that yeah, I guess that works if you define loyalty or allegiance in terms of some sort of preference for a given side; but the way that the military at least, and others, have looked at insurgencies or counterinsurgencies, or civil wars, often times allegiance is more articulated by the behavior of the population; not necessarily prewar sympathies.

What this then leads us to look at... I mean, if you look at, for example, where I'm from in East Tennessee, prior to the US Civil War was pro-union—that's the reason why Tennessee was the last state in the United States to join the Confederacy. Once the war actually started, who the population actually supported—whether the Union forces or the Confederate forces, in large part depended on who was in control at a

given time, looking at not just East Tennessee, Lebanon, Afghanistan, or Iraq. Kalyvas, his thesis is that control most often leads to collaboration and not vice-versa. In other words, the evidence that we have that you can simply buy off or buy allegiance in civil war or through insurgencies and that will then lead towards some sort of control or some sort of greater security. It's not really supported by historical evidence.

What is supported is that allegiance—and by allegiance, we're talking about the behavior of the population—is most often influenced by who's actually in control of the given area. Where does that leave us for Afghanistan? Well I'm going to tee up all the Afghanistan-specific stuff for Michael, but I think this can give you a little bit of an idea of where, from a security perspective, both the counterinsurgents as well as the military planners are thinking about when they're thinking about how to approach reconciliation and reintegration.

The idea is that we can all agree that reconciliation and reintegration is necessary for lasting peace in Afghanistan, but the thought is that the time is not ripe for reconciliation and reintegration on a large scale. Steve Biddle put it best in *The New Republic* when he wrote that the Taliban's not likely to accept a loaf of bread when they think that the bakery is going to be up for sale the next day. In the same way, I believe that the current thinking in NATO ISAF Headquarters—and I can't speak for the commander—is that one has to set the conditions for reconciliation and reintegration in order for it to be successful. Balance of power or perception of strength have to be changed, and stress has to be raised on the belligerent relative to the stress that he is causing you.

As Michael pointed out in his book for USIP though, if you're not thinking about reconciliation and reintegration as you are trying to exert more control over the population, then you're going to miss a lot of opportunities; opportunities to perhaps peel away some insurgents; also opportunities such as they present themselves to liaise with senior leaders within the insurgency.

I guess what I would say is that right now the NATO ISAF forces in Afghanistan are pursuing a pretty aggressive military strategy in southern and eastern Afghanistan designed to separate the Taliban insurgency from the population as best as possible. That then is expected to lead towards reconciliation or reintegration. But again, if you look at General McChrystal and the way he's tasked-organized his command, there's expectation that we will walk and chew gum at the exact same time. At the same time you have one three-star general leading the effort to pacify certain areas of southern and eastern Afghanistan, and another three-star general in charge of training the Afghan national security forces, you have yet another three-star general in charge of reconciliation and reintegration.

I hope that that makes a little bit of sense from the theoretical perspective, and I'm going to turn it over to Michael to fill in the blanks, and correct me on everything I've said wrong.

HOGGE: Andrew thank you very much that was very insightful and I also want to thank you for putting in my head for the first time the list Iraq, Afghanistan, Lebanon, and East Tennessee. Michael, over to you.

MICHAEL SEMPLE: Thanks for that brilliant, theoretical grounding. I start from somewhere between the Socratic and the Taliban position. The Socratic position being that it's important to understand how little we know, and that certainly applies to Afghanistan and the Taliban; but the Taliban position on knowledge of course is that the perpetual desire for better understanding—that's the original idea of the Taliban; the desire for more knowledge.

One of the usual challenges is where you're supposed to summarize everything you're working on most waking minutes of the day in 15 minutes, so I won't. All I can do is give you five paragraphs and two postscripts. The paragraphs are just a few points just talking about the deal versus no deal option; a paragraph on what the actors actually want; coming back to what Andrew was pointing us towards, the de-conflicting the military and the political actions; a little bit on what a deal might look like and some of the ways to get there. I am going to give you a paragraph on the challenges inherent in reintegration that everybody's talking about these days, and postscripts where I've been told I have to say something in postscript-mode; implications of the arrests going on in Pakistan and the peace jirga.

Deal versus no deal. What I refer to this kind of thing as the default option. We're on track for an obtainable outcome in Afghanistan, which is that the military campaign which is underway does at least shore up the precarious military situation so that it becomes clear that the bakery isn't about to be grabbed by new owners who don't have to pay the price. In other words, it becomes at least clear that the major urban areas in Afghanistan are not about to be taken over; which is different from the current situation. There's fighting on the outskirts of Kandahar every day at the moment. So at least you get that.

There is some expansion of the national security forces, the Army, the police, and of course the intelligence—which people always forget to mention—but that they continue to be as they are at the moment, perceived by much of the population as being sort of a coalition between Eastern Pashtuns and Northern Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks, and with no particular place for the Kandahari Pashtuns, who are doing much of the fighting.

That as we move towards the limit of the tolerance of the US public for their troops being deployed abroad, that supplies of weapons and funding start to take the place of boots on the ground, and that the Taliban are able to continue to mobilize young men, but more against a corrupt government than against the foreigners, because it's clear that the foreigners are leaving; that the regional powers back their proxies in this conflict, which they judge is going to continue indefinitely.

At least this will guarantee that for the foreseeable future -- and there's no hostile insurgent hoard able to topple Kabul, burn down the American Embassy, and get TV pictures of crowds dancing around, burning US flags -- it's possible to avoid that sort of disaster scenario if somebody loses Kabul, but of course that doesn't mean peace, and it's not neat, it's messy. It's better than the worse case scenarios, but not too good.

It's bad first of all because of course it's bad for the Afghan population; they're the first people who suffer in a scenario of continuing conflict. It's bad for regional international security because that still leaves Afghanistan as a highly contested space with lots of room for all sorts of anti-government armed actors to be operating an active regional proxy war inside Afghanistan, and can have repercussions of the Pakistan/India dispute at any time, and it's also bad for any notions of global governance, because any reasonable person would consider that that was a failure to everything that the international community promised and have tried to do in 2001 when it intervened, and people considering whether to cooperate with international processes elsewhere would be looking towards the obvious failure in Afghanistan, and deciding how much to bet on international action. Of course, that's an outcome which doesn't involve any further political deal; maybe somebody has tried reconciliation in this, but it hasn't worked out.

The alternative of a deal outcome is one in which there is some kind of a political settlement in which the critical mass of the people involved in the insurgency at some stage sign off on a deal where they come on board. I would argue that that is more likely to be a good outcome. First of all, because the moral and political authority of the Taliban movement, which is something which is now wielded as one of the most important factors in the ongoing conflict; that because they become an actor or a party to a new deal, they have to apply that moral and political authority in a sense, to shoring up the deal; declaring the political set up then in Kabul, a claim for the whole of the country as being legitimate, and to declare an end to the jihad.

That negotiated outcome, with them signing up to a deal, leaves much less space for further anti-government armed actors, or indeed for regional proxy warfare. It takes the rug out from under the feet of most insurgents inside Pakistan who claim their legitimacy from participating in a jihad in Afghanistan; that option is no longer there. If the moral authority of the Taliban movement has declared that this set up now in Kabul is helping us move towards our eventual objectives, it's the best hope for peace and stability in Afghanistan, and for stability in the region, but it may not be attainable.

What the actors actually want of course, is rather key, and that's where you have to be Socratic, accepting that we probably don't really know, at least you cannot confidently determine what the key actors—the insurgents—want just by going onto your internet and looking at the latest round of Taliban insurgent propaganda, because there's a certain

dynamic... they're engaged in information warfare; what you can read on the internet is the last statement attributed to Mullah Omar, or what you can get a hold of, the last propaganda video that came out of Miram Shah, or Shamshatoo, or some of the places where the insurgents produce this stuff -- they're part of a certain political process, they are active informational warfare, they do not represent realistic statements of political intent.

In those things you'll find that the main focus is on demands around the withdrawal of foreign troops, and there's of course references to Shari'a enforcement. There is talk about not having a particular international agenda, although in terms of what the symbols that they refer to at the moment, of course they, in a sense, de-legitimize any international action by the United States. I think that if we get to a more political process, move engagement away from this process of information warfare, we'll find that most key actors inside the Taliban have got aspirations around rehabilitation of their movement as a moral and political force; which is sort of the opposite of much of what we—a lot of people have been talking about on the reintegration debate. That's basically saying Taliban not terrorists; Taliban good. There is an aspiration towards that.

I think we'll find that most of them are looking for some kind of living space; an ability to be able to operate; be who they are without being persecuted. I think that we'll probably find that there are aspirations in some way to be able to operate as a national, political force. But one of the key questions is, is there a critical mass inside the Taliban movement that does not aspire to have a monopoly over political power. When the movement originally emerged, in the period from 1994 right through to 2001, fairly rapidly they got into a situation where they vied for that monopoly of political power. Many of the conversations which I heard certainly indicate that the thinkers inside the Taliban have realized that that is not attainable, and that there are many other political actors inside Afghanistan who are not going to come over to the Taliban and that they're well-armed and well-funded and they're not going to concede the space. But it's critical as to how big is the mass inside the movement and that it's taken this on board.

In terms of our Socratic process of trying to understand the things we as yet don't know, we have to appreciate that there are differences between leadership and membership; there are differences between the different parts of the insurgency. There are generational differences; a sense of the people who led the movement, who have a jihadi experience of running a government; the hum-drum business of state as opposed to people who were in madrassas during the period of the Taliban rule, and have their only active experience has been in the struggle of the past nine years.

I believe that these are what the key actors of the insurgents want, but in reality there's been no political process in which they've had a chance to show their hand. We could go into a long sort of diversion in trying to work out what it is that the international community wants; what it is that the

Afghan governments itself wants. Probably the Afghan government wants to survive and prosper, and the international community has got somewhat conflicting objectives, but we should always remember that the core residual one is a guarantee that al-Qaida cannot exploit the territory of Afghanistan for a repeat of September 11.

On de-conflicting political and military action; I mean I think Andrew gave us a very good, clear introduction to that that the fact that international community, in particular US forces, are engaged in an aggressive military campaign does not imply a rejection of the idea that there may be a political process somewhere along the way, but that they realize that no acceptable political outcome would be attainable if you entered into a negotiating process in a position where the Taliban think that one more push and the American's are out. I think that is reflected in the conversations that I have with various people associated with the Taliban—they've got that on.

There are different points of view inside the Taliban. There are people who I label as the pragmatists, the ones who understand they have to behave politically, that they have to accept some kind of deal which is short of what they say that they're fighting for. But when hardliners inside the movement put the argument out that we're about to take Kabul, that the Americans are about to leave, it basically renders it impossible for the pragmatists to make their argument, so that in a sense, what's happening inside the surge may well be affecting the argument inside the Taliban, that parallel to the argument that we have around the western world -- we are the countries that are engaged inside Afghanistan -- that parallel to that argument, there's an argument inside the Taliban of what we can get; what we should settle for.

Basically, any prospect of an imminent Taliban takeover of the country weakens the hand of the pragmatists inside the movement with whom it might be possible to deal. However, it cuts the other direction as well, because one of the somewhat ironic reasons that the Taliban use to conduct their mobilization, to persuade young people to go out and fight, is that the United States is committed to a strategy of militarism, and that the only thing we can do is stand up to this militarism. And so those inside the Taliban who are putting this argument, they actually refer to things like the surge as evidence of what they always said; the only language the Americans understand is the language of guns, for example.

So it sort of plays into the hands of the Taliban militarists as well. So in de-conflicting, it's important that the international community finds ways of underlining the credibility of the message that yes, a political outcome is possible. The most obvious way to get that going is to have some kind of credible dialog process, which, despite all the headlines that periodically appear in the papers, there is no such serious, strategic-level dialog underway.

It's also important to continue the—I hesitate to say the information warfare—but it's important to be engaged there in the information sphere,

countering the parallel reality that the Taliban militarists put out to persuade their people that a military victory is possible. It's important to understand the messages that young people who go out and fight for the Taliban, what they're hearing, and to counter those messages which persuade them that they might actually win.

Also it's important to get across the message of long-term commitment, because it's not just a question of whether you're about to expand the security perimeter around Kandahar, or secure a few more districts. It's a question of how long the international community—particularly the United States—is going to be in this game, because if the United States is going to be out of this game imminently, then, frankly, it's not going to have any ability to influence the political outcome, either whether that political outcome happens or not, or what the terms of it will be.

I think that finally the best way to de-conflict the military and political action is to get international community back into a conflict mediation role, rather than just a waging war role.

There's no time to go into the nitty-gritty of what a deal might look like, but if we're not going to be in the default option; if we're going to be in this as some kind of negotiated outcome, it's going to be underpinned by some kind of formula, which allows the major protagonist to the conflict -- all of them -- to claim some form of moral victory. It's got to be a formula which makes it clear that this is not zero-sum.

This is where I talk about the aspirations of many people in the Taliban movement which are not to somehow eliminate the United States, or demolish the Statue of Liberty, it's about how to reassert themselves as a legitimate moral and political force. That is probably compatible with most of the objectives of the international community pursuing inside Afghanistan. There's going to be a formula, like some of the formula underlying the Belfast Agreement on the Northern Ireland conflict, and then there's going to be a string of things about how you get top-level reintegration—not low-level—top-level reintegration of the Taliban movement instead of things where grievances are addressed, which were important to more Afghans than just those who have taken up arms. The Taliban are probably a minority of aggrieved Afghans, there's gonna have to be broader buy-in to the deal, and of course addressing the issue of al-Qaida and guarantees against the use of Afghanistan for international terrorism will be very important parts of the deal. How we get there, key policy issues around will it be Afghan-led in the form that Kai Eide has been recently putting around that this will be a process led by the Afghan government with the international community facilitating where requested by the Afghan government; or will it be one in which there will be a significant role for international mediation? A key choice which lies before people; I personally would tend towards the key role for international mediation, but it's interesting to note that the United Nations has been articulating that no, the international role will be minimalist.

There's a long list of challenges in reintegration. The first one has not been I think adequately addressed recently. The key challenge in reintegration is the track record of the team which has been put into place to run reintegration from the government of Afghanistan's side, has got a long track record in delivering the messages light on substance. There is a key risk. In reintegration, the money is spent, the reports are submitted, and nothing substantive happens. The best way to avoid that would be first of all to insure that there is an honest evaluation of the experience in the predecessor programs, particularly disarmament of illegal armed groups.

And secondly, we have to make sure that this is a process which is led by analysis. That those people are reintegrated who genuinely have been part of the insurgency rather than getting at this strange [inaudible], where we're forking out large amounts of money for reintegrating people who were never part of the insurgency.

The two postscripts. The one was the implication of the arrests in Pakistan; we heard that Mullah Baradar, or the military head of the Taliban, has been picked up. It's much bigger than that. The arrests which have been going on inside Pakistan are strategically significant. Now a major chunk of the Taliban leadership is now in Pakistani custody. There are conflicting interpretations of this. One interpretation is look, the Pakistanis have been told to assist in the war on terror. They've just picked up the key chunks of the military leadership of the people who are conducting the insurgency; they've been doing what they're told, yes. However, it is also significant, and the message which has been taken by many of the Taliban lower down the ranks have been that those people who were reported to have been interested in some kind of contacts or reconciliation have all been locked up. Those ones who are interested in continuing the struggle have been left out to fight. That is the message which has been taken down inside the Taliban movement whether it is intended or not.

So the very minimal implication of those arrests is that Pakistan will insure that its interests are addressed if there is any move to some kind of a political solution, and probably that makes sense. But also, it underlines the difficulties of generating space for politics, because arresting people is a continuation of the conflict, not a transition towards politics. Many of the pragmatists that I talk to in the Taliban movement say we need space to do politics.

Final one on the peace jirga. If you want to understand the significance of the forthcoming peace jirga and how we should engage with it, let's go back to the past; analyze the experience of the regional peace jirga—the Pakistan-Afghanistan process started in 2007, and learn from that. Broadly, I think the experience from that was that it was position-play rather than a strategic attempt to push peace. The institutions that were created from that process are sitting hollow and unused. If you want to see an example of a minor white elephant, go and visit the secretariats of

the last round of big-tent peace jirga processes. They are sitting unused. Thank you.

HOGUE: Michael thank you very much. Can I just ask you one thing? At the very end there, we always talk in this UN community about building the capability, the capacity of people to do certain things, institutions to do certain things, particularly at the very end there, where you were talking about the need to analyze what has gone before in order to know how to go forward, and your very last example there about the hollow secretariat sitting there. Does the capability, does the capacity exist? Is it simply the lack of will on people's part to use it?

SEMPLE: Yes, correct.

HOGUE: Excellent. I hope you all can ask precise questions like that, too. Please, if you would raise your hand, I will call on you and get a microphone to you. Craig Charney in the back—wait for the microphone, and please do introduce yourself, even though I've just done so.

CRAIG CHARNEY: Thank you Warren. I'm a pollster and I work for the International Peace Institute, and I've also done extensive polling in Afghanistan. I recently looked in fact at some of our old work—some of it's in this week's *Newsweek*—and got a surprise, because I found that most of the people who like the Taliban in Afghanistan, but half of them don't like Osama bin Laden. They also tend to be older, elder males in the south; employed and educated, while the more hard-liners, who also like Osama, as well as the Taliban are more lumpen, unemployed, uneducated. Those who dislike bin Laden also are more interested in being involved in the international community; international trade, are more supportive of Afghan custom and so forth. I found this interesting because they suggested that there might well be the sort of fissures or cracks which might offer a basis for negotiation; at least drawing a substantial part of the Taliban's support base into this sort of a negotiation that Mr. Semple was talking about. I wonder if he or Andrew would care to comment on this, or how that fits in with their impressions.

EXUM: This is probably good that I answer first, so that my ignorance is exposed, because I think this is the thought process that a lot of policy makers have right now. I think there's a worry that the old guard Taliban leadership that may not have had close ties to al-Qaida and September 10, 2001; that leadership structure has been eroded, and that was perhaps accelerated by the recent arrests in Pakistan, and that the next generation of leaders there's not going to be—the worry is that the past five years of warfare, or the past almost 10 years of warfare have driven the [inaudible] or the Taliban and the Haqqani Network closer together with al-Qaida; but Michael's really the subject matter expert.

SEMPLE: Andrew, yes thanks for that. I think you're absolutely right to be starting to look inside the insurgency, try and understand the different places that people are coming from, because this is an insurgency which is in flux. This is an insurgency which does have generational differences within it.

My understanding is that from the people that you could now characterize as the old guards; people who have joined the movement in 1994 and were with it in the period of its rise and in government, and have stayed loyal, that most of them regret the link with al-Qaida. Most of them feel that they were doing something which was inherently right for their country, but that they lost the kingdom on the basis of the link to al-Qaida, and some of them very discretely blame Mullah Omar for calling it wrong; both pre-2001 and at that critical point just after 9/11. Broadly labeled the pragmatists, and they're the people you can deal with, and at the moment, they are the people who, if they were to come on board on a political deal, they could claim the brand name—the Taliban—they could use this as a moral and political authority of the Taliban to say, what we are doing now is good, and all good Muslims should cooperate with us.

But I think that the younger generation, even if they are from Kandahar and over to the west, the younger brothers of those people, their main experience has been in struggling against the international community and the Americans. Osama of course purports to be a leader in that just as much as Mullah Omar does. Should remember that the early experience of the '94 generation was actually sitting around in Kabul waiting for Bill Richardson to turn up and see, and then say, is there a deal, which is totally different from people whose only other experience has been waging war against the United States.

There's another aspect of that shift inside the insurgency, which we should definitely be worried about. There is a difference between the politics of the traditional Taliban movement which centered on Quetta and Kandahar and the politics that we see in Waziristan, which is in shorthand we say the Haqqani Network. The people who we now label the Haqqani Network and who are gathered in Waziristan are much more likely to be the people that you're talking about who say, love Mullah Omar if he's not a little bit soft for us, and love Osama bin Laden. If you lock up all the Quetta/Kandahar leadership and you leave an open field for Waziristan, guess what? You get a hardening of attitude of the insurgency and you reduce the prospects of some kind of political settlement. In fact, if I sit down and joke with people who are linked through to the ones in Quetta/Kandahar, I say, well today Waziristan's our problem; tomorrow when you're on board it's your problem brothers.

HOGUE: Please here in the front row.

JACQUELINE SPANN: Thank you. My name is Jacqueline Spann, I'm the President of Education and Literacy Fund for Africa. The question that I have is very basic. I'd like to know how long do you think we will be chasing the Taliban? I mean we've been over in Afghanistan for over eight years chasing the Taliban, and the world economy is in a state of flux, and it is continuously declining. I don't know where we get the money to purchase all these weapons; to continuously send all this military might to this tiny little country, and I just need an answer. How long do you think we're going to engage in this scenario?

EXUM:

Yeah, I wish I had an answer there. When you look at the evolution of the US military over the past eight years, it's really been pretty stunning. Operationally and tactically the US military have been very quick learners when it's come to counterinsurgency operations, low intensity conflict. But if you look at the counterinsurgency doctrine that the US reads from, the play book, it's really quite... tactically, operationally, it's great; strategically, politically, it's pretty naïve. It's naïve for two reasons; first off there's an assumption that the interests of the host nation align with our own, and so there aren't any mechanisms in place to use leverage, or... we kind of think through how we're going to use leverage of the host nation when we conduct third-party interventions; kind of ad hoc or ex post facto. It's also politically naïve in the sense that it assumes that political support from the population of the United States—not to mention financial support—is more or less never ending.

I do think, however, that it's a mistake to say, you know, we've been in Afghanistan for eight years, we haven't done anything, simply because I fought in Iraq, and for many years -- really until just about 18 months ago -- Iraq was a tremendous drain on the resources the United States was able to commit to Afghanistan. If we are able... right now, we have kind of an opportunity to commit new resources to Afghanistan, but I think everybody from Ambassador Eikenberry to General McChrystal know all too well that there is a time limit on our commitment to Afghanistan, at least at the current levels.

When President Obama spoke to West Point or spoke to the nation at West Point in December, I thought he did a pretty good job with the first message that he had to deliver. The first message that he had to deliver was to reassure the United States and other troop-contributing nations that we're not going to be in Afghanistan forever, and to remind Afghan policy makers that we're not going to be in Afghanistan forever.

But the second message he had to deliver was very different. He had to tell the Afghan people who have to make a choice in this campaign, as well as policy makers in Pakistan, as well as the insurgents themselves, that even though our commitment to Afghanistan is going to go up and down, it's going to be enduring. I don't think that he delivered that message very well, because all the headlines afterwards were on 18 months, and ironically, that makes it more difficult to push forward some sort of reconciliation and reintegration. If the enemy thinks that you have a concrete time limit on when you're going to leave—even though those are the political realities—that I believe makes reconciliation and reintegration more difficult.

HOGGE:

Andrew, on that last point you just made, has the Taliban been able to exploit that? In other words, when an American officer is there explaining to a local community that this time we're going to stay, we're not going to abandon you -- are there people in the midst of that community that say, yes, but the President of the United States said they would start withdrawing at such-and-such a date?

EXUM:

Yeah, I mean the fact that we live in tents I think sends a message enough, and not hard structures. I'm less worried about the message that we're sending to insurgents on the ground in Afghanistan, and more worried about the message that we're sending or not sending to policy makers in Pakistan, quite frankly. I think that since 2005 or so, Pakistanis have pursued a quite logical strategy in Afghanistan aimed at the day after the United States leaves the region, and employing transnational groups or domestic insurgent groups in Afghanistan as a hedge against the vacuum that's going to result from the United States leaving. You're not going to change either Pakistani threat perceptions or Pakistani strategic calculus if the message that they receive—and this was the message that was initially received—is going to be: the United States is going to packing up stakes in 18 months.

HOGGE:

On that same point, and Mike if I might ask you this, what is the significance of the arrest of the Pakistanis taking into custody the Afghan Taliban leader, and is it possible that this suggests that Pakistan might one day withdraw the sanctuary they give the Afghan Talibanis in Pakistan?

SEMPLE:

Just finishing off where Andrew got to on the issue of the mid-term and long-term prospect. I think Andrew's absolutely right that there have been difficulties in communicating it, and I think that what most actors in the region really haven't bent their minds around yet is: what will the nature of the longer-term commitment look like? Because it is clear that the resources on the scale that they are being into Afghanistan at the moment are not going to be available for more than a few years; it hurts even now. Nobody really understands whether it's 18 months or two years, or three years, or four years, when you get significant draw-down of those resources, what will the nature of the enduring commitment be, and how effective will it be on the ground both in terms of planning and in terms of communication. I would have thought that that's a priority so as to be able to influence the actors there to cooperate.

On the point about the prisoners, people being arrested, is an absolutely fascinating case study of one of these are holograms that look different depending on which angle you're approach it. Like I told you, you can easily spin it that the Taliban is an insurgent group waging war against the United States, and the United States allies, and the government of Afghanistan, and anybody who succeeds in arresting the head of military operations gets major brownie points, they really have been extremely successful, a kind of extremely successful security operation, potentially major repercussions for those people who are trying to keep the conflict going from the Taliban side; great, so it's a great big step forward in the security operation.

What I was trying to explain earlier, is that Afghanistan is the world's most fertile soil for rumors and conspiracies. It's absolutely brilliant. I mean if we got ourselves together and decided let's hit on one story that we want to get into circulation, I'm sure with the networks that you and I all have here, we can get this, and it's going to bounce back to New York. More or

less, if we want to arrange for an Elvis sighting, I think that if every one of us just goes back to the office and sends an email to our friends saying, hey, have you heard about the Elvis sighting? Within a week it'd be bouncing back to New York that yes, he's been seen in all 34 Afghan provinces.

So the point being that we've had Elvis sightings on Taliban reconciliation for the past year. I can tell you confidently that in October of 2009, Mullah Baradar was smuggled into the Presidential Palace and ate a meal with Hamid Karzai. Any of us who's got access to reporting channels will know that many of the reporting channels carry this through the system, and there are several different versions as well. Maulvi Kabir, one of the Eastern Taliban leaders, who you know, hasn't got quite as many headlines as Mullah Baradar, but we know that there are also things through the reporting channels that Mullah Kabir was also half in bed with the Afghan government.

So basically, you had a string of reporting that some of the Taliban are considering reconciliation. I personally think a lot of it has sort of been spun -- particularly spun by people connected to the Kabul government who want to demonstrate that they can actually do politics and they can deliver some kind of reconciliation themselves, who've been talking up things. The basis of many of these rumors is that Afghan actors in conflicts all the time maintain contacts across to the other side, but it's largely tactical rather than strategic, so as to keep a get-out-of-jail-free card, or find ways of springing prisoners when the other side picks them up. That has been misrepresented and spun into this idea of reconciliation, and so now I think that some people have actually started to react against it.

So basically the people around whom most stories have been told have now been picked up and they are under arrest. The rest of the movement, rightly or wrongly, now believes that if you talk to the government or the internationals; if you deviate from the path of conflict and jihad, you will end up being arrested. This cuts two ways, because on the one hand the Taliban actually—who I label as the pragmatists—are now more frightened and more paranoid, and feel that it's a very dangerous thing to dally with the idea of peace. On the other hand, it increases the desire because there is a deep unease inside the movement, feeling we are being used as a proxy for a regional conflict. This is not where we want to be, because remember that most of the people involved in the movement actually—rightly or wrongly—they believe that they are part of a political and moral force which is seeking to reform their country and bring peace and justice. So the idea of finding that they're actually some type of a proxy is extremely uncomfortable. Whether it's true or not, but at the moment that's one of the things that they're worried about.

HOGGE:

I've seen eight hands, so I'm going to start going two-by-two. Gentleman here first, and then my colleague Nur Laiq afterwards, and then we'll go to the back.

HAGEN PEUKERT: My name is Lieutenant Colonel Hagen Peukert, I work for DPKO inside the UN. Reconciliation always means a kind of readiness to make concessions. Facing inside the current Afghanistan national government and establishment, we do have the representatives of the former Northern Alliance; many of them had been seen or could have been seen as war criminals, and many of them had been fighting the current Taliban leadership for many years. How could we see realistically a kind of national reconciliation if these two opposing groups are still as they are? And if we think about most of these current representatives or senior representatives in the current national government and authority by any means could not be accepted by Taliban leadership. So how much does this impede realistically the process of reconciliation?

HOGGE: Your question-- we'll take them both at once.

NUR LAIQ: Actually, my question was similar to that one. It was about can President Karzai actually deliver given that he'll have to deal with spoilers that are within his own government, then within the region, and then possibly also in the US?

EXUM: That's a fastball for you, that's yours.

SEMPLE: Okay, two difficult and significant questions. The issue of the presence of figures from the Northern Alliance inside the Kabul government is both an asset and a liability. It reminds us that what's going on in Afghanistan is not just an insurgency against foreign occupation, it is also another metamorphosis of an Afghan civil war. And the protagonists inside this civil war have been slightly remodeled several times, but different parts of the Pashtun groups and the Northern Alliance are the key protagonists. In a sense... it's important that the reconciliation should be between them, otherwise it's not a political deal.

Where there is a hope that a settlement might be attainable, is that the Northern Alliance figures that you're referring to do not have any claim to control or operate Kandahar. They aren't even really able to operate in Kandahar, so the first space which is important for the Taliban movement is a space that essentially the Northern Alliance is not interested in. Just to give you hints that there might be some kind of possible settlement, and you say, okay, well, somehow the Northern Alliance is primarily concerned about pleasing a constituency which sits north of the Hindu Kush; the Taliban is primarily concerned about what happens south of the Hindu Kush, and of course, somebody has to come up with a formula whereby you're happy with the way that the national government has been formulated. I'm not going to offer you the answer in 30 seconds, but it's just an indication that it might be possible.

There are positive symmetry and negative symmetry options. There's the kind of option which President Karzai has tried to push in all previous settlements of his political practice, which has been sort of positive symmetry; let everybody stay in; however bad you are, it's okay, stay with us. So the worst of the Taliban come in, and they're joined by the worst of

the Northern Alliance. It's possible that you get at some stage some kind of negative symmetry. You can imagine deals where some key Taliban figures are at least retired off the scene to sit in Saudi Arabia; they might be demanding some quid pro quos from some member of the current government.

I would just point to one thing in terms of thinking ahead as to how this might work and that is that of course we are right to look at the past; but we should also look at the present. And if we're trying to understand the current set of grievances, and how you might be structuring an agreement to have a broader appeal than just to the current round of fighters; we should remember that the strongest grievances at the moment relate to things which have happened after 2001 rather than before it. It has to do with diluted wealth; it's to do with the emergent inequalities, the crony capitalism, the way that those people who have been close to the regime, which includes some people who were warlords and some people who are newly arrived, who have leveraged their access to the Presidential Palace, and to some of the international operators to translate it into hundreds of millions of dollars in a situation where the society has a self-perception of everyone being poor, and therefore this being unjust. So that probably when you come towards a deal, you'd be looking to see how could some of that be reigned in? Challenges, and if you can't meet these challenges, you end up with a default option.

On the issue of is Hamid Karzai going to deliver, how can he deal with his spoilers. I think that the formula which Kai Eide, for well thought out reasons, and there's a logical coherence to what Kai Eide has been arguing, that this will be Afghan government-led with facilitation upon request. I think it will probably run afoul of the in-house spoilers; that we'll end up with some kind of insider/outsider gain, where the insiders run the Presidential Palace; basically offer no compromise which will be acceptable to the outsiders, the people in the insurgency, and also non-government aggrieved people who aren't with the Taliban and you don't get a deal.

That's why I think that there's going to have to be a more active international mediation facility than something which is likely to be requested in the Kai Eide formula.

HOGUE: Andrew you had a thought on precedent?

EXUM: Yeah I've used the time of Michael's answer to think through maybe some precedents that might apply here. Certainly in the case of Northern Ireland, as well as with the case of Lebanon, you have instances of previously sworn enemies coming together in power-sharing arrangements. Certainly if you look at the political alliances in Lebanon today they're quite interesting when you look at them with respect to some of the more violent episodes within the Lebanese civil war. I think the same thing... I think Reverend Ian Paisley just resigned from the government in Northern Ireland, but the fact that he could share a table with Martin McGuinness for so many years I think testifies to the fact that

leaders will engage in a political process when they think it benefits them. Bosnia is another example whereby the reconciliation process benefited the political leaders on all sides.

One example that doesn't apply, I don't think, is Iraq, and this is probably important for Americans to remember. The episodes that led to the drop in violence in Iraq in 2007 and 2008 came not just from a change in American tactics, and a surge of American troops, but also came as a result of several things, that had we been able to stop them in 2005/2006, we would have tried to do—and that was a pretty brutal civil war that was fought and lost by the Sunnis. So I don't think that Iraq applies, but there may be some other examples that do apply and give us a little bit of hope for previously sworn enemies sitting down in Afghanistan.

HOGUE: This gentleman here in the front row, and then this woman here in the third row.

RAFIUDDIN SHAH: Thank you very much. I'm Shah, counsellor from the Pakistan Mission. It was a very interesting presentation. One could have difference of opinion on many points, but just to use this forum for education and analysis, I have two questions. We, as far as Pakistan's knowledge of Afghanistan is concerned, it is a country which has a peculiar culture, history. Its terrain is very difficult. There are many parts in Afghanistan which are not still accessible for NATO forces even today. It was (inaudible) in the heart of Afghanistan and only a couple of weeks back NATO forces weren't there. So there are many places where there's a vacuum which the Taliban have been benefiting from.

But in that context, when we see the whole story, in 2004 it was for the first time when Pakistan emphasized that we should try to find a political solution of Afghanistan. Whenever we talk about political solution it is reconciliation and things like that. My question is, that while there is now a realization for reconciliation and political solution of the issues, coupled with the military solution which cannot be denied: why do most of the intellectuals and media is trying to make reconciliation more complicated rather than simplifying? Because the things which we come across send a message that probably at first is difficult to understand theoretically what this reconciliation and reintegration is, and then implementation of that reintegration becomes another challenge.

My question is, with your background, with that experience, do you think reconciliation could be simplified? And my last question would be that purely from a military point of view; you think a total military solution of the problem is possible? Thank you.

HOGUE: Just hold that question for this woman in the third row; we'll answer them both at once.

ERIN MCCANDLESS: Thank you, a very interesting discussion. I'm Erin McCandless from NYU, and if we think about the Taliban as having a key desire for rehabilitation of the movement as a political and moral force, what are the implications for how we understand reintegration particularly at the community level, reintegrating former combatants at the community level? And you mentioned that DIAG needs to be evaluated. It has been evaluated a couple of times, and of course the purpose of DIAG was to, or is to deal with the 1,800 or so illegally armed groups that were not taken care of in the first DDR process.

And some of the key problems with DIAG of course, is the conceptualization around what actually is an illegally armed group, and how many people are forming it. The fact that ongoing insecurity with insurgency makes it really undesirable for people to want to give up their weapons, and also since, in some cases ISAF is toying with different kinds of alternative security structures, which also make it seem to some like there's re-arming going on, while disarming going on at the same time in neighboring communities, but most importantly probably that the development dividend that was supposed to go with DIAG is too little, too late.

And I guess if you could say something about that, and the key question is how much and what kind of reconciliation and reintegration do you think is really possible at the community level, because we've been talking more about the political level, and do you think this can really begin in any concerted way before a total end to the conflict? Thank you.

EXUM: Well I'll just begin by answering the gentleman's second question. No, there cannot be a purely military solution. The problem is that the US government has figured out how to do counterinsurgency at the tactical and operational levels; it has failed in large part to figure out how exactly we use leverage at the political level. Afghanistan is, in a lot of ways, much more difficult than Iraq. In Iraq, you had Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus joined at the hip more or less in Baghdad, and then in addition, following them General Odierno and Ambassador Hill. But Iraq was a largely—and no disrespect to our allies who fought there, the British especially—was a largely American operation.

General McChrystal, by contrast in Afghanistan, has no real civilian counterpart; or rather, he has many civilian counterparts. And so I think it's more difficult to combine military and political operations and strategy in Afghanistan than it was in Iraq where you had a pretty clear relationship between the Ambassador and the General.

Then just briefly—and this is to the lady's question—I talked earlier about counterinsurgency often resembling a kind of counter-war strategy, and certainly at the local level I think that's what it's looking like. Again, this has only started taking place in the past 24 months, but you'll see a lot of US military units at least using the TCAF method—the Tactical Conflict Assessment Format that was developed by USAID—and it's been pretty enlightening. At the beginning of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, US

military units going into certain areas would assume that their mission is to fight, seek out, and destroy the enemy. Then we got a little more sophisticated, and your average commander would say, right, I know I need to do that but there's also services, so I'm going to pave x-number kilometer of roads, build x-number of hospitals, refurbish x-number of mosques, and we started to think beyond just purely kinetic means.

Now, I think in some areas of Afghanistan, at the local level, they're really looking at what's driving the conflict at the local level, and this is not reconciliation per se, but what they're finding is that the things that are driving the conflict in some areas may or may not be the presence of an enemy. It might be things like land disputes, irrigation rights. This is a little bit like trying to teach an elephant to jump through hoops when you're talking about Marine Corp battalion commanders—Army battalion commanders as well. But nonetheless, I think that operationally and tactically we've gotten more intelligent. So paradoxically in Afghanistan, we may be able to do reconciliation at the local level much more effectively than we can at the larger, strategic and political levels.

SEMPLE:

Also, first of all on the question on military solution, the answer is a big no. It's a no obviously for the government of Afghanistan, and the United States and allies. They're never going to eliminate the Taliban from Afghanistan through military action. But it's also a no for the Taliban as well. The Taliban, under no foreseeable scenarios, given—it's like the residual US commitment in there, under no foreseeable scenario are the Taliban actually going to be able to topple the existing order in Kabul. You've got these really sort of outlandish possibilities -- there's popular dissatisfaction after another 10 years, and mobs in the streets, almost a non-Taliban phenomenon. The Taliban are not going to win militarily; the United States is not going to bring a clear end to the conflict. There's going to be no outright military victory, and that's something which I think is broadly recognized over here now that I think that's sort of built in to many of the NATO calculations now. The question is, when does it get rebuilt into the Taliban calculations.

On the issue of simplifying reconciliation, I love the challenge; it's brilliant. I think it's important to have simplified ways of communicating it as long as that doesn't actually prevent us going into some of the detail as well, because with Afghanistan, the devil is in the detail. The kind of reconciliation which is relevant to bringing an end to the current conflict in Afghanistan is a reconciliation, meaning a political accommodation between those people who have stayed out of the existing political order, the Kabul-centric order, and their armed opposition, which is part of an overall political deal in Afghanistan, that's what it is. I take the point that this has been articulated by various quarters, including significantly in Pakistan for several years now, and it's only over the past year or so that more people have started to buy into the idea, but, still, no political process has started, and, well, that's something which may change over the next year or so.

But on the issue of learning from DIAG – yeah, I think you’re pointing towards the key point from exercises like DIAG is that over the past 9 years, in exercises like DIAG, we’ve had the international community buying into something which is sort of a key part of the process, operationalizing it through projects, coming up with mechanisms to deliver it, a metrics to measure it, everybody gets involved -- you go through all this wonderful substance, and I’ve sat through so many of these meetings that you sit in the Presidential Palace, and everybody’s feeling really good over there at this side, and you’re reporting on progress, and there’s lots of effort and lots of money spent, and fundamentally you’re not making progress towards the real substantive mission, to actually what you wanted to achieve in a substantive sense. But there are lots of metrics to be able to pass back to headquarters. It looks as if perhaps you’re making progress, and you’re certainly spending the money, but actually, you’re not getting there because what you’ve really committed to doing is actually missing the original objective.

The thing is, that headquarters have been slower to recognize this than some of the key national actors in Afghanistan, and that’s why I’m saying that this has got to be a big warning for the structuring of the reintegration program, because they’re much further on the learning curve; my dear friend Masoom Stanekzai is well ahead on the learning curve, further ahead than most of the other people involved in our missions who’ve only been there for six months and the people in headquarters who’ve been there for two or three years.

The last bit was just, can you do bottom-up reconciliation or does it have to be top-down? I think it makes sense to push in both directions. You’re not going to solve the whole problem through the bottom-up, but we can certainly contribute to the learning exercise, because when you get into some of the bottom-up reconciliation there’s a possibility of addressing the kind of things that Andrew was talking about that you can start to explore and learn more about the grievance-driven agenda, which is denied in the top-level propaganda. When you suddenly find the people that we’ve been labeling as terrorists and Taliban or whatever, you know actually in the first year of the conflict, we blew up their homes before they’d even gone into the resistance; took their cousins off to whether it’d be Kabul or Bagram, or Cuba and in a sense force them into the insurgency and find ways of unwinding that at a local level. I’m sure it will deliver positive feedback in terms of creating the conditions in which some kind of national reconciliation might take place.

HOGUE:

I’ve got more questions than we can handle in the next 10 minutes, but let’s do three. Ann Phillips in the front row. Jeff Laurenti in the back, and then this gentleman against the credenza.

ANN PHILLIPS:

My question—perhaps you addressed it, I was out of the room for a few minutes, so if I did forgive me. I’m interested to know what your views are on the lessening of interest, or the decreasing interest and outright withdrawal of a number of the European troops from the involvement in this effort, and—did you address this already? Oh, and the unequivocal

opposition of the European population to the involvement in this whole procedure in Afghanistan. Will there be an impact? Or none? Or what is the significance of this if any? And there you have it.

HOGUE: Jeff? Make it fast.

JEFF LAURENTI: Jeff Laurenti, The Century Foundation. If we could explore for a second please Michael's point about the "Kabul-centric political order" -- to what extent do the Taliban inner circle of leadership view the Kabul government and the coalition that empowered there as not just political opponents who happen to have the marbles, but as fundamentally illegitimate and immoral, and to what extent do they see the 2004 constitution as itself fundamentally illegitimate, or is that something into which they could be brought to buy in?

HOGUE: Finally this gentleman?

RAZZAQ ALSEEDI: My name is Razzaq from Iraqi mission. Just asking about two questions; the first one is about the insurgency within Iraq and Afghanistan; they are separate or working together? And the second question for the gentleman, what about the experience taken by the American forces. Do they apply in other places or any place has its own restrictions? Or for example reconciliation, other stuff that has been done with the support of American forces in Iraq? They are going to be applied in other places? Thank you.

EXUM: I'm sorry, just real quick, that question was on operational lessons from Iraq that can be applied to Afghanistan?

RAZZAQ: I mean there is a lot of things done in Iraq with the support of American forces, is this experience going to be applied in other places?

EXUM: I'll take the first and third question and give Michael some time to think about the second one. First off, with respect to the pull out, or considered pull out of some of the troop-contributing nations from Afghanistan, I think that operationally that it's a mixed bag. I think as far as combat operations, it probably doesn't reduce NATO's fighting power by that much. I think from an information operations, there's strategic communications perspective, it is big. It certainly reinforces the idea that the US and NATO presence in Afghanistan is on the clock so to speak.

I think probably the more interesting question is with respect to the long-term relevance of NATO as an alliance and as an alliance and as a fighting force. I think that Afghanistan has probably opened up some questions with respect to the future role that NATO should play, and will play and to the continued viability of the NATO alliance as a fighting force. A lot of this stuff is not new. We act like in the 1970s and 1980s everybody in NATO was going to share an equal amount of the burden of fighting in Western Europe—that was never the case—but I think that is one of the questions that is going to be asked.

Yes, it does have an effect from—again, I called it an information operations or strategic communications effect. It sends a message that there is a time limit on how long we're going to be there, and yes I think that does affect reconciliation, reintegration or the attitudes of just normal Afghans when they try to think about, okay, who am I going to support in this conflict, so yes.

Operationally there have been lessons that have been learned in Iraq that have been applied to Afghanistan, but, I can say this with certainty, that the American military is very wary of taking the Iraq template and just assuming it's going to fit Afghanistan. Again, like I said at the very beginning, all insurgencies are sui generis, they come from within their own, and all conflicts are sui generis, they come from their own specific social, political, historical context and the Afghanistan conflict is much different than the conflict in Iraq.

HOGUE:

Michael you have the last word.

SEMPLER:

Thanks Jeff, I think that was an invitation to write a paper rather than to answer a question. The thing is that the people who are waging the insurgency are not mobilizing to fight against the Kabul government and the system that most of the people in this room know about. They are not mobilizing against the—

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