

## THE CENTER FOR NATIONAL POLICY

### **“THE END OF THE AFGHAN WAR: TALKING WITH THE TALIBAN AND WHAT COMES NEXT”**

#### **FEATURED SPEAKER:**

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SCOTT BATES: Well, thank you everybody for coming to the Center for National Policy. Can you hear me in the back all right? Thank you very much for being here.

My name is Scott Bates. I'm president here at CNP. And on behalf of our chairman, Peter Kovler, welcome.

This week at CNP, we have decided to focus our discussion on two of the most important national security issues confronting America: first, the situation in Afghanistan and, on Thursday, we hope to see you again. We have a fantastic program about Iran that will be – thank you.

So turn off your cell phones if you can, but that served as a useful reminder. Thank you. Right.

Well, folks, as we gather here today, this afternoon, in Washington, D.C., in this beautiful conference room, at this very moment, in Afghanistan – and I know many of you have been there – darkness is descending on a January evening. And we all know what that is like. And darkness is descending across countless valleys, and mountains, and hillsides. And there are 90,000 American troops in the field on patrol standing guard duty as we speak. Those are the stakes for America at this moment.

And the history of this war-torn land has been well chronicled so we really don't need to go into that right now. But I think that the sacrifices made by thousands of American families and many families of NATO service personnel who have been injured or lost their lives, that has not been as well chronicled and it's important to remember them today.

But as the years go by, there seems to be less focus by America's policy and political class on setting a clear and sustainable course ahead in Afghanistan. For the past two years, American and allied troops have made some significant security gains. They've removed al Qaeda as an operational force in Afghanistan and put the Taliban in most areas on the run.

Yet, after 10 years of American and allied commitment to providing massive security and development assistance to Afghanistan, a recent NIE stated security gains in Afghanistan may be undercut by pervasive corruption, incompetent governance, and the Taliban operating openly from sanctuaries in Pakistan.

Indeed, President Hamid Karzai has asked for \$10 billion a year in assistance from the international community. And that would be through the year 2025, so that's \$10 billion a year for that period, simply to maintain the security apparatus that is in place now and to avoid the economy of Afghanistan from crashing entirely.

Well, there's still much talk of the withdrawal of coalition combat forces from Afghanistan in 2014. There's a recognition by all that a significant residual force would need to stay there for an undetermined amount of time. I don't know what residual force means but we can ask our experts today.

Yet, this topic that you'd think political leaders in America would be engaged with – generally I think if you've been watching the debates or even listening to the president, it is not a topic that is getting the attention that it well deserves.

So, for all the sacrifice that's been made by the American people in the last 10 years, is it possible that we might win every battle and yet lose this war? How can we avoid that fate? What should the American people expect in terms of the real duration of the U.S. commitment, prospects for success and, more fundamentally, in defining what is success in Afghanistan.

Well, we're fortunate today to have with us three men who, for the better part of a decade, have dedicated their professional careers to finding answers and providing options on the seemingly intractable war in Afghanistan.

Michael O'Hanlon, to my right, is I believe one of the most insightful strategists and prolific writers on national security of his generation. I would say my generation, but you're much older than me, right, Michael? As director of research and a senior fellow on foreign policy at the Brookings Institution, Michael has written a half dozen books and several hundred op-eds on national security issues confronting the United States. His articles have appeared in the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Financial Times, and on and on. He has appeared on TV and radio – and this is a true statistic – over 2,000 times in the last 10 years. I think that really goes to the point that his opinion is valued and trusted across Washington and throughout the world. And, in fact, I can assure you that when I worked in the U.S. Congress, we valued Michael's opinion very highly indeed. He was about the first person we went to on matters of war and peace that faced America. Michael has a Ph.D. from Princeton. He teaches there. He teaches throughout the halls of academia, but he is not confined to the ivory towers of academia. He has personally gone on missions to Iraq and Afghanistan repeatedly to learn from troops on the ground on the situation and that has informed his opinion.

To my left is Joshua Foust, a fellow at the American Security Project and a correspondent for the Atlantic. Prior to joining the American Security Project, Joshua worked for the U.S. intelligence community where he focused on studying the non-militant socio-cultural environment in Afghanistan and at the U.S. Army Human Terrain System Project. He also worked with the Defense Intelligence Agency on issues related to the rise of political violence in Yemen. Joshua is author of Afghanistan Journal, selections for Registan.net and is a regular contributor to Foreign Policies AfPak Channel. He has appeared on the BBC and Al Jazeera to speak on the war in Afghanistan. And, Joshua, thank you very much for coming with us today.

To my immediate left is Paul McHale. Paul McHale has served his nation as assistant secretary of defense, as a member of Congress and as a colonel in the Marine Corps Reserve. As assistant secretary of defense for homeland defense, Paul McHale was responsible for homeland preparedness in the wake of 9/11 and civilian oversight of two combatant commands that cover the western hemisphere. As a member of the United States House of Representatives, Paul McHale served on the House Armed Services Committee, which has oversight responsibility for all U.S. military operations and training. And, as an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve, Paul McHale served combat tours in Saudi Arabia in Operation Desert Shield, in Kuwait in Operation Desert Storm, and in Afghanistan during Operation Enduring Freedom. In addition to being awarded the Defense Department's highest civilian honor, the Distinguished Public Service Medal, former Secretary McHale also received Afghanistan's highest award for public service, the Baryal Medal. Do you have that with you today?

PAUL MCHALE: I'd have to check.

MR. BATES: Okay. He's an adjunct professor at the U.S. Army War College, a former member of the board of advisors at the U.S. Naval War College, and, perhaps most important of all, at least for many of us here today, he is on the board here at CNP.

So thank you very much, gentlemen, for being here today. And as always here at CNP, we'll let the experts start the discussion rolling and then I will rely on all of you to share your opinions, thoughts and ask your questions.

So, without further ado, Michael.

MICHAEL O'HANLON: Scott, thank you. I know we're all thrilled to be here. It's a great privilege.

I want to talk picking up on the question you asked of what is success, but also, before I do that, just review a couple of the facts and figures. And others may want to emphasize different ones or challenge mine or just try to get a little bit of the lay of the land for I think the factual basis from which we're all proceeding because there's plenty of room for disagreement, even once the facts are established, and they're certainly difficult to ascertain. But I would just cite a couple of the key trends that I think I've seen in Afghanistan in recent months. One is – and they're good and bad. There's no doubt that they're both.

On the good side, what we've seen is a continued growth of the Afghan security forces. Now, in recent days there's been a bit of press on the terrible tragic occurrences that have been all too frequent where Afghans soldiers, be they Taliban infiltrators or others, have killed American or other NATO soldiers working with them. That's been a big problem.

On the other hand, I have not seen data that suggests it's a growing problem. It's serious enough and tragic enough as it is. And it basically needs to be juxtaposed with

the fact – and others may have different interpretations or impressions than my own – but when I talk to American and NATO soldiers on the ground, they generally feel that the Afghans are better fighters than Iraqis, at least in the ones that I've spoken with, and not bad.

Now, I'm not going to overstate. I'm not saying these people are viewed as the best soldiers going, or that they are nipping on the heels of the Turks for the best army in the Muslim world or – I don't hear that kind of praise.

What I hear is the Afghans are courageous, that they know how to fight, and not the just ones who are fighting against us but even the ones who are fighting with us, that they actually do learn reasonably well, but that they don't necessarily show any danger of becoming a Western army anytime soon, that one patrol a day is enough, this whole concept of doing three or four that Americans seem to relish doesn't seem to go over so well in Afghanistan. There are a lot of problems obviously with people's desire to go on leave and stay on leave longer than – in other words, to desert. There are a lot of other issues as well.

And, by the way, the army – partly because of the financial constraints that Scott was referring to earlier in a different context, the Army remains fairly small for the size of the country, and it's going to stay fairly small for the size of the country. And that's going to be a challenge as NATO continues to phase down.

So those are some good and bad statistics and facts that I would perceive and interpret on the Afghan army. The police – not quite as good, perhaps even quite a bit behind the army. I think it's heading in the right direction but probably not at the pace that you would really hope for given that NATO is already now well on the way down.

So the big hopes that we had in 2009, when President Obama accepted the recommendations of Secretary Gates, General Petraeus, General Chrystal and others to do this surge, I think the aspirations of that surge have been disappointing. I think most people would agree with that.

On the other hand, the accomplishments have not been inconsequential. And that's going to give me in just a moment here a chance to pivot and try to answer what is success or what is realistic success at this moment. But, first, a couple of more facts and figures and then I'll get to that question.

On the issue of the trends in actual security on the ground, what I see here is that most of the country is somewhat better than it was a year ago. The north and the west are still a little worse than they were three, four years ago – and you can ask any journalist, any member of an NGO, anyone who used to be able to travel to those areas, it doesn't feel as safe anymore.

But I believe that in the last one to two years, we've sort of stabilized the deterioration. And the north and the west remain relatively reasonable places for the

context of a country at war. So they are not particularly violent for the typical Afghan on the typical day, but if you're a NATO soldier, if you're an Afghan soldier, if you're an Afghan police chief or an Afghan governor, you're at risk. And certainly there's a fair amount more risk and danger in those areas than there had been a half decade ago. But I think sort of we've stanching the bleeding in a sense. And there's no longer an ongoing deterioration in the north or west.

Kabul, even though it suffers the occasional spectacular attack, is and remains and has been a far safer capital city than Baghdad ever was, that really at any point in the war, including today, and it's safer than many crime ridden capitals around the world like countries in places like South Africa or Nigeria or Colombia. Many places that have had high levels of endemic violence are actually more dangerous in their capital cities than Kabul. And that remains true. So even though this spectacular attack continues to occur, I don't think you're seeing a fundamental challenge to the security of the capital. And most of the security there is provided by Afghan security forces.

So, again, I'm not going to overstate their abilities but they're doing okay there. The problem really is in the east. And what we've seen overall in 2011 I think it's fair to say is a gradual improvement in most of the country, a fairly dramatic improvement in the south, but a continued deterioration in the east, not just a stalemate but a continued deterioration.

So, to put it in quantitative terms – and I don't want to claim the statistics are of high enough fidelity that you should bank a lot on this – and others may want to, again, either challenge or give a different prism to view some of these statistics, but, overall, the amount of enemy initiated violence in Afghanistan in 2011 was down nationwide compared to 2010. Notice I said “enemy initiated violence.” There are different assessments about whether crime might have grown in that period. And the U.N. statistics show that average Afghans perceive a somewhat more dangerous country in 2011 relative to the year before.

But, by NATO statistics, tracking enemy attacks we've seen less in 2011. But even that relatively good news has to be balanced by two more sobering realities, one of which is that the decline has not been dramatic. And given that this was the huge year of effort, 2011 was the biggest year of our effort with the most forces that we're ever going to have. A 20 percent nationwide reduction is not a huge accomplishment. Now, you could say it was never nearly as violent a country as Iraq at the worst of it. And, therefore, it was hard to decline dramatically from a level of violence that was never all that horrific.

On the other hand, 418 Americans still died in Afghanistan in 2011 and that's only down by about less than 20 percent from the total in 2010 and it's a pretty large number. And a lot of Afghan forces, a lot of others died as well.

So I would say on balance, the security environment nationwide has improved only somewhat and that's a little bit discouraging. And, on balance, the east is worse by roughly 15 to 20 percent.

MR. BATES: Is that directly attributable to the sanctuaries in Pakistan?

MR. O'HANLON: Absolutely. And so the fundamental strategic problems that I'll summarize, my lay of the land with just these two points, because you've already got one earlier in your introduction, Scott.

It's hard to win a counterinsurgency campaign when you have a perfidious neighbor to the east and when you have a corrupt indigenous partner in the country you're working in. And, by the way, we may have Pakistanis in the crowd. I certainly don't want to be offensive. I think when I say perfidious, it's in regards to Pakistan's view of how to handle Afghanistan. Pakistan is doing an admirable job, in my judgment, dealing with its own insurgency. And they've been at times an important partner with the United States in dealing with al Qaeda, not so much in 2011 perhaps but in previous experience we have made a lot of progress together.

So the U.S.-Pakistan relationship is a mixed bag but on balance Pakistan's role towards Afghanistan has not on balance been helpful. And the hope that somehow by showing Pakistan we were serious and committed, they would come along and really help us and really clamp down on those sanctuaries, that was an aspiration that I think the president had in '09. I think on balance it's been disappointed. And so that's how I would sketch out the basic lay of the land.

Let me conclude, because I don't want to go on it too long, and we'll have more opportunity for discussion later after hearing from my distinguished colleagues, what is a reasonable standard for success given all of this? Well, I think that a reasonable standard for success is something like I call – and Paul Wolfowitz and I wrote about this a couple of months ago – the notion of a Colombia standard.

And what I mean by that is not Colombia today, where we've had dramatic progress over the last 10 years, and wouldn't it be wonderful if Afghanistan could have a leader like Uribe or Santos, but what I'm talking about is Colombia the way it was a decade ago where it had a FARC insurgency in a big part of the country, but it was not really at that time even at substantial risk of overtaking the whole country. We were helping Colombia get the tools to contain that insurgency on its own with the hope that at some point somebody like Uribe would come along and be able to make big dramatic progress. And I think getting Afghanistan to that sort of place, where it can contain primarily rural insurgency that remains chronic at some level and controls substantial swaths of land in the east and south, especially in the east, that may be the most realistic standard of success that we can get to.

But I would submit that if we are able to do in those swaths of eastern Afghanistan post-2014 what we can now do in the FATA region of Pakistan, that's a

tolerable and acceptable outcome for American security interests. In other words, if the insurgents and the terrorists who may try to take sanctuary there don't have enough big open space that they know that they're relatively safe, if we can be sort of nipping at their heels with human intelligence that we gather all around their periphery, that we can send in spies – because there are no big swaths of land that are unavailable and inaccessible to us, that we have drones and other assets overhead that we can listen to their communications and occasionally strike at them with drones or commandoes, that is for us a tolerable outcome. It probably takes 10,000 to 20,000 U.S. troops beyond 2014. And it probably takes even to get to this goal, even to get to this standard of success, it probably means the president has to stay a little bit patient once we get down to 68,000 U.S. troops in September and to stay relatively close to that number for the following year.

Maybe I should leave it right on that point because I suspect we'll have some disagreement and debate on that point, that's certainly a central point for American politics.

I have a couple more words to say about President Karzai and the 2014 Afghan political transition which is the other big transition in 2014 that we have to think about. But why don't we get to that later or at least my role in that conversation later.

But, again, even to get to this Colombia standard, you're probably going to have to continue the training of the Afghan Army and police at a fairly intense level. You're going to have to work hard in the field for another two fighting seasons which means the drawdown I think is going to have to stay patient once we get down to that 68,000 U.S. troops number in September. I don't think we can go a lot below that for the following 12 months.

MR. BATES: Thank you, Michael. An interesting point is that – to ask for that continued patience, not a small thing. I'm thinking that at this point we've probably had the longest combat engagement in American history perhaps, maybe close to Vietnam. And a political leader, be it Republican, Democrat would have to have a frank discussion with the American people about that. And this is a perfect segue to Joshua, whose background is also in intelligence. And he's written extensively on HUMINT.

And you don't have to answer this right now, but working into your presentation, picking up on what Michael said, the idea that we could use drones, special forces, light footprint on the ground to disrupt – I'm paraphrasing, disrupt any terrorist networks, what is the impact of when you scale back your engagement on the ground a very significant level to your ability to collect HUMINT? So it's one thing when you have 100,000 guys on the ground and you're spending billions, can you still get the good HUMINT with a much lighter footprint?

MR. FOUST: Yes, I mean I could probably answer that really briefly right off the bat. You can't. And also, right now, the value of the human that we get is really vastly overstated. Almost every example that you have of U.S. forces accidentally killing Afghan

civilians is a result of bad humans. We are still subject to getting played off local rivalry  
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MR. BATES: Yes, is it bad or intentionally bad?

MR. FOUST: I mean I don't – like the U.S. isn't intentionally bad –

MR. BATES: Right, it's –

MR. FOUST: – but a lot of the intelligence that they get, they pay for. And we get what we pay for. We don't pay very much for it. And when you give people money to give you information, you're automatically introducing bias into the equation. And so I mean I think that the value and the accuracy of that is pretty overstated in public. And that's actually, I mean, kind of a theme that I think creeps into a lot of these strategic discussions.

You know we talk about 418 U.S. soldiers getting killed last year, 2,300 Afghan civilians got killed last year. That's an increase over 2010. So while we talk about enemy initiated attacks being done, when we talk about parts of the country getting safer for Afghans, for the people that we're actually there supposedly trying to protect, it's much worse. If you go through the educated circles in Kabul, you don't see people thinking, wow, this is much safer than Bogota in 1999. They think this is terrible. I want to get out as soon as I can. There's just enormous flight of educated Afghans in Kabul. They're voting for their feet and they're voting no confidence in what's coming down pike in Afghanistan. So I mean I'm definitely not as optimistically, even guardedly optimistic, I think it's a better way of putting it, as Mr. Hanlon over there. But that's important to keep in mind. And I think a lot of what this comes down to was kind of theme of what I wanted to talk about in the first place, which is this end state that we're trying to figure. I mean I've heard Michael's idea articulated in a lot of different ways. It basically comes down to managing the conflict in some way, just kind of accepting a more or less permanent presence and saying that therefore this is going to be what we have to deal with, essentially in perpetuity because there's no considered strategy for how to actually end the need for us to have a presence there.

You know, when you look at the decisions that went into, say, the surge in 2009, it was well, we can do this, but not if we have an unreliable neighbor to the East and not if we have an unreliable government in Kabul. Those would be failure conditions. So these conditions haven't changed. They've been in place since 2001. So we've had this problem with kind of making magical thinking about our ability to make plans and our ability to carry them out. But you know, ultimately, in this part of the world, conflicts end through negotiation and settlement and politics. They don't end through victory for the most part.

Even when the Taliban was taking over the government, they would engage in battle and they would fight people, but their primary method of conquering the country was striking deals with local power brokers to assert control. That's the same way that

Najibullah did it after the Soviets withdrew, striking power – striking agreements with different power brokers throughout Afghanistan. That was the way the Soviets tried to enforce control in the '80s, it was by striking bargains with different power brokers. That was the way King Zahir Shah tried to rule the country through the 20th century, was by striking agreements with different local power brokers. When they felt that that agreement was violated, they would rise up in rebellion and Shah would come in and kill a bunch of people and then renegotiate a settlement to reassert this center for a free arrangement that it would have with the countryside.

So I think when we look at this kind of end state for Afghanistan, the fact that we're not looking at it in those terms, we're not looking at it in terms of a political system that needs to be accommodated and worked within. We're essentially setting ourselves up for a permanent failure state.

So you know, right now, the big push coming out of both the Obama administration, out of some NGOs, and to an extent out of the Afghan government, there's this push for negotiations with the Taliban, a negotiated settlement with the Taliban. And this couldn't be more likely to fail if it was designed to. And the biggest reason for that isn't because of Taliban are these bloodthirsty monsters you never want to give up fighting. I don't think that's true at all. But the problem is that the conditions for a negotiated settlement, which would be the conditions for a return to a political discourse within Afghanistan, just don't exist yet. One of the biggest issues to that is actually the Afghan government itself, which is the government we created and imposed on Afghanistan, is fundamentally incapable of reacting to the Taliban as a political entity instead of as a military entity.

So if you go to Afghanistan and if you break out of the Kabul bubble and break out of the military bubble and actually talk with non-Americanized Afghans, what they say is that the Taliban is only part of the problem. The bigger problem that they have is the government and is – they don't put it in these terms, but it's the fundamental nature of the state, the fact that their local officials are corrupt and abuse them, the fact that the police are corrupt and abuse them, the fact that the soldiers that are supposed to protect them are so high they can't pick up their weapons. These are really fundamental issues that just training a bunch of any of these soldiers or training a bunch of Afghan police aren't – isn't going to fix. That doesn't get at the actual root of the problem.

So we can get tactical successes in this kind of a framework. We can send 20,000 Marines into Kandahar and actually achieve something because that's what Marines do. They're good at that. We can do the same thing with the army. They're good at creating space. What they haven't done, though, is create the conditions where they can transition from that presence into an Afghan presence. Even though they're handing over control, what they're doing when they hand over control, when there – there's this Afghan government process of transitioning control from primary American security presence to primarily Afghan security presence.

When they do that, they're enforcing and they're entrenching these fundamental political problems.

MR. BATES: Joshua, what happened with the government in a box that we were promised that would come into? This was about two years ago, I think General McChrystal and others were speaking about that.

MR. FOUST: That was a really unfortunate turn of events on his part. I haven't paid attention in the last couple of months, but I believe they've gone through three different administrators for that area in two years. There's been – they've rebuilt part of the bazaar that they bombed, but there're still security incidents all over the place. They've done nothing to address the problem of systemic heroin cultivation, opium cultivation. I mean they can move around if they have a security presence there, should they have a bunch of armored trucks going down the road, they generally don't get messed with, but I mean there's still a huge problem with commerce in the area, with other issues. Just recently, I believe, the district governor was attacked there. There was an assassination attempt on his life. So I mean there's been improvement from the worst of the fighting, but what I think we don't tend to acknowledge about somewhere like Marja is that before we decided to go in with that government in a box, there wasn't fighting there because the Taliban had actually imposed their own version of governance. So in a very real way, what we did in Marja was destroy a functioning Taliban government and replace it with a dysfunctional Western-backed government. And that's the choice that a lot of people in the South have to face, is either a Taliban government that is vicious and doesn't give them very much freedom, but it does give them order and it does control chaos, which is a very serious concern for them. And in response, we want them to accept a corrupt government that can't function and can't protect them and can't impose control. And when – that's a political issue. That's ultimately a choice that people are not really going to make. It's not a real choice. It's between either tyranny or chaos. That's literally the choice that we're presenting Afghans.

And this gets back, I think to the bigger issue of – a real political heal in Afghanistan isn't resources and it's not even necessarily strategy, although it's a part of it, it's that we don't understand the politics of how Afghanistan works, in both a historical sense and in a present sense. So until we start incorporating the sense of local political bargaining, national political bargaining, international political bargaining, which includes Pakistan. We're not really going to get at this. I mean Pakistan does – you can't get away from this – they have legitimate security interests in Afghanistan. They don't benefit from chaos next door. They want control. But they want control that they can impose. And we're not willing to give them control that they can impose. We want them to accept control that we impose, and that's not acceptable to them. That's a political issue. That's not a military issue. That's something that needs to be resolved at the head of state level, people talking about where their interests are and what they're willing to compromise on that.

So I mean kind of getting back, I guess I can just try to bring us all together somehow, is that when we're looking at these end states and what our plans are for 2014

and what we bicker about troop numbers or something else it's I think completely trivial to the bigger issue of the war. We're not taking account the idea of Afghanistan as a political system that requires political acumen, political clarity, and political knowledge to be able to function and manipulate, for lack of a better word.

So – and until we start putting in this – and it's hard work, really, really difficult hard work to try to understand the politics of what's happening, the politics of what's driving the insurgency, the politics of what's driving local rejection of the government, and then also the politics of what drives local acceptance of the government, because that happens in some cases as well – we're not going to make any real headway on this. We're going to be in that kind of managed stalemate that I think Michael was talking about. So – it's probably –

MR. BATES: Thank you very much, Joshua. Secretary McHale.

MR. PAUL MCHALE: With luck, I think my comments will build upon what Michael and Joshua have said, although I don't agree with everything that each teller has commented upon. I think you'll find substantial similarity in the themes that I now emphasize, drawing upon what has previously been said.

I think it's helpful to put Afghanistan in context, and that is that Afghanistan is a relatively small country, about the size of Texas. It's one of the poorest nations on the face of the earth. Literacy is a daunting challenge, to say the least. Nationwide, about 28 percent of the total population is literate, and among women, literacy is hovering at about 10 percent. If you look at Afghanistan, you can readily identify a whole host of enormous challenges that must be met if Afghanistan is to become a modern nation state, nowhere close to that today.

But I think we make a mistake if we simply look at all of those challenges as if they were equal in priority. They're not. I mean when I personally look at the challenges facing Afghanistan, I'm worried deeply about illiteracy. I'm concerned about poverty. I'm concerned about economic development to overcome that poverty. I'm deeply invested, for instance, in women's rights and the preservation of minority rights under the Afghan constitution. Having said all of that with passion and conviction, in my judgment, there is one challenge facing Afghanistan that is paramount when compared to all others. And that is personal security. We know two things. We know that Afghanistan today is a violent society, individual Afghan citizens – I have many friends who live in Afghanistan – individual Afghans do not feel safe and they haven't felt safe for quite a long time. We know, at least in my judgment, that that lack of personal security is the driving political force in terms of what most Afghans set as a baseline for achievement and acceptance of the national government.

Karzai's government has not delivered a sense of personal security, public safety, or tribal security in a society that is heavily based upon tribal relationships.

Number two, we know that we're living in 2014. Now, I regret that the president has put so much emphasis upon the various timelines, when the president announced on December 1st, 2009, that we would, in fact, surge 30,000 to 33,000 troops into Afghanistan and in the very next sentence, he unwisely talked about how quickly we would pull them out.

As Dave Barno – I look at the back of the room and I see a photograph of Lieutenant General Dave Barno who was once our commander in Afghanistan – noted last year, when the president said that, although the president was emphasizing the size of the surge, all that was heard in the region and around the world is the Americans are leaving. And so we got a society where people do not feel safe, nor should they. It is a violent environment. I hesitate to say violent society. The Afghan people are wonderful people, a wonderful culture, a very intelligent culture that unfortunately has to coexist with a very high level of illiteracy.

The Afghan people live in fear on a daily basis. And now, because of the repeated and unwise emphasis upon timelines for redeployment of the ISAF forces, they know we're leaving. So the crucial question is I think indeed the survival of the Afghan nation state will be determined by how well we plan in the next two to three years to ensure that there is a level of personal security once we depart and the Afghan National Security Forces take over full responsibility for public safety within the nation. And regrettably, I can't point to any data today that would give me confidence that we're on the right glide path to achieve that level of personal security once the ISAF forces depart.

I spent six months as a senior advisor, the senior advisor to the Afghan Ministry of Interior or the Afghan national policy, and worked daily with the minister of interior. I know the Afghan police quite well. And I do not yet have confidence that when we depart that the Afghan national police will be able to provide with integrity competent protection of the Afghan civilian population.

Now, what you have to ask yourself at that point is what is the likelihood that a democratic government in Afghanistan will survive if that government is perceived to be unable to provide a basic level of personal security to individual Afghan citizens? I think there's very little chance. That's where the Taliban came from. If you go back and re-read the history, as Joshua has pointed so carefully, between 1992 and 1996, the Taliban rose to power not because there were some dramatic shift toward Islamist extremism in a nation state that had never harbored such a culture in the past. If you talk to ordinary Afghans, they'll tell you that they don't identify at all with the culture of the Taliban movement. What they do recognize often with deep regret is that the Taliban did bring through brutal enforcement a certain level of public safety. When I talk to my friends about that period of Taliban rule, although they find the cultural aspects of the Taliban movement to be repugnant, they recognize with some degree of positive acceptance that at least they were safe, they felt, on the streets of Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif and Kandahar, during that period. And so if I can tile all this together, consistent with what Michael and Joshua have said, over the next two to three years, by the, I think, unfortunate deadline the president keeps referencing, by the end of 2014, success or

failure of our mission will be determined by whether or not the Afghan National Security Forces, most notably the Afghan national police can provide safety to ordinary Afghan citizens and therefore our main effort between now and 2014 should not be counterterrorism missions, should not even be broadly based counterinsurgency missions. The clock is ticking and the Taliban knows it.

Our effort between now and 2014 should be to train the Afghan National Security Forces, most especially the Afghan national police to take over in a credible way the responsibility for public safety after 2014. All of those other challenges – literacy for women, minority rights, economic development – all of those challenges can be met in due course I think with a fairly high degree of patience on the part of the Afghan people, but if they don't feel safe in 2015, the Taliban will once again rise to power just as they did between 1992 and '96 and for the very same reasons because the Afghan people are prepared to sacrifice individual freedom in order to have some level of public safety within their own homes.

MR. BATES: Thank you, Secretary McHale. Well, great discussion. Let's hear from all of you. And if you can, identify yourself and pose your question. Yes, sir.

Q: My name is Walt Rogers –

MR. BATES: And a little bit loud for the folks on the back who are so patient.

Q: My name is Walt Rogers. I used to spend time in Afghanistan for CNN. I write a column for the Christian Science Monitor now. I have two district questions. None of you has mentioned the role Iran is playing or not playing there and I have one question which sounds trivial, but it isn't. When I was last there, Karzai couldn't entrust his own people to be his personal security detachment. It was all done by U.S. – either private soldiers, either they – (inaudible) – special ops. Can Karzai now trust a genuinely Afghan security detachment to protect him or is he still relying on mercenaries?

MR. BATES: The question from Mr. Rogers is what about Iran's role and also can Karzai count on the fellows that are guarding him. You talk about personal security. Does the president of Afghanistan have a loyalty of a core group? Michael.

MR. FOUST: I could – I mean I could (bring ?) the Iran thing. So Iran has a pretty complicated relationship, both with Afghanistan and then also with U.S. forces in Afghanistan. So on more than one occasion, Iranian forces have collaborated with U.S. forces to go after narco-smugglers. In 2002, Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps people were working alongside Green Berets in western Afghanistan to go after the Taliban. So there's a history of cooperation actually between the United States and Iran in Afghanistan.

As the 2000s have gone on, though, and as relations between the U.S. and Iran have deteriorated, we've seen a lot more evidence that someone inside Iran is in some way helping certain parts of the insurgency. There's not a lot of evidence that it's

systemic, that it's even being directed from high levels of the government. It could easily be a lower level person, kind of like within Pakistan, where you have semi-autonomous units of the ISI that openly support the Taliban. But – I mean Iranian weapons find their way into Afghanistan. Members of like Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin talk about being able to find sanctuary inside Iran and ease of border crossings.

So there's some – there's some amount of involvement. I mean I think – and this kind of a theme with a lot of reporting on this, it gets completely out of proportion. Secretary Gates spent I think two and a half years talking about how Iran is funding the Taliban, which was completely unsupported. That was just this feeling based on a couple of disparate pieces of data. So I mean they exist.

At the same time, Iran doesn't want the Taliban in charge. In 1998, they almost went to war with the Taliban, when the Taliban murdered a bunch of Iranian diplomats in Mazar-e-Sharif. So I mean there's bad blood between them as well. I think what you see right now is more of a pragmatic relationship, where they're more interested in keeping the U.S. off guard and keeping the U.S. bogged down than they are in making sure that they get some kind of controllable group inside Afghanistan because ultimately, I mean, Hamid Karzai is very close with the Iranian political leadership. So they don't really have a compelling interest to undermine him or destroy him in some way. I think what they're really trying to do is keep the U.S. off balance in that country, and that has them taking contradictory steps, I think, to accomplish that.

MR. MCHALE: I think it's worthwhile to look at Iran's influence over Afghanistan in the proper context. There's no denying. Particularly in the Herat area, Iran exercises considerable influence over the local political structure and really the daily life of the Afghan citizens who live in and around the Herat region of western Afghanistan.

But the strategic interest of Iran and the current influence of Iran is nowhere close to the strategic interest and current influence of Pakistan. And so if you're looking at external actors and the role they play within the Afghan borders, Iran is of interest and of some concern to the United States and to Afghanistan, but nowhere close to the pervasive, enduring influence of the ISI in terms of past support of Hekmatyar, past support of the Taliban movement. I have a very high regard for Massoud, for instance. And anyone who has studied that period of time and I think the heroic resistance that was led by Massoud has to be appalled by the enormously influential and negative role played by Pakistan and the ISI in supporting the Taliban against Massoud prior to Massoud's assassination. And so I think we should keep our eye on Iran. Certainly, there's no room for complacency, but our main effort, again, in terms of the strategic implications for the region should be Pakistan and the Pashtun elements that – (inaudible) – border and the ability of elements of the Pashtun tribe to be influenced by Pakistani government and more directly by the ISI.

Final point, if I may, we need to recognize that the Taliban is a very decentralized movement. Mullah Omar and Hekmatyar have a longstanding rivalry. That's probably a

conservative way to state it. And so as we look at the topic of today's discussion, talking with the Taliban, we have to recognize that the Taliban speaks of many voices. Mullah Omar is a powerful voice within the Taliban movement, but frankly even if the opening of the office in Qatar is calculated to facilitate discussions leading toward peace, I have doubts that Mullah Omar could deliver the Taliban movement livestock and barrel in terms of the enforcement of a peace agreement, I think over the next two to three years, as we build in a very focused and dramatic way the Afghan National Security Forces, we should continue to try to reconcile elements of the Taliban movement, sometimes major elements of the Taliban movement that might move more quickly to a support of an Afghan government than perhaps other even larger elements of the Taliban movement.

And I said final point, but my second final point, if I may, with regard to the safety of Karzai; I think President Karzai needs to spend more time among his people. He needs to take on additional risk. During our civil war, Abraham Lincoln walked out to the battlefield and had to be told to keep his head down. When I was the mentor to the Afghan minister of interior, I encouraged him to go out into Kabul at all hours of the day or night in order to be seen as a leader among his people.

Is there a personal risk to Karzai in doing that? Yes. Is there a chance that his security detail might be penetrated? Yes, but I think a great leader of a great nation must take on that risk and that responsibility.

Q: Who's guiding – guarding him now, the Americans, personal presidential detail, is it the Americans, which is all I saw when I was there.

MR. MCHALE: I don't know. I know what the history has been, who has guarded him in the past, but I haven't checked in the last year. I don't know.

MR. BATES: Yes, in the quarter.

Q: Charlie Williams of the – (inaudible) – Center. You raised the issue about the lack of wisdom in setting a deadline, which is a criticism about the strategic influence of the United States in the region, but what about in the United States – what about the feeling that creating And maybe this is one reason why the other side of the aisle from the President Obama hasn't spoken about it.

MR. BATES: Michael.

Q: And the point I would ask, too, with regard to negotiating with the Taliban, what's the U.S. strategic interest now, is it rebuilding Afghanistan and avoiding the Taliban resurgence and control, or is it the narrow issue of the relationship with al Qaeda and terrorism and has that now shipped to Pakistan – (inaudible).

MR. O'HANLON: Well, I'll start with the first one. Charlie, good to see you. I would simply argue that I think President Obama's June speech this past year where he announced the accelerated drawdown that General Petraeus was not thrilled with, but

could live with, and we've heard a lot of discussion of that recently, and you know – you know is in many ways a reasonable speech for balancing the various factors. I didn't love it. I've been a supporter of the broad coin strategy, but I have to acknowledge that I think President Obama has bought himself some political space. I think he can essentially do what he wants next without suffering a huge cost. I actually think in some ways the risk for him politically is greater if he decides to cut too fast and then there's maybe an unconnected but still coincidental terror strike in the United States or somewhere else that his Republican rival could say, aha, that's because the president's losing his previously steel spine, you know, or what have you. But the point being that Obama did manage to sort of take the issue a little bit off the table because he sent simultaneously two messages. One is we're not staying forever, but the other is we're not racing for the door. And I think that's a reasonable balance and in a democracy that's watched this thing for 10 years and funded very frustrating campaign, and yet still has a lot of security interests in this region, I think it's a pretty balanced way to go. The reason why I hope that there's no big drawdown immediately after we get to 68,000 in September, I think we need some time to complete the kind of mentoring of the Afghan security forces that Secretary McHale was talking about, and to make some headway in the east. But I acknowledge, the east is going to be to some extent beyond our control if we can't get a better handle on the Pakistan dimension of this.

Nonetheless, I think we can do a lot to sort of harden the east and limit the danger of the sanctuaries from Pakistan if we have another solid fighting season after 2012 to go after it. But the president, I think, did a very reasonable thing in a democracy, balancing these various competing concerns. And 68,000 U.S. troops is still a lot and still do a lot of things on the battlefield.

MR. MCHALE: If I may address that as well. On this point, I think there's some distance between Michael and myself, both in terms of the facts, as we see them, and the meaning of those facts. I don't think the president has struck a balance. I followed the president's statements in the 2008 campaign with much approval when he spoke about our need to refocus on Afghanistan and its criticism of the conflict in Iraq. But I'm a Democrat and I'm a former congressman, and I said to my wife, who's seated in the front row, there's a train wreck coming here because the president can easily run an opposition to the war in Iraq, and that's acceptable to his political base, I said at that time, but he's got a challenge ahead of him. And that challenge is once the war in Iraq is over, the war in Afghanistan will be no more popular with the Democratic base than was the war in Iraq. And at that point, the president is going to be trapped between his rhetoric, which was committed to success in Afghanistan, and a political base that probably by a majority does not support that same approach. Well, we are experiencing that dichotomy today and with regards to the June.

At least as I read – I'm going to put a plug in here – from Vernon Loeb's new book, All In, I don't think what Michael described happened. Petraeus did not buy into a late summer withdrawal in 2012, of the 23,000 remaining surge forces. He fought it professionally, respectfully, but he fought it to the very end. He thought that it was

unwise to pull out 23,000 forces during the fighting season. I agree with General Petraeus. I wish that the president had taken the general's advice.

Now, the position that Michael described is an accurate description of Secretary Gates and Secretary Clinton. They, too, were not thrilled at the timeline for drawdown as originally proposed, which was the middle of summer, round the 4th of July. But they reluctantly did accept the end of summer. And that's the decision that is currently on the table. In my judgment, there is no rational explanation to justify from the military standpoint pulling out 23,000 forces at the height of the fighting season. General Petraeus was right. I hope that the success of our nation, the success of the Afghan people, and ultimately, the success of the president that he would reconsider that decision. What makes sense from a military standpoint, maybe not a political standpoint, it certainly is optimal to withdraw those forces at the end of the summer in 2012, but there's no rational military justification.

I would hope that with courage the president would rescind that decision and go back to what was recommended to him by General Petraeus, which would be an end of year withdrawal of those forces.

Final point that I would make. If Abraham Lincoln wanted to be a popular politician, he would have ended the civil war in 1862 or 1863. And there was great pressure upon him to do so. But Lincoln – this is what made him a great president – transcended the immediate political requirement, would not negotiate a peace, and instead realized the strategic importance of continuing to prosecute the war. Now, I realize that our interest in Afghanistan is not of the magnitude of our interest during the Civil War, but I would argue that it is of far greater importance than the emphasis of this administration would lead ordinary citizens to believe.

Afghanistan is vitally important to a stable Pakistan. A stable region is vitally important to nuclear security. If we pull out of Afghanistan and the Afghan national police cannot protect the Afghan people and the Karzai government falls for the same reason that the Taliban came to power in the early 1990s, we will have what Stan McChrystal described as Chaosistan. And it will be a nuclear-armed Chaosistan, where the future of a civilian government in Pakistan is called into question and where stability vis-à-vis India is in doubt.

Now, this is not the American Civil War, but it is pretty darn important, so as someone who would want to see the president succeed, I would encourage him to stiffen his spine, stand up to the base, argue for what is important strategically, in the interest of our nation and that region, explain why it's important that we make a commitment, get out by 2014. Let's make sure that between now and then we create the conditions for personal safety within Afghanistan. And I don't see a glide path moving in that direction.

Dave Barno said at the time of the December 1st, 2009, West Point speech, we have to strike a balance between resolve and a recognition that this can't be an open-

ended commitment. We've seen, in my judgment, far too little resolve and far too great an emphasis on timetables for retrograde.

MR. BATES: I think we have time for a couple of more –

MR. FOUST: Can I jump in on this, too, please. I mean I think it's really shortsighted to have this discussion without coming back to the political question. So the civilian government of Pakistan right now, with 100,000 troops in Afghanistan is at risk from the military. And it's not a risk as a result of our withdrawal; it's at risk as a result of Pakistani politics.

The push to build a huge military and police force within Afghanistan completely glosses over the fundamental political problems within Afghanistan. And building a military as a replacement for a state is not a sustainable solution. It's not a victory condition. It's not even a withdrawal condition. It just gets back, again, to this grinding stalemate.

In this whole discussion, we've been appealing to generals making a case for a military argument for the war, when the war is not about the military. The war is fundamentally a political struggle for the future of the Afghan state. And we're not making these decisions, or even framing our questions in that light of looking at the fundamental question, facing the Afghan people of what state they want to live under. It's not a question of whether they want the ANSF or the Taliban militias running around. It's a question of whether or not they want to accept again the harsh order imposed by the Taliban or the corrupt disorder imposed by the Afghan government and ultimately by the United States. In that sense, I think we really overestimate the positive role that we can play by just throwing more military forces at this problem or even maintaining a military force there because it doesn't get at the fundamental political problem that's at the heart of this war that we still haven't addressed.

Q: But Josh, what does get to the point on the political side?

MR. FOUST: That's a completely separate issue. I mean when you look at the structure of the Afghan government, it's completely unsustainable. It's too centralized. It's not responsive to its people. I mean these are things that I think really requires a new loya jirga to completely scrap the constitution and start from scratch. That has huge costs and it'll be hugely difficult and it'll probably fail ultimately, but I think we really do need to contemplate the fact that we can't really salvage the country in its current state. Something really fundamental about the political system and about the government has to change. And it has to be in a way that can accommodate bargaining between the different players. I mean from the last two Bonn conferences we've had to determine the future of Afghanistan, we've excluded countries like Iran and the Taliban. That's crazy. They have a huge role to play in this. The Taliban are a political fact in Afghanistan. We cannot change that. We've proven in the last 10 years that we can't change that militarily. And so we have to figure out how to accommodate them, how to create a system where they can achieve what they want to achieve through bargaining instead of

through fighting. And we haven't put in the effort to figure out if that's even possible. And if it's not possible, then we really do need to start contemplating the fact that we can't change the situation no matter how hard we try. And that's something that, getting back to the domestic policy topic, no leader is ever going to want to admit. But ultimately, there are problems that we're just incapable of solving by trying really hard. And that's – I mean it's not a pleasant truth to come to, but I think it's something that we do need to consider.

MR. O'HANLON: I want to really mostly agree with Josh on this point and I promised in my opening I wasn't going to talk too much – (inaudible) – I try to stay within eight minutes, but I agree. It's central. And now we're almost an hour into this, so let me give my, too, sense on this question. Thanks for the – thanks for raising the subject.

I agree with Josh's fundamental diagnosis that politics trump much else or at least are equally important and we had created much of the problem. The system is not working very well. The constitution was not U.S.-written, but it was largely U.S.-blessed and inspired, and it concentrated power in the hands of a president that we turned into an autocrat because we gave him the exclusive power to hire and fire throughout the country because at that time, we had a light footprint strategy of the first term of the Bush administration which was fundamentally mistaken and gave Karzai no other ability to control this territory, except to dole out money here and there to warlords based on how they behave and then to occasionally fire them or the governors that he had appointed because that was the only way he could have power. And now we get a Karzai who acts like an autocrat and we're surprised. And unfortunately, the constitution has not evolved.

Where I would probably differ with Josh is that the practicality of creating this new loya jirga now, in 2012, I don't see, because the problem is that Karzai is now going to be in charge of it because there's no way for us and I – Josh has a lot of thoughtful ways on how we can try to maximize our influence – I don't know that you can at this late date throw away the constitution, create a new loya jirga, and do it in a way that doesn't actually make the problem worse. So – and I'm not sure we even disagree on that because we're both sort of regretting the situation that we're in. My ideas are – and I worked last year with an Afghan reformist named Hassina Sherjan and an American democracy promoter, named Gretchen Birkle, on a paper where we talked about a political strategy for trying to strengthen Afghan political parties and parliament. And that was what we saw as in the short term the more feasible set of actions. And I won't go through the litany of mostly small ball ideas. It starts with asking members of Congress when they visit Afghanistan not just to go see Karzai, but to go spend more time with parliamentary leaders, opposition leaders, governors even. And that extends to ideas such as, even within the current constitution, the notion that you sort of discredit or discourage the strengthening of political parties I think has to be thrown away. We have to actually help these parties really develop. A lot of the democracy promotion efforts the United States government's done in Afghanistan recently have not really done this because Karzai's been against it and we haven't really wanted to getting the space on it –

MR. : And there are historical reasons for that.

MR. O'HANLON: There are. Afghans associate political parties with the – (inaudible) – which were the warlords who wrecked the country in the '90s.

MR. : But it's actually important – no, because I agree, a lot of inertia to overcome –

MR. O'HANLON: I just want to just point on that. And I'll just finish on this particular point. Therefore, we don't necessarily have to say that Karzai was wrong to be against these parties eight years ago, but he is wrong now, if for no other reason that his term expires in two years and if he insists on staying on, all bets are off as to whether this country has any hope. We can't let that happen. So we have to have an answer to the question of how do you have a legitimate process to replace Karzai. And right now, we're not well along in that –

MR. BATES: I'm feeling much like Hamid Karzai right now because I'm losing control of the room, but – yes, please, and they'll I'll have a word and then one more question.

MR. MCHALE: There needs to be a subjective but informed assessment of the aspirations of the Afghan people, of their culture and the kind of country that the Afghans would like to achieve. And I think we have been woefully deficient in terms of the battle of ideas. There's been very little inspirational and important rhetoric coming out of Washington or out of Kabul in the last three, four, five years in terms of the kind of nation that Afghanistan could be in the year 2025, a nation of greater literacy, a nation of substantial tolerance, a nation possessing a government that is reasonably free from corruption, a nation that is vibrant in terms of music and Persian poetry. Now, that may sound like empty rhetoric to you, but it is, in fact, I think inspirational to Afghan citizens who want to live in that kind of country. And so I think over the next two to three years, which is the time we have remaining, we should reignite the battle of ideas. We should attempt to inspire in coordination with and really in support of Karzai and his government a vision for the future of Afghanistan. The elements of that vision will not be achieved in a year or two or even in a decade or two. Poverty will be real in Afghanistan for years to come. Illiteracy will be a challenge for many years to come. But if in fact we are able to provide for the physical security of Afghan citizens through effective ANSF forces in 2014, the Taliban movement will not find traction and the natural aspirations of the Afghan people will build toward the other social and political achievements that I've described. But a precursor for all that is safety. You can talk from now until doom's day about women's rights, and I would like to do that, because I'm passionate about minority rights in Afghanistan and elsewhere, but if we focus on those types of issues, while people are being killed in their own homes in the year of 2015, Afghanistan will never be the kind of society that Afghans themselves would like to achieve. Safety is the paramount objective and I'm afraid current policies, within the timelines described by the president, will not get us there.

MR. BATES: Another question. Yes, sir, right here.

Q: I'm – (inaudible) – and I work with the Voice of America for Afghanistan – (inaudible) – tomorrow we'll be presenting your views to Afghans. Afghans, as congressman mentioned in your opening remarks on Qatar, Taliban are pretty much decentralized forces and we don't really know – excuse me – that Mullah Omar's statement will stop everybody from fighting with – against the United States or the Afghan government.

MR. MCHALE ? : Probably won't.

Q: Probably won't. And what – (inaudible) – outcome I expect from – on political settlement from Qatar. That is the hot topic and that what outcomes are keen to – generally from a U.S. perspective or a U.S. analysts. What are the U.S. options or the debating points with the Taliban representatives in Qatar?

MR. BATES: What's on the table with the Taliban?

MR. MCHALE: We have not shaped the conditions for negotiation very well. As a matter of fact, if you look at Mark Grossman's statements over the last few days, it's not even clear that the opening of the Taliban office in Qatar is directly related to peace negotiations. We're trying to get confirmation from the Taliban, from Mullah Omar and his representatives on that point. But in my judgment, we need to juxtapose two facts. Taliban commanders, particularly at the mid level, have said very clearly that during any negotiations, for instance in Qatar, that the fighting will continue. We have made it equally clear that during those negotiations, we'll be planning for our departure. Now, with those two statements in juxtaposition what is the incentive for Mullah Omar or any other Taliban commander to negotiate in good faith? So I remain skeptical, maybe even pessimistic as to the outcome of those negotiations, when the dominant characteristic is the ticking clock in the background. So I think between now and 2014 we should pursue negotiations. We should do so cautiously and realistically. I'm very skeptical about releasing prisoners from Guantanamo and sending them to Qatar. But we should pursue negotiations with Mullah Omar, recognizing the very daunting prospect of those negotiations leading to a successful outcome.

In the interim, we should approach midlevel commanders, those who control in a decentralized Taliban movement fighters in the range of 200, 300, 500 and try to bring as many of those in under the umbrella of an Afghan government as we can possibly achieve because along with strengthening those public safety forces that will protect the Afghan people beyond 2014, we should try to diminish the number of adversaries who are still inclined to pick up arms after we are gone. I think we make a serious mistake if we focus primarily – and a very dangerous mistake – if we focus exclusively upon negotiations with Mullah Omar. Hekmatyar is not likely to make peace based upon any guidance given to him or to his movement by Mullah Omar. We have to recognize the decentralized character stakes of the Taliban movement and try to reconcile those forces accordingly.

MR. O'HANLON: I'd just add a word. Josh probably wants to as well. On the – I just want to comment on one aspect where I think I'm generally in agreement with Secretary McHale. We've had a little bit of disagreement today on the nuance that separates us, which is the level of resoluteness of the president and how much is needed to make this possible.

A couple of things – let me just first try to clarify what I was saying before in the June speech, when I said General Petraeus could live with the outcome. I agree that he did not advocate this and he made it very clear that he would publicly disagree with the specifics of the decision, but he could live with it in the sense that he did not resign. He did not sort of become despondent and figured that the entire campaign plan was now something that had to be discarded. And in my trip in November in Afghanistan, a couple of months ago, when I talked to commanders and to the diplomatic team, they felt, generally speaking, that if we can stay at 68,000 U.S. troops after the drawdown of this upcoming spring and summer, whether they like that drawdown or not – and I'm not suggesting they do. And I'm not suggesting Petraeus did. We know he did not. Whether they like it or not, they think they can live with it in terms of their campaign plan, except that the Karzai and Pakistan dimensions are beyond their control in many ways and remain wildcards.

So I don't think that going down to 68,000 by the end of the summer is militarily fatal. Now, if the president were to decide either the mission's accomplished or the mission's impossible, and therefore dramatically pull out again, starting in October, then I think you would get a fair amount of resistance from some aspects of command. But I don't think that things have gone so far down this path. Secretary McHale may be correctly sensing the body language of the president, but I don't think the decisions that have been made so far fundamentally cripple the military aspects of the plan. I think that actually the Karzai and politics aspects and the Pakistan dimensions remain greater threats on balance to the mission.

And by the way, we shouldn't stay forever. And once the Afghan army gets up to a size and the police gets up to a size and competence where they can do most of it, we should downsize to 10,000 or 20,000 troops and hopefully not even stay there forever, but – and therefore, I think the president's okay to be conveying that there's some degree of downsizing that's going to be ongoing in the next two to three years. I just hope he doesn't take the argument to an extreme. But to convey that there's going to be some downsizing is basically saying that the Afghans are getting more capable on the security front and the war is not just a military effort anyway. And so I have no particular problems with that aspect of trying to negotiate even as we downsize. I think it's doable. If we emphasize that we're still resolute, that we plan to do the downsizing responsibly and that even after 2014, we're going to keep a modest force.

MR. BATES: I'd like to call on our chairman, Peter Kovler for our last question.

Q: I'll be quick. Thank you all very much, really interesting, stimulating. The diversity of views is just terrific. The name of President Bush isn't mentioned much, but Michael mentioned it. A bit of an instant history question. I appreciate all the things, thoughts for President Obama. It's sort of about an instant history question. How do you think President Bush will be recognized as a commander in chief for his leadership, or, if you have a different opinion, lack of leadership? How did President Bush do as our commander in chief in Afghanistan? Do you have an opinion?

MR. BATES: So the question is how did President Bush do as commander in chief on the Afghan question.

MR. O'HANLON: I'll try to be brief and start. I think ultimately, unfortunately, his approach didn't work. He had a concept that a lot of people agreed with then and are agreeing with now, which is don't try too hard. It's not worth it. And it's not doable anyway. That was essentially his strategy. It was dressed up as the light footprint. But at that time, there was a chance that a relatively light footprint strategy could have worked. If you had at least tried to build up a halfway decent Afghan army and police. We didn't even try to the first five, six years. So I think it was sort of, you know, irresponsibly light, in the sense that even if you're going to do limited state building, if you don't create a little bit of an army and a little bit of a police and pay them a little bit wage and give them training instead of just grabbing somebody off the street and putting a badge on their uniform and sending them out the next day to patrol, which is what we did in the days before Secretary McHale got engaged, but at the time he was engaged, it was much more serious. But in those early years, the initial strategy just flat out didn't work and we should have known and I should have known too.

I'll make a broader critique. In the think tank community, we didn't yell enough about the fact that this didn't have a prayer, so as a nation we made a mistake.

MR. MCHALE: If I can come back to the question as it was actually asked and I appreciate the nuance that you attack to it, I respect that, but I think President Bush will likely be perceived by history as a good commander in chief overall, who adopted an aggressive approach to al Qaeda that produced at least 10 years of security for the United States. I think when ordinary citizens think back at the presidency of George Bush and they assess from the perspective of private citizens how well he did as commander in chief, I think the dominant characteristic will be that for 10 years after a horrific attack, he kept us safe.

Now, with regard – and so I think history will be kind to him in terms of his overall responsibility as commander in chief. I think history will be harsher in the determination to go into Iraq at the expense of resources in Afghanistan. And I think in agreement with Michael that Afghanistan was not given the attention or the resources that it needed in 2003, 2004, 2005, 2006, and that I think the surge approved by President Obama and an increased emphasis on Afghanistan that was the result of the president's successful campaign in 2008, will be seen as the right approach. And I think by comparison, President Bush's relatively modest commitment to Afghanistan early on was

counterproductive. And so I think the president will be seen as a good man who tried very hard and who successfully protected our country for 10 years, but who did indeed take his eye off the ball in Afghanistan. The question now is whether we will refocus with sufficient resources, consistent with what the current president said during his campaign, in 2008, to ensure that in 2014 and beyond the Afghan government can physically protect its own people. And if that precursor is not met, all other factors will fall off the table. And then I fear that Afghans, who want a vibrant society and want economic expansion and are a tolerant people, I mean not a Western democracy – this is the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, but the Afghan people are a very vibrant, intelligent, tolerant people. That’s the kind of society they have had in the past and that they want again in the future. They will sacrifice that only if they conclude that the Taliban is their recourse for daily safety.

MR. BATES: Joshua, you’re going to have the last word.

MR. FOUST: Awesome. So I mean I would describe Bush’s policies in Afghanistan as negligence and broken promises primarily. I would say negligence described it probably until about 2004 or 2005 and broken promises describe it all the way up until he left, at the end of 2005. I mean I was actually still in college at the time, but I remember very vividly, in 2001, him promising this new Marshall Plan for Afghanistan that took the form, I think that year, of like \$2 million in reconstruction assistance. I mean he made these enormous promises and then under delivered. And when I was living there, in 2009, working for the Army and trying to investigate what the social effects were of our war there, the most common thing that Afghans always said is Americans overpromise and under deliver. And that was consistent, no matter where you went, what region of the country you went to, what level of importance of Afghans that I spoke with. They all said America overpromised and under delivered. And so there is really deep disappointment about that and – I mean President Obama I think has tried really hard to reverse that and, you know, the decision – and I agree with Secretary McHale about this – the decision to reemphasize a focus on Afghanistan was the right one, but he had to make that decision because of President Bush’s negligence of the war and because of his overpromising and under delivering on all of the – many, many promises that his administration made. That, I think hurt our reputation and our ability to work there in ways that we’re just now starting to realize because of the expectations that it set up again, for us to overpromise and under deliver.

MR. BATES: Gentlemen, thank you for a discussion that is – was more than worthy of the importance of the topic, shedding a light on this and getting down to crunch time. We’ve got about two years to make a difference in Afghanistan and we have the Plan A of counterinsurgency, Plan B of counterterrorism, and now McHale’s Plan C, which is personal security and that might be able to be something we can pull off. Please join me in thanking our guests today. (Applause.) And thank you all of you for being part of this. We’ll look forward to seeing you Thursday. Our program is how to prevent a war in Gulf while stopping Iran from getting the bomb. Moderator Indira Lakshmanan of Bloomberg and several great panelists. Look at our website for more information.

We'll see you Thursday and maybe we need to do this again sometime. We've just scratched the surface on Afghanistan. Thank you.

(END)