

Progress or Regress? The Afghanistan War in Review

Panelists:

GENERAL JOHN KEANE (ret.), Chairman,
Institute for the Study of War

AMBASSADOR RONALD NEUMANN (ret.),
President, American Academy of Diplomacy

SHUJA NAWAZ, Author,
Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within;
and Director, South Asia Center, Atlantic Council

MAX BOOT, Senior Fellow,
Council on Foreign Relations

Friday, November 19, 2010

Army Navy Club
Washington, D.C.

INTRODUCTION: General Keane is a four-star general, I believe 37 years of public service in December 2003 culminating as Acting Chief of Staff and Vice Chief of Staff of the United States Army. He currently serves as the Chairman of the Board for the Institute for the Study of War.

Additionally, General Keane is a senior partner at SCP Partners, a venture capital firm based in Philadelphia, and he is president of CSI LLC. During his highly decorated military career, General Keane was a career paratrooper, a combat veteran of Vietnam decorated for valor, who spent much of his military life in operational commands where he units were employed in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, and Kosovo. He also commanded the famed 101st Airborne Division, Air Assault, and the legendary 18th Airborne Corps, the Army's largest warfighting organization.

General Keane conducted frequent trips to Iraq for senior defense officials, having completed multiple visits during the surge period. He played a key role in recommending the surge strategy in Iraq and is featured in many articles and a number of books, including Bob Woodward's *The War Within* and Tom Ricks' *The Gamble*.

Still active in national security, General Keane continues to advise senior government officials on the war in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and on national security in general.

I now give you General Jack Keane.

[Applause.]

GENERAL KEANE: If you will indulge us, I think we are just going to remain seated for our remarks, and I am delighted to be here and welcome you to the Institute for the Study of War at the Army Navy Club.

The president of our institution is doing what she's been largely doing for the last two years, and that assisting our commanders in the prosecution of war, and right now she is in Afghanistan, Kim Kagan, and she has been there for months actually, assisting General Petraeus and as a special advisor to him. And she will be returning in December.

So I am sort of pinch-hitting here a little bit as a panel member and also welcoming you on her behalf as the Chairman of the Board of the Institute for the Study of War.

The subject, as you see, deals with Afghanistan. "Progress or Regress?" is the title, and I am a panel member myself, but I am delighted to share this panel with three distinguished colleagues, Ambassador Ronald Neumann, Mr. Shuja Nawaz, and Mr. Max Boot.

I think the way we will do this is I am going to provide some remarks. We are going to try to hold ourselves to 10 minutes, colleagues, which is probably the toughest for me. I'm sure they are more disciplined than I, so I have somebody who is going to wave at me in the back that you won't see when we get to nine minutes. Okay, fellows? And hopefully, we will get pretty close to 10, so that you can ask questions. That's what that's all about. I will introduce our distinguished panel members just prior to them making remarks.

I was in Afghanistan in September. I did another assessment for General Petraeus. I have done many for him in Iraq in 2007 and '8, and after he sort of parachuted into Afghanistan somewhat unexpectedly, he asked me to come over and take a look and give him some feedback, which I did for two and a half weeks, and went to just about all of the contested areas, saw our troops, local government officials, a lot of time with Afghan National Army and police and a fair amount of time with the people themselves to understand what is really happening.

My judgment is that, number one, I am very encouraged. Number two is we are beginning to turn the momentum around to our favor in Afghanistan, and we still have a tough, hard fight on our hands, make no mistake about that, but I am convinced that if the momentum continues -- and my judgment tells me it will -- by next spring, we will have definable progress that will be self-evident to anybody.

And most of my feedback is somewhat anecdotal to be sure, as you would expect, but I trust because I had similar feedback very early on in the surge in Iraq. I was there in February when the troops went in and came back a few months late, and I began to see very similar preliminary signs that the surge was working.

So what are these signs, number one? Well, first of all is the erosion of will of the enemy and a breakdown of some of their morale.

Now, how do we get that information? Well, first of all, we listen to their radio traffic every day, and we listen to their cell phone traffic, whether it's antenna based or satellite based. So we get a volume of information on what is their attitude, behavior, what do they think about what is happening, and their morale is being eroded by prosecution of now-comprehensive combat operations against them.

The second thing is this was a focus area for me, is every test force commander at battalion or brigade level that I spoke to had evidence of Taliban that were willing to reintegrate. That means a crossover. Every single one of them had. Some had just a handful, and others had as much as 200 to 300, and that is a very significant factor.

General Petraeus has put in play a program with President Karzai's approval that will, one, employ and, two, pay people to come and reintegrate, and the name of that program is Afghan Local Police a la Sons of Iraq in Iraq.

In Iraq, that program grew to 110,000 and was decisive at war. In Afghanistan, we do not know what that number will grow to, but it will be in the thousands, to be sure, and it will have a profound impact on the seed in which we can achieve stability and security.

So why is this happening? Well, it's happening because we have a decisive force. That is the reality of it. The additional 30,000 that the President gave to the command and to what we have already had there from NATO, largely U.S., coupled with the Afghan National Army, which is now a capable force, it is decisive. It is decisive because it can operate comprehensively against the operational framework of the enemy at the same time in all the contested areas. We have never been able to do that. We have always had to be selective. That's the reality of it. So this is a decisive force, and it is now beginning to have some impact on this enemy.

The second thing is the people are fed up with war, much as they were in Iraq, and this is nine years now, and they are fed up with it. They are very susceptible to supporting our efforts once we are able to put people on the ground and stay there and continue to support them and be willing to sacrifice ourselves to do that.

And the third thing is Petraeus himself, when he's touched every aspect of the command, geopolitical strategic leadership, tactical operation leadership. He's brought in much just like the success in Iraq. He's brought an attitude that we can win this thing, it's doable, it's hard, but it's not hopeless, and we can win, and those are the terms that he uses, and he's got the entire command on the same page. No reflection of Stan McChrystal, a great general officer and who we have tremendous regard for, but let's just be frank. I mean, Petraeus is one of a kind, and he's had some profound impact on this war.

So the 2014 that is now being discussed in Lisbon and was announced by government officials in the United States as a reasonable target date for us to move toward and beginning transition probably next year and move towards that is some sort of an objective date. I think that's reasonable. I came to that conclusion myself and told that to General Petraeus when I was there in September, but there's a big "but," and the "but" is those sanctuaries in Pakistan.

We don't make 2014 transition complete in terms of our objectives if those sanctuaries continue unimpeded in their support for the insurgency that is raging inside Afghanistan, and I may say that those sanctuaries are aided and abetted by the government of Pakistan, by the military in Pakistan. That's the harsh reality of it. That the Pakistanis do not pull the plug on those sanctuaries or we do not take those sanctuaries down ourselves, it's hard to imagine us meeting a satisfactory 2014 date, so that's the big "but."

Now, I think once we start making some progress here, definable progress that the Pakistanis can see, I think they recognize then the tables are turning on them in the sense that the Taliban is not going to stay in control or regain control of Afghanistan, the United States is not precipitously leaving, leaving them and also the Taliban in charge, and Afghanistan has always been a strategic buffer for them, and they have been hedging their strategic objectives here simply because of the harsh reality of their never been convinced of the U.S. commitment. I think that commitment is there. It's obvious. It's going to stay, and it's going to turn the tables in Afghanistan, and I believe our diplomats will have some leverage to turn the tables with the Pakistanis as well.

And I'm going to stop right there, and I am going to introduce my colleague to my left here. This is Ambassador Ronald Neumann, and it's really a pleasure to have him on this panel because of his vast amount of experience. Formerly a Deputy Assistant Secretary who served three times as Ambassador to Algeria, Bahrain, and finally to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and from July 2005 to 2007, before Afghanistan, Mr. Neumann was a career member of the Senior Foreign Service serving in Baghdad from February 2004 with the Coalition Provincial Authority and then as the Embassy Baghdad's Principal Interlocutor with the Multinational Command where he was deeply involved in coordinating the political part of military action, and I think that was another 16-month tour that he did there, so an amazing amount of experience in this part of the world.

Ambassador Neumann is the author of *The Other War: Winning and Losing Afghanistan*, and he also speaks some Arabic and Dari as well as French. He received State Department Senior Foreign Service pay awards in 2004 and '3 and 1999, as well as individual superior honor awards in '93 and '90.

Additionally, the Ambassador served -- listen closely -- as an Army infantry officer in Vietnam and holds a Bronze Star, the Army Commendation Medal, and a Combat Infantryman's Badge, which he is wearing on his tie clasp. And I was proud to see him with that. In Baghdad, he was awarded the Army Outstanding Civil Service Medal -- Civilian Service Medal. Excuse

me. He currently is the president of the American Academy of Diplomacy.

Mr. Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR NEUMANN: General Keane, thank you very much. You know, I wear that CIB because it remains me a bad day in bureaucracy that things can be worse.

[Laughter.]

AMBASSADOR NEUMANN: When I looked at the title of today's talk "Progress of Regress?" I was reminded of Chairman Mao's famous comment about how do you analyze or evaluate the French Revolution, and he responded, as many of you will know, "It's too early to tell." And I thought of that not just because it's a cute line, but because as we evaluate what is going on in Afghanistan -- we are about to enter a period of evaluation -- it is important to have a little check on our desire for instant results in our 24-hour media culture where we want instant answers all the time.

Now, I left Afghanistan in 2007. I was back last May. I also retain contacts with a lot of Afghans and a lot of Americans on the ground, so I am certainly not quite as up to date as General Keane but maybe bring to the discussion some different perspectives, particularly of Afghan views of where we are.

And so I would say that I agree that there is progress. I think it is extremely important that we be careful not to exaggerate the progress because, as all of us know, war is an interactive enterprise. The enemy is a thinking and reactive force, and there is much, too much attempt -- not by General Keane, I don't mean that -- but in the press, there is much, too much attempt to take war as a straight continuation of a plan or a progress. I think Hollywood has probably contributed to that.

I have basically three points I want to make, and I will try to follow the excellent example of General Keane in keeping to my time. One is, yes, there is progress, but understand how much ambiguity exists about it. Two, be very careful about haste, and three, understand the consequences of our own actions. Now, I agree that there is no question we are making progress on the ground with our military. That is very clear.

But it is also important to remember that that progress will not actually mean much until Afghan Security Forces can take the place of the forces that are employed, so they can go elsewhere. Now, Marines are doing quite well in parts of Helmand. The jury is out on Sangin and some other places. That is good news. It is also irrelevant if you can't get enough Afghan forces to allow them to redeploy or we end up with too many forces on too small a piece of ground. That's not a criticism. It's just understand that's there. I think, personally, the jury is still out on Afghan Security Force development. I believe that the Afghan Army has made great progress. There is a lot to work with there.

We also have to be very cognizant of the need not to overuse that force, not to break it by keeping it deployed. We have not yet begun successfully to institute the red-green-amber cycle of redeployment of units for rest. We are managing to do it for companies. We're flying people out of Helmand, so they can get a break. We are not yet able to actually rotate units. We know what happens to our own units if we keep them in battle too long. We can get there. This is not negative. It's just understand there's a doubt. We have had a real problem of maintaining the force. We have to put enough trainers where -- I think we'll see some more commitments out of NATO. We have to maintain the embedded element, which is really the new piece that's tremendously important, but just understand those things aren't done yet.

And security from Taliban means security against night letters. It means freedom to travel. You have to look at that from an Afghan perspective, not a military perspective, the ability to live securely, to work, and there are ways. There's progress. Afghans will not feel secured until they are secured by Afghan forces because they know the foreigners leave, so, yes, progress, a lot of ambiguity.

Second, we really have to guard against haste. We are under enormous political pressure from our own government, from circumstances, and from shakiness in NATO to move quickly, and pressure can be a good thing, but it can also be a dangerous thing. We are still employing some of the very warlords that we condemn in others cases, President Karzai from maintaining, and some of the reasons we do that is because we're in a hurry. That may again be a good thing, but haste is potentially dangerous. It can lead us to overstretch forces. It can lead us to demand progress which can warp our own reporting internally. I think we're pretty good at avoiding that, but we have had experiences of that before people become vested in the programs that they are responsible for administering. So haste is something we have to guard against.

And then we have to think very hard constantly about the consequences of our own actions. We are very good at reflecting on the consequences of Afghan actions, like President Karzai's recent press statement, but we've had a lot of trouble dealing with the consequence of some of our own actions. We do have the forces we need, and we are putting a lot of money in them. I would give it probably my right arm to have it back in 2005 when I recommended a \$600 million economic supplemental, but after a long bureaucratic struggle, I got 43. That's part of this story under-resourcing. It's part of the past.

But the deadline of July 2011 has done us enormous harm. It has led a great many Afghans and Pakistanis and others to believe that we're out of there pretty quickly, too quickly. I personally think it has led President Karzai and others to believe that he has to construct an Afghan force of militia commanders that will fight if we bail out on him too fast, and I suspect -- I have not talked to him about this, but I suspect that he believes we are still going too fast.

The one place maybe where I would differ a little is I don't think our will is yet certain. I think we are moving in a very correct decision as we change the narrative from 2011 as the focus to 2014. One should not believe we are going to get instant credibility for that change.

I think the big inflection point -- now that's a new word that we like a lot -- is going to be in this December review ourselves. If we come out of that review with a spat of White House press leaks, of political pressure for withdrawal faster than commanders think is sensible, then the take-away of Afghans and Pakistanis and others is going to remain that we are going to leave too quickly, that we're looking for an excuse.

I think it's very, very important that we understand that how we play the next year or so on the tempo of transition, on the reality of the conditions on the ground, whether we really are turning over because of conditions or whether we're turning over under pressure, defying the conditions, that is going to have an enormous amount to do with our credibility.

And our credibility has a direct reciprocal impact on Afghan actions. We want them to build a better government. In many cases, I think they are on a post-America survival strategy. We have to get back on page and not two, and I don't think anybody should underestimate the difficulty of getting onto that single page because we have radiated a lot of conflicting messages in the past, and we lived with our past, as does everybody else.

So, bottom line, yes, there is progress. We should judge it. We should not try to judge things for which we do not yet have enough time and facts to judge, and as we move forward, we have to constantly go dig very, very deep.

I think the Afghan Local Police program may work, but I think there will be a lot of temptation to have it become politicized, to have it become a force of local commanders, and it will be hugely important that we look really hard, not just at the security we're providing but at what we're creating politically.

Right now there is a considerable divergence between what Afghans see and what we are reporting in some areas, and that's not a bad thing, but we're just going to have to keep digging and looking and being realistic with ourselves, so cautiously optimistic. With diplomats, you know, they're the ones who always see the glass as half full, and they're worried about whether it's -- or half empty, and they worry about whether it's going to break.

GENERAL KEANE: Thank you, Mr. Ambassador.

Our next distinguished colleague, Mr. Shuja Nawaz, is a native of Pakistan. He is the Director of the South Asia Center at the Atlantic Council. He is also a political and strategic analyst and writes for leading newspapers and *The Huffington Post* and speaks on current topics before civic groups and think tanks and on radio and television.

Mr. Nawaz's latest book is *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army, and the Wars Within*, and it's available on the Web and from leading book sellers worldwide. He is also the author of *FATA--A Most Dangerous Place*.

Mr. Nawaz has a distinctive and diverse career, including working as a newscaster and

producers for Pakistan television and covered the 1971 war with India on the Western Front. Additionally, he has worked for the World Health Organization and *The New York Times* and has headed three separate divisions at the International Monetary Fund. He was also a director of the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna. Mr. Nawaz was the managing editor and then editor of *Finance and Development*, the multilingual quarterly of the IMF and the World Bank, and on the editorial advisory board of the *World Bank Research Observer*.

We are delighted to have you here, sir.

MR. NAWAZ: Thank you, General, and thank you to the ISW for hosting yet another great event. It is always wonderful to be here, although sometimes I prefer to be in the audience, so I can ask questions, particularly when there is a panel like this surrounding me.

I agree with a lot of things that have been said, and so I am going to try and give a perspective of how this war is seen from inside Pakistan.

There is, obviously, a reality that the Afghanistan War cannot be delinked from the war inside Pakistan. There is, as General Keane observed, an Afghan Taliban sanctuary inside FATA, and there has also been, as a result of Pakistan moving in its regular Army into FATA, which was traditionally a buffer zone, and from where the Army had been removed at the time of independence in 1947, there was a backlash among the local population which gave rise to the birth of the Pakistani Taliban, the Tehrik-i-Taliban of Pakistan.

And not only did it do that, but it allowed the TTP to link up with al-Qaeda as well as with the Tehrik-e-Nifaz-e-Shariate-Mohammadi in Swat and Malakand. The TNSM decided to join the bandwagon of the TTP, and they have taken the war inside Pakistan to the Pakistan Army and to civil society, particularly focusing on soft targets and now becoming very much part of a religious war inside Pakistan between the radical elements and the more traditional majority of Pakistan which believes in Sufi Islam.

So Pakistan is facing that internal conflict at the same time that it is facing this very difficult decision on what to do about the Afghan Taliban and what to do about the Afghan refugees whose camps inside Pakistan and particularly in the Balochistan form the official or unofficial sanctuary, call it what you will, for people so that they can get their R&R, which the Ambassador was referring to, because the enemy can in this case get a rotation much more easily and across the border, whereas it's much harder for the coalition forces to be able to do that. And yet the focus has been when we talk about the war in Pakistan, on what Pakistan can do and what it has done to help the fight.

Now, who is fighting the insurgency inside Pakistan? It is primarily the Army, and that may be the wrong way of doing it because history dictates, and as we are now learning even in Afghanistan, that you really win the insurgency once you have community-based police, and you can isolate the militant from the local population and win the population's confidence and win their respect and be able to provide good governance and administration at the local level and

build on that to the next level further up and then all the way up to Kabul.

What happened in Afghanistan was that we began at the top and pulled all the power to Kabul and then finding it very difficult now to divest. Now the same thing has happened inside Pakistan. Because of many years of military rule and autocratic rule, the powers of the provinces were taken away and so moved to Islamabad, and it's only in the last two years that some move has taken place to divest those powers through the 18th Amendment, which took the powers away from the president and gave it back to the prime minister and the parliament, and also through the National Finance Commission Award that the center gave up its fiscal and other revenue-sharing responsibilities to the provinces, to the extent that for the first time now, in the next month or two, the prime minister has promised to actually reduce the size of the cabinet, so that those sectors that belong -- previously belong in Islamabad will now move to the provinces.

I give you this broader picture because until and unless Pakistan can stabilize its own polity, I think it's going to be very difficult for us to get a decision out of Pakistan that will really be helpful on the border and particularly with Afghanistan, because here Pakistan faces a strange paradox, a conundrum.

Inside Pakistan, when the Taliban took over Swat and Malakand, there was a huge public outcry against this, against the fall of government that the Taliban represented, what they were doing to the local culture, what they were doing to the local population.

The Army, which had lost its respect among the population, had fallen from number-one place ranking in the institutions that the people of Pakistan respected, fell to number three, behind journalists and lawyers, which is a strange thing for us in Washington to understand.

[Laughter.]

MR. NAWAZ: And the people, once they observed how the Taliban actually functioned, pushed the Army back and said, "We are with you, and go and sort these people out." And the Army went back in and did the job in Swat and Malakand and managed to rise again to number-one ranking, if you follow the Pew polls and the other polls that take place in Pakistan.

Now, the question is if that's the case inside Pakistan, does Pakistan want a Taliban government in Kabul? I think the answer is no, but at the same time, there is still a vestige of a previous thinking that pervades the corridors of power inside Pakistan, and that is a view of Afghanistan as some kind of a subsidiary client state, a landlocked state that is totally dependent on Pakistan, and a misguided notion that is rooted in the war against the Soviets where, because of the contiguity of the territory inhabited by the Pashtun on both sides of the border, the Pakistanis felt that their best representatives in Afghanistan were the Pashtuns, and because the Durrani were Pashtun and traditionally ruled Afghanistan, that that was the best form of government that Pakistan could hope for in Afghanistan, and so they broke with the Tajik, the Uzbek, the Hazara, and essentially the northern alliance as well as with the Shia in the west of the country.

I think a serious attempt needs to be made within Pakistan to rethink this view of Afghanistan and to look at Afghanistan as it truly is, a much more mature, well-established country that's been in existence for over 200 years, whereas Pakistan is still a sprightly 63-year-old, and to understand that reality and to see Afghanistan in a new way.

Now, the summer 2011 deadline, I think was unfortunate. It was unfortunate in that it was highlighted, and then people didn't read the footnotes, the explanations that followed, which is always the case, and so the message that went out to Pakistan was shades of 1989: "The U.S. is going to have another precipitous withdrawal, and we are going to be left with a chaotic situation on our western borders. We already have a looming India rising as an economic and political power to the east." And so, in their view, they needed to have some kind of surrogate, some kind of hold, some kind of leverage in whatever would ensue once the allies quit Afghanistan.

You have to recall, also, that Pakistan was not in the coalition of the willing. It was in the coalition of the coerced. And we had President Musharraf at our center last week, and he had a hard time trying to explain exactly how and why he decided to do what he did, making some bad decisions in terms of deployment of the Army.

Now, the good news, if there is any, is that the Army Chief, General Kayani, does appear to get this, to some extent, and last year when he spoke at the National Defense University -- and I know a number of the people in the audience were there -- he used the term "strategic depth," and those that follow Pakistan's military history know that this is a term that has haunted us since the 1980s. It was a term coined by General Aslam Beg, the Army Chief who took over after General Zia-ul-Haq died, and it meant essentially that if India were to break through into Pakistan in occupied territory, that Pakistan would use Iran and Afghanistan as its physical strategic depth, and that they would fight the war on.

The reality on the ground is that if India were to break through, they would occupy the biggest cities and the key infrastructure and road links between North and South Pakistan, essentially break the country in two or three parts, and the game would be over. It doesn't matter if you stayed in Afghanistan or you went all the way to Uzbekistan. It wouldn't mean much.

So, essentially, after General Beg left, the Army forgot about this, but it's a very wonderful title which continues to -- breathed fresh life by people like General Hamid Gul, who was a partner of General Beg, and abetted by western media, which all often repeat this as an explanation for Pakistani behavior. I don't think there is any basis in terms of reality for this kind of thinking.

General Kayani redefined "strategic depth" as -- I think in his words, he said "a prosperous and stable Afghanistan." If this were to occur, I think we would have a fresh relationship between the two countries, which would be much more important, and I think at a much larger scale, pulling back to a 60,000-foot view of the region, it would behoove the United

States to now make active efforts at cultivating its other strategic partner in the region, which is India, to give Pakistan that breathing room that would allow it to devote much more forces to the fight on the border.

As it is, within North Waziristan, which is where the Haqqani network is based, the Pakistanis now have 34,000 troops, which is much more than they need to get the job done. So it's a question of timing now and whether the hedging strategy will be affected. And as General Keane said, we will see what emerges out of NATO, and if the redefinition of the withdrawal timetable takes us to 2014, I would expect that the Pakistanis would probably be rethinking their strategy.

Thank you very much.

GENERAL KEANE: Thank you, Mr. Nawaz. Appreciate it.

Next we have Mr. Max Boot. We are delighted to have Max with us. He is one of America's leading military historians and foreign policy analysts. He currently serves as the Jeane J. Kirkpatrick Senior Fellow in National Security Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. More than 100,000 copies of his book are in print. He is now writing *Invisible Armies*, a history of guerilla warfare and terrorism. His last book, *War Made New: Technology, Warfare, and the Course of History: 1500 to Today*, has been hailed as "a magisterial survey of technology and war" by *The New York Times* and "brilliantly crafted history" by *The Wall Street Journal*.

He's an advisor to U.S. commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan and was a senior foreign policy advisor to Senator John McCain during his Presidential campaign in 2007 and '8. In 2004, he was named by the World Affairs Councils of America as one of the 500 most influential people in the United States in the field of foreign policy. In 2007, he won the Eric Breindel Award for Excellence in Opinion Journalism, and before joining the Council in 2002, Max spent eight years as a writer and editor at *The Wall Street Journal*, the last five years as opinion editorial editor. From 1992 to 1994, he was an editor and writer at *The Christian Science Monitor*.

Max, great to have you here today.

MR. BOOT: Thanks very much. It's a pleasure to be here with all of you at an event sponsored by ISW, which has in a very short time become an amazingly useful and influential think tank, thanks to the leadership of Kim Kagan, Jack Keane, and, of course, the hard work of all of the staff members. It's an honor to be here with so many distinguished fellow panelists, especially General Keane, who is one of the few generals I'm aware of who has had a positive and powerful impact not only while wearing the uniform but also in retirement, although it doesn't feel like much of a retirement, I'm sure, because you seem to be awfully busy and rightly so.

Well, when I assess the situation in Afghanistan, what I look at is where we have come, from early 2009, not that long ago, to today, and I think it's an extraordinary leap that we have made in a relatively short period of time.

I can remember visiting Afghanistan in early 2009, and it was really back then a very sleepy, backwater theater. It was a place where we had only about 30,000 American troops. That's in a country of 30 million people. That's smaller than the NYPD, and it didn't matter what the generals were saying. You can't do effective counter-insurgency in a country of 30 million people when you only have 30,000 troops. We didn't have the infrastructure. We didn't really have an agenda beyond doing the holding action.

All of that has changed. There is now a sense for the first time in nine years that we are actually in Afghanistan to win, and that we are getting the resources and the strategy necessary to prevail, which doesn't mean that we are going to transform Afghanistan into a country as peaceful as Switzerland anytime soon, but that does not have to be the goal. All we have to do is to create an Afghanistan that can secure and police its own borders. A vital part of that is training and standing up the Afghan National Security Forces where that has been marked improvement over the course of the last several years.

Just in the last two years, we have gone from fewer than 150,000 Afghan Security Forces to more than 250,000, and their quality is up because there is more intensive training and mentoring. Salaries are higher. Desertion rates are lower. That is along with the surge in American forces, from 30- to 100,000, and, of course, there are also 40,000 allied forces there.

So, for the first time, we have the possibility of implementing a serious counter-insurgency strategy, and that is what our forces are doing today, especially in Helmand and Kandahar, which are the pivotal centers of the Taliban activity in the south.

I saw for myself this summer that, in fact, the classic population-centric counter-insurgency strategies that have worked in numerous countries, from Colombia to Malaya to the Philippines to Iraq, also work in Afghanistan. I saw that just visiting the District of Nawa, which is an area where the Marines went in well over a year ago. It was a virtual ghost town run by the Taliban. Today, it is safe enough that you can walk around without body armor. Schools that were closed have reopened. Stores have reopened. Goods are available for purchase, and licit goods not just the illicit ones that were available before. Political and economic development is on the right track.

Now, Nawa is a little bit further along than other areas because the Marines went in there earlier, but Marja and other areas are on a similar trajectory. It will take a little bit longer. If we have a little bit of patience, however, the Marines will be able to create the same kind of security conditions and to allow transition to the hold and build phase of "clear, hold, and build" as they have already done in Nawa.

We are seeing troops go into the area around Kandahar, which has been the traditional

hot bed of the insurgency. They have cleared the Taliban out of areas in Arghandab and Panjwai and other areas which have been Taliban strongholds for many years.

Now, we won't have the full measure of success of those operations for a while because it's one thing to clear them out, but you have to hold onto what you've gained, and it's vitally important that our troops be able to hold on next summer when there will be an inevitable counter-offensive. But I am pretty confident because these are not the usual in-and-out operations we've done for nine years. These are a serious counter-insurgency plan being implemented, which, of course, involves not only kicking the enemy out, but also moving in to secure the population to prevent the enemy from coming back in.

Now, I am pretty confident on the security front. I think we are making good progress, and we will continue to make more progress. I think the two areas that will remain the most problematic and will be the hardest to deal with are, A, safe havens in Pakistan and, B, issues of governance and corruption within Afghanistan.

Let me briefly address the safe haven issue, which has already been discussed extensively by my colleagues. I don't have a magical solution for solving the problems of Pakistan. I don't think anybody does. I don't think we can get the Pakistanis to turn off all their support for the Afghan Taliban and the Haqqani network and others anytime in the near future, but what we can do is we can safeguard Afghanistan against foreign interference. If we can increase the level of security and governance in Afghanistan, that will make it much harder for these insurgent groups, whether they have Pakistani support or not, to wreak the kind of havoc and mischief that they have been able to do over the course of the last several years.

The model I have in mind here is FARC in Colombia, which is a country I visited about 18 months ago, which has been yet another proof of concept of how counter-insurgency operations can work successfully. They have had tremendous success there under the leadership of President Uribe in beating back the FARC, which had seemed on the verge of a virtual takeover a mere decade ago, and yet FARC continues to exist, largely because it continues to receive outside support from Venezuela principally, also to some extent from other neighbors. And yet today, despite the fact that FARC exists, Bogotá is safe. Much of the countryside is safe. You can move around without security. The life of the country is flourishing. FARC has been reduced essentially to a nuisance value in jungle strongholds, where they do not affect the major centers of population. And if we can get Afghanistan right in terms of security and governance -- and I believe we are on the right track -- it won't matter that much whether the Taliban or the Haqqani network or others still have safe havens in Pakistan. They will not be a strategic threat to the future of Afghanistan.

Beyond the issue of increasing the level of security, especially in the south, I think the other critical element of counter-insurgency success is increasing the level of governance and decreasing the level of corruption. That is something that alienates the people from the government and is the best recruiting agent that the Taliban have.

Now, thankfully in some ways, in a perverse way, some of this problem has been made by our own efforts because for years, we have poured billions of dollars into Afghanistan, without having a large number of troops on the ground. We have essentially tried to buy security on the cheap by renting troops from warlords and power brokers, and what that has done is to vastly increase the level of corruption and to increase the power of some of the most hated power brokers within the country, the very people who are driving the Afghans into the arms of the Taliban.

Now, I say thankfully. That is a large part of the problem, because that is actually something that we ourselves can control. We are not dependent upon waiting for the Afghan legal system to move against corrupt government officials, which is something that is very hard to expect in any third world country. We can have a major impact ourselves simply by getting a grip on our spending and making sure that our contracting dollars, billions of them, are not fueling corruption and warlord-ism. That is something that is happening right now for the very first time.

General Petraeus has put H.R. McMaster, who is one of the, I think, most gifted officers in the entire Army in charge of a task force, charged with reducing corruption and getting a hold of our own spending. That is something that General Petraeus understands is going to be a vital part of our success, and that is something that we are focusing on really for the first time right now.

I think one of the issues has been that other agencies of the U.S. government have not necessarily seen the importance of dealing with corruption, and so there have been well-documented reports about payoffs from the CIA or other agencies to a lot of warlords. That is something that I think we have to be concerned about. I think we need a unity-of-effort approach here to deal with corruption and to make sure that that is a major issue that we are helping to create good governance in Afghanistan rather than helping to create warlord-ism or corruption. That is something that is well within our capabilities.

I think the greatest asset that we have on our side beyond the vast military capabilities at the U.S. Army, Marine Corps, and other services bring to the fight, beyond the capabilities that the nascent Afghan National Security Forces bring, I think the greatest asset that we have is the goodwill of the people of Afghanistan. This is not like the 1980s when the Soviets turned the entire country against them. We are not seen, by and large, as an invading force.

If you look at the public opinion polls, support the Taliban is very low. The people of Afghanistan have tried Taliban rule. They did not like it. Fewer than 10 percent today would like to see a return to the Taliban. Nearly 70 percent support the NATO mission in Afghanistan. In fact, I would suspect the number would be considerably higher if we did a better job of keeping law and order. That's been the number-one complaint about NATO forces is that we're there, but we're not doing enough to deal with the threat posed by the Taliban.

Well, finally we are starting to address that. We essentially have the people on our side,

which I can tell you as a historian of counter-insurgency and insurgency, that is the biggest determinant of success, who has the people on their side, and at the end of the day, the people don't want to see a return to Taliban rule.

So what the American and allied forces are doing there is very much acting out the desires of the performance of Afghanistan. That is why I think we have an excellent chance to succeed. It won't be quick. It won't be easy. There's still a hard fight ahead, but I think our prospects for success are excellent.

GENERAL KEANE: Thank you, Max. Appreciate your comments very much.

I think we have done a pretty good job of providing you with some information, stimulating some questions for you. We have a microphone in the middle of the room, and we have somebody who is going to take charge of that. Let's put it that way.

So I would like you to ask a single question as opposed to multiple questions, so we can get everybody a shot at this, and we do have plenty of time for questions.

Yes, sir.

QUESTIONER (Voice of America Television): Ravi Khanna, Voice of America Television.

I wanted your reaction, all of you -- this is for all of you -- about the tanks which we are inducting now. Is it a good idea or a bad idea?

GENERAL KEANE: The question deals with the tanks that have been asked for by the command in Afghanistan. We are sending about a company's worth of tanks.

Many of us have scratched our head a little bit as to why they haven't been there before, given the success we enjoyed with them during the counter-insurgency in Iraq, and we found them very successful actually in cities in Iraq, which many people think they would not be, as long as they were coupled with ground troops with them.

And I think the commanders recognized that a tank accompanied by infantry is a formidable weapon system. You can knock down pretty much a wall with its main tank gun, if there is someone behind that, that's shooting at us. It is an intimidating piece of equipment and weapon system, all of its own, and we found that to be true in Iraq. In other words, you can compel other people's will just by its presence, and that's a factor.

And it also provides protection for our troops who are around there. It takes one whale of an IED to defeat it, and the Afghan Taliban do not have the missile systems that would defeat that weapon system. It's not that they couldn't get them, and someone will probably start providing them to them, given the presence of those tanks.

So my answer to that is it's a good thing, and I think it's a step in the direction. We may see more coming if it turns out to be what the commanders think it will be, and that is an effective weapon system in a counterinsurgency in Afghanistan.

MR. BOOT: If I could just add something very briefly to that, I think the decision by General Petraeus to approve the dispatch of those tanks blows a big hole in one of the myths about population-centric counter-insurgency because some people will suggest that it is a very unrealistic lovey-dovey kind of approach that you are trying to win hearts and minds. You're not doing the hard fighting that's necessary to defeat and kill the enemy, and nothing could be farther from the truth. In fact, successful counter-insurgency combines hearts and minds, attempts to reach out to the population, to move troops in among the people, to do civil action projects. It combines all that with very hard-headed kinetic action designed to capture or kill the insurgents.

And General Petraeus is surging American efforts across the full spectrum of activities, from increasing efforts to reintegrate Taliban, from increasing efforts to bring electricity to cities like Kandahar, to also increasing air strikes, increasing kinetic action, putting -- increasing special operations raids, putting pressure on the insurgent networks across the full spectrum of activity. That's what it takes to be successful.

So nobody should imagine that American commanders are under some kind of misapprehension that they can win over the Taliban by demonstrating that we're nice guys. They understand there is a hard core that has to be killed or captured, but you also have to be careful in a use of force to avoid alienating innocent civilians.

And I think one of the best metrics of how we are doing is that we have been able to increase air strikes pretty dramatically, while at the same time not seeing a dramatic increase in civilian casualties, and that's because for the first time, we have boots on the ground, we have excellent intelligence about where to hit, where the bad guys are hiding. We can take out insurgent safe havens very precisely in a way that we were not able to do before when we were doing a light footprint, counter-terrorist approach.

GENERAL KEANE: Mr. McFarlane?

QUESTIONER (Robert C. McFarlane): Thanks very much, General, and thanks to each of you for coming and for your contributions to the public debate and raising awareness of Ground Truth.

Thanks for your presentations. There seemed to be a consensus among you that right now prosecution of the classical counter-insurgency strategy is making real progress, and everything I hear from battalion level and special ops people indicates that.

What I also hear is, however, that there is a persistent worry, some would say bitterness but occasionally hatred about the government, and it's, yes, in Kabul but also down at the

province, district, village level. Well, if we continue to make progress and whether by 2014 or as long as it takes on the battlefield, if you will, and that facilitates a drawing down and turning over of the security requirement to Afghan forces, what about governance? If it remains corrupt, somewhat dysfunctional, and not really a coalition that includes tactics to any depth, can that remain stable? And the corollary is, is it possible and are we, our government, focusing on how to broaden that government and make it more expressive of the real Afghanistan's population?

GENERAL KEANE: Yeah. That's a great question, and the governance issue certainly is one of the major challenges we are facing in Afghanistan, and you normally face them in other counter-insurgency efforts as well. I mean, after all, the reason why counter-insurgency exists usually -- the reason why insurgents exist is some kind of legitimate grievance against a sitting government that people are willing to take to arms to do something about.

So the reality is the approach that is being taken, particularly dealing with corruption, I think is a pretty balanced approach. Number one, as Max mentioned, we are going to watch our own dollars and account for them because they have been lining the pockets of the enemy, and that's got to stop. We got a task force that's doing that.

As a matter of course, we will start to deal with the predatory nature of corruption as it affects the people, and it affects them in harassment taxation on the roads inside their villages. And we are close to them now. In the past, we were not, but we are right there with them, and we are going to identify, report, and at whatever level we can act to do something about it, we will do that, even if it has to get to a general officer level. What we are not going to do is ignore it, and that is what is happening now.

The egregious level of corruption that takes place in ministries, egregious level, particularly in the security ministries, MOI and MOD, those will be identified and brought to probably, in most cases, at least a minister level or possibly the presidential level for resolution.

The other thing is the corruption at the higher levels of government will be dealt with in private and not in public, and there will be no beating of the chest about some empirical victory over having accomplished something with a government official as it pertains to corruption. It is going to be done privately, and we have had a lot of success with this in Iraq with Ryan Crocker and Dave Petraeus working privately with Maliki dealing with some of the egregious nature of his subordinates. And in 90 percent of those cases, that leader took action because we had what? We had evidence, indisputable evidence, and stopped talking about the generalities and get to the specifics. And if we don't have the specifics, then stop talking about it.

Now, the governance at local level is an issue, as Mr. McFarlane is talking about, and that is a real challenge for us. We are going to continue to work with that and hope to shape it.

There are really good people out there at that local level who are courageous and do make a difference, and there are others who wouldn't be there. And we will work through that. At the end of the day, we cannot solve all of these problems in the time frame that we're there. I

mean, that's the reality of it.

I am comfortable we can turn this over to Afghan National Security Forces who can continue to provide a stability and security. I am comfortable we can make some changes at the local level to improve the governance in terms of its ability to provide services and responsiveness to the people and then hope that that would continue on. It is a challenge, and it will continue to be a challenge probably right up until the time that we're there.

AMBASSADOR NEUMANN: I want to speak to that, this question a little bit, because it's a terribly important question. I agree with much of what General Keane said, but I am probably a little more skeptical. But anyway, let me try to raise your confusion to a higher level of detail.

[Laughter.]

AMBASSADOR NEUMANN: First of all, we do need to take responsibility for our own pieces, the action. That has two pieces. One is the things we do on the ground with the contracting. Second piece is what is our national intent, our will. These are quite separate problems, and you have to get down to a level of detail which we really don't like to do in Washington where we want to be strategic all the time.

We are in a process now, which I totally applaud, of trying to get a handle on contractors who are very corrupt with our money. Now, let me take a specific example. In Kandahar, contractors attack other contractors. They do so because they think the Americans are leaving soon, and they want to make a bundle.

When you give a contract to an Afghan equivalent of a minority contractor, you have a high expectation, should have, that he is going to be attacked not only by Taliban but by some of the people that are on our side. Now, there are a variety of things that we might be able to do to deal with that. It's not a hopeless situation, but when you make the first step, you had better know what you are going to do and how you are going to deal with those problems as they come because, if we find that our logistics are being seriously impacted because the new contractors can't deliver, then we are going to have to either secure the new contractors, which we really don't want to use the force to do, or you end up backing off and going back to the old contractor, in which case you have now suffered a major political defeat in your will.

This is a solvable problem, but I raise it because I want to underline how difficult it is to deal with these problems, and how much depends on your execution of policy after you get to a very correct decision about policy.

On the larger level of government corruption, I do believe that we must deal with the incoherence of our own message, and I say it is incoherent because of the question of how soon we are going to leave. As long as Afghans at senior levels believe that we are leaving rapidly, there are two logical responses. One is I have to steal more because I am going to have to run.

The other one is I have to build up a network of local commanders who can fight for me because I'm not going to be there on the Army yet when the Americans leave. Now, I'm not dealing with whether or not those perceptions are true, but I can tell you, I have enough contacts to know, those are very Afghan responses.

Now, as long as people believe that, our dialog of the harm corruption does to the nation, which is absolutely true, it's completely irrelevant. Afghans have a model for survival in a post-America if we leave too soon. That model is how President Najibullah, the last communist president of Afghanistan, survived. We forget that he survived for three years after the Soviets left. It was not an immediate collapse. There were two massive attacks on Jalalabad by the Mujahideen, helped by the Pakistani Army, using artillery, using large numbers of people. I've seen some accounts that say they lost 10,000 people in the first assault, and they failed. In fact, Najibullah held on until basically the fall of the Soviet Union cut off his funding, after which he couldn't preserve this network of alliances.

As long as there is a strong doubt about our national will to remain, there is going to be a strong logic for Afghan leaders to try to maintain these kind of militia forces, in which case our arguments about why those do violence to the war don't compute very much.

I raise this because it is directly relevant to the message we radiate in Washington. We cannot deal with corruption, much as we want to, only on the basis of our recriminations in Kabul. We are going to have to deal with it in part as a matter of our national will, but I totally applaud and agreed with what General Keane was saying about dealing in private.

Our tendency, our default reaction over and over has been to try to deal with corruption in very western ways. We must have a task force, and it must be investigatory and left alone. So what do we do, we go out and arrest a guy who may be corrupt as the devil but who is also a key component of President Karzai's network of political support, and if he stays arrested and testifies, he will probably pull apart various pieces of that network, which from President Karzai's point of view is key to his physical survival after we leave. Why would you not expect that he would balk that arrest? We go and have a hissy about corruption when the consequences would have been completely clear.

If we are able to do what General Keane is talking about and deal with this privately, we can make some major impact on that, but that means we have to do something that we are very bad at with a very big government and a lot of pieces, which means we have to actually know what all our pieces are doing. Before the arrest takes place, you have to think about do you want to do this arrest, do you want to carry in this information, this evidence, do you want to talk about that at a senior level, do you want to try to contain it. It is possible to do those things.

The only reason I am going on and on about this -- and I'll quit -- is because you really need to understand, one, the degree of complexity involved and, two, the degree to which our own purposes and our own will are central to carrying out the mission.

Thank you.

GENERAL KEANE: Does anyone else want to comment? Go ahead.

MR. NAWAZ: A quick one. I think all this is well and good, but I think it is not a question of punitive measures nor a question of simply looking at it from Kabul outwards. If it is good governance you are looking for, it has to begin by the Afghans at the community level, which means devolving, appointing authority and power to the communities and beginning with the municipality as a key component of governance, good governance in Afghanistan.

I say this because our own Center is looking at this issue now, and we feel that if you take away from Kabul the power to appoint even the local teachers and policemen and lowly appointments, you are going to give some position of strength to the locals, feeling that they have ownership, and they will protect that against the Taliban and anyone else that wants to disrupt it. I think that model has to be turned around and taken from the community up rather than from Kabul down.

Thank you.

AMBASSADOR NEUMANN: Yeah, but it's really, really rough because you have to deal with the fact that if you're not very careful, what you will do is devolve power to the very corrupt holders of power who are in the provinces. There's a lot of tension between devolving power to deal with corruption and devolving power to the corrupt.

One more point -- and I'm sorry to go on so long about this, but I think it really is important. We have, in my judgment, too many people, civilians and military, who are operating locally on the belief that Kabul does not matter because it is incompetent. The latter is true, but when you deal with trying to set up things on a local level, whether it's police force or governance, as though we can manage it, what you create is a great deal of suspicion, and what you find is that while Kabul does not have the power to do things well, it has the power to screw up what we're doing. And when you act too much as though they don't matter, you create a belief that we're creating local conspiracies, and then you get a reaction. You get people who may be very good people removed, and then we're having a fit about it. This, too, is not simple, but it requires a constant coordination between what we are doing on the ground and what we are doing and talking about in Kabul.

The line in Woodward's -- in President Obama's memo, which is in Woodward's book, that we will work with Karzai where we can and work around him where we must, is not going to have been missed by the authorities in Kabul, but I have seen this dynamic repeatedly. They come to believe that there is a local conspiracy with the local government, between the foreigner and the governor.

Let me give you a historical case, British with Engineer Daoud, Governor of Helmand, built him up enormously in the press, absolutely ignored Kabul, wouldn't tell Karzai what they

were doing. A lot of things going right, but enormous frictions.

When Daoud was removed, there were three days in which President Karzai refused to take a telephone call from the ministerial level in London. The message of that refusal was it's still my country, damn it, you can't run this out from under me.

So we have now enormous assets that we didn't have in my time. Oh, how I wish I had, but --

GENERAL KEANE: We've got to move on.

AMBASSADOR NEUMANN: Yeah. We have to be very careful how we use those assets. We have a delusion of understanding power dynamics, and if we are not careful and if we exaggerate our abilities on the ground, we are going to hurt ourselves.

GENERAL KEANE: Next question.

QUESTIONER: This is a question of defining terms, and I know this is an ongoing debate. And, Max, you partially answered this, but in terms of our international interests, what is the best-case scenario if we succeed and the worst-case scenario if we fail in terms of us, and what is a reasonable time frame to answer that question?

GENERAL KEANE: Do you want to answer?

MR. BOOT: Well, I would just answer it as a historian by referring to history. I think the best-case scenario is Afghanistan as it was prior to the communist coup in 1978. I mean, there is this notion that Afghanistan is somehow hell on earth, and it's a country that's always been at war and isn't really a country, all this other nonsense, which really does not comport with its history, which is that it has been a country longer than the United States has been around, as you mentioned longer than Pakistan has been around. And in the '50s and '60s, it was really seen as a model third world country that was pretty peaceful. It was a place where tourists went. It was a normal hippie destination. I mean, if you read *The Kite Runner*, you get a taste of what life was like before the communist coup and the Soviet invasion and the 30 years of hellish war that followed. So that is the ultimate best-case scenario of what Afghanistan can look like.

We are not going to achieve that anytime soon, but I think it's helpful to think about that, just to understand that Afghanistan is not a country consigned to perpetual war. It is not something that its people accept as normal. It's something that has been thrust upon them by the course of events, but what they really hunger for is decent, accountable governance, and if we can help them get there, I think we will create a tremendous strategic ally and partner in the region that will help us deal with problems like Pakistan and many others.

If on the other hand we pull out precipitously and leave an insecure Afghanistan, I think it's pretty easy to see what will happen. It will be a repeat of the 1990s. When you saw the

country torn apart by civil war, when Kabul was getting shelled every day, when horrible human rights violations were occurring, and out of all that, the Taliban were able to seize power, simply because they promised a return to some kind of law and order. And, of course, as we know, their promises were hollow. What they offered was not good governance; they offered this horrible totalitarianism that the people ultimately came to think was a horrible alternative type of government, but if we see Afghanistan, once again, becoming a place where there is no significant support for central authority, you can expect that kind of civil war. You can expect the rise of the Taliban, and, oh, by the way, the Taliban still have very close links with al-Qaeda with whom they have never broken, and so we can expect that just as it was prior to 9/11, Afghanistan would once again become a sanctuary for terrorists who would seek to attack us.

So I think that's the ultimate nightmare scenario which would happen if we were to pull out too soon.

GENERAL KEANE: Does anybody else want to add to that?

[No response.]

GENERAL KEANE: Okay. Thank you.

Next question.

QUESTIONER (George Washington University Student): Derrick Licina, student at George Washington University.

I would just like to pick up on a point that was brought up by Mr. Nawaz, specifically the need to build police --

GENERAL KEANE: Can you bring the microphone up? Because the --

QUESTIONER (George Washington University Student): Absolutely.

GENERAL KEANE: Thank you. Thank you, sir.

QUESTIONER (George Washington University Student): I would just like to pick up on a point that Mr. Nawaz brought up about the need to build local police capacity, specifically in the FATA region of Pakistan.

I'm just curious. In your mind, has the government of Pakistan, more specifically Ministry of Interior and Defense, done enough to increase the capacity of the Frontier Corps, and why or why not?

MR. NAWAZ: Yes, they have, and I think the U.S. is playing a huge role in that by training trainers for the Frontier Corps, but it has to go even further down into the community

level to the Khasaddars and the Levies that live inside the community and that are from the community, and I think they now are focused on that.

In terms of the changes in the Frontier Corps, from being a backwater where the dregs of the Pakistan Army used to be sent, it is now a place where any aspiring young officer who wants to make a mark wants to go because it allows them to fight and to rotate in and out.

And more recently, a good sign of that was when after many, many years, a brigadier from the Frontier Corps was actually promoted to major general, and the interesting thing is that he has now been brought back from having commanded the 1st Armored Div in Multan to become the head of the Frontier Corps in the FATA region.

So the Frontier Corps is -- within the last two years, has improved tremendously, and I think it is much more capable of looking after the local situation inside FATA.

GENERAL KEANE: Anybody else want to add to that?

[No response.]

GENERAL KEANE: Next question. Yes, sir.

QUESTIONER (Financial Times): Dan Dombey, Financial Times.

I would just like to ask a little bit more about President Karzai's comments to *The Washington Post*, bearing in mind what both General Keane and Ambassador Neumann says. If, according to Ambassador Neumann, it's very important to bear in mind key dynamics in Afghanistan, but it is equally important to degrade Taliban to the point at which the ANSF are able to take over, is there any conclusion here? Is there a concern that the increased tempo of operations that General Petraeus has embarked on more than the politics? And there, even if Karzai is reassured the turn, the U.S. is there to stay at least for three or four more years.

GENERAL KEANE: Do you want to start with that?

AMBASSADOR NEUMANN: The nature of counter-insurgency is full of contradictions. You know, get used to it. You're always going to be trying to tread a balance.

The increase in tempo of attacks against -- by Special Forces-type units against insurgents has had a considerable measure of success, and it has disrupted -- and I'm sure General Keane can -- or is able to talk about that more. I don't know if he can talk about it more.

You have two issues that you have to deal with that may be involved. One is Afghans are very sensitive about this stuff, and they have tremendously long memories. They conflate what happened five years ago and what happened yesterday into kind of one common picture.

I traveled extensively when I was there, and sometimes people would be saying you have to respect our traditions more, meaning this kind of thing, and I'd say, "Okay. When was the last incident?" Well, it was two years ago, but two years and yesterday are the same. So it's hard to get unstuck.

You have funny perceptions. I remember they did an investigation after one big battle the Dutch were in where they claimed they had killed a lot of civilians. One Afghan was explaining, "They killed my uncle, and he was a civilian." Well, what was your uncle doing? "Well, he was shooting," because, you know, there was a battle, and it would have been unmanly not to pick up his gun. But he was a civilian, so you have a few of these problems you got to work your way through.

I think it -- remember that President Karzai is constantly on the telephone. It's good, it's bad, but everybody is calling him. He vibrates to this popular discontent, and he has a problem that we have, in his view, not really responded to him over a number of years. I think that view is exaggerated, but it's there. But he has learned that when we don't respond to him, we respond when he goes to the press.

So, yes, there's a contradiction. Yes, we will have to live with the contradiction, but I think we are on the right track, but we will have to continue to provide a very high level of detail about what we're doing. There won't be an easy answer to this one.

Over to you, sir.

GENERAL KEANE: Well, first of all, President Karzai is aware of the nature and character is all of our operations. He gets briefs of some level of detail in terms of what is taking place, whether those operations are classic counter-insurgency operations or whether they involve special operation forces, and he is very much up to date in terms of the progress that we are making and what the issues are as a result of that.

General Petraeus has continuous meetings with President Karzai, and I would describe that as a cooperative relationship, yet a firm relationship that they have with each other. They speak very frankly with each other, and so, number one, the President is well informed as to what is taking place.

And I think the Ambassador really put his finger on it. I would just express it a little differently. President Karzai has been in power nine years. I think he's on his fifth or sixth Petraeus, and he's seen expectations before, and he's seen expectations not met before, and he also has a people to answer to. And I think a lot of that, what we saw, was posturing for attention before the Lisbon talks, reminding everybody that he is the head of this sovereign state and that he has some issues inside of it.

To look at that as a major divider from what General Petraeus is trying to accomplish, what NATO is trying to accomplish, and there is a major chasm there and we are going in

different directions as a matter of policy would be wrong. Quite frankly, they're back on the same page again. That's the reality of it.

So it happened. It's unfortunate it got people, you know, frustrated about it, but I think President Karzai intended all of that to take place. Mission accomplished.

MR. BOOT: The only thing I would add every briefly, as I recall it, you had many similar comments by Prime Minister Malaki in Iraq. I mean, all these heads of state have a stake in showing that they are not simply American puppets and showing that they are standing up for the sovereign well of their people, and so Prime Minister Malaki likewise made many comments about how he didn't really need American troops, how Iraqi Security Forces would be ready to take over very soon, et cetera, et cetera, but he didn't press the issue. He didn't actually demand that our troops would leave because he understood at the end of the day that for the short term, he needed our troops, and I think President Karzai understands the same thing.

GENERAL KEANE: Is there another question? Okay. Thank you very -- oh, there is one. Sir, go ahead. Get up there and get the microphone.

QUESTIONER: I was going to ask because I noticed a disagreement between Ambassador Neumann and Mr. Nawaz about this, and maybe the rest of the panel can speak to it, too. There seemed to be disagreement over whether authority over the Afghan Security Forces should be more in Kabul or more devolved locally and seen that there was a point of disagreement that didn't get really fleshed out, and I was wondering if maybe you two could speak to it and the rest of the panel if they want to add, also.

MR. NAWAZ: I'm not sure I'm a match for Ambassador Neumann on this debate, but let me just offer my view, and I'm sure we don't disagree as much as on the way it can be done.

In my view, we continue to use the word "we," you know, we must do this, we must do that. I think in the end, the best solution is the one that emerges out of Afghanistan, and out of the government in Kabul and out of the governments in the provinces.

As Max was referring to, Afghanistan has had a way of balancing its various regions and regional interests. Now, we can build up warlords or we can build up local interest groups that are not necessarily armed and militant and our warlords, but they will protect themselves against any intrusion from the Taliban.

And certainly, as you go away from the border region, there is more likelihood that that will happen. So, if we focus on some of the elements of local government that the Afghans could themselves try out -- and they will be one step forward, two steps back initially, but then it will be three steps forward, and they will be able to leap-frog it.

Basically, the issue is that the values that the ordinary Afghan has on Maslow's scale are the same as the values that someone in Idaho or Iowa has or in Washington. So we have to

respect that and not have this kind of vanity that somehow we know what's good for them and then we will work it out and impose it on them. It's much better if it emerges from within.

There will be debate. There will be discussion, but I think it will have roots, and it will outlast the coalition's presence in Afghanistan. That's my view.

MR. BOOT: Before Ambassador Neumann answers, I just wanted to piggyback on something that Mr. Nawaz just said, which is about the importance of respecting Afghan institutions and respecting the people of Afghanistan. I mean, we have talked a lot about, as we tended to in Washington, about executive power, about President Karzai, and there's also a lot of talk about how to work with provincial or district governors, but there is another aspect of power which we ought to keep in mind, which is the checks and balances on executive power, which come from the legislative branch, which also exists in Afghanistan.

There is a Parliament. There is a long tradition of Shuras and Jirgas, and we should think about not only empowering executive branch actors but also empowering the Shuras and the Jirgas and the parliament to acts as a check upon executive authority. That is very much in line with traditional Afghan tribal culture, and that's something that we should empower.

Unfortunately, in the last decade or so, things have gotten out of whack, in part because of our own aid spending. We have created the super empowered network of maligned actors, often linked to the executive branch of government, but part of the process of reform is not only to take away some power from some of those maligned actors, which we can do, but also to empower the Shuras and the Jirgas to speak up for the voice of the community and to ask as a check upon executive branch abuse.

MR. NEUMANN: I don't think there is a lot of disagreement here in principle. There is a complex question as far as scratching at it, but it's very deep on -- not deep in disagreements, just complicated about how you do these things.

I totally agree with Mr. Nawaz on the issue of letting some of these things grow out of Afghanistan. I think it's important as we look at the devolution in addition to not trying to engineer to much ourselves, you know, really be humble about how much we know and understand, to also reflect on how different Afghanistan is from the Afghanistan of the '70s.

I actually visited Afghanistan first in 1967. My father was Ambassador there. I spent three and a half months just out of college traveling all over the country by road from Iraq to Kabul, by horse and yak up into the Wakhan along the Oxus River, saw a lot of the place.

The tribal system of the '70s has been shattered by war. The tribal leaders have lost the cohesion and the force that they had in most cases. In 2005, all over Afghanistan, only in one province was one tribe able to exercise the discipline to run a tribal slate for the parliamentary election and keep off the election, members of the tribe who weren't on the slate, just one measure of how fractured tribal leadership has become.

Tribal leaders have lost power to commanders, what we call "warlords." Some of them are pretty little warlords; some of them are big warlords. As Mr. Boot said, we have had a role in helping that in some cases.

So that doesn't mean it's not possible to do off power, but we have to be very careful, have a lot of understanding or a lot of room for things to grow somewhat naturally in Afghanistan and not assume we can engineer it.

By the way, I agree that the best is something that looks a little bit like that past the '70s. I just point out people didn't expect as much from government then. They had been in their refugee camps in Pakistan and Iran. They've seen things that they never saw in the '70s. The '70s, people talk about golden age of development, we actually had far less aid, far less development projects than we've had now, but it seemed wonderful because people didn't have the same expectations.

So, as we deal with how things devolve, we are going to have to deal with the reality of an enormously fractured society. Be very careful that we are not trying ourselves to stand up Shuras without knowing who we are standing up, really what we're doing. I mean, the land is littered with examples, and I won't go on, on time, but it's just to say it's not a difference over an objective. It's a reminder of how complicated it is to work on.

Thank you.

GENERAL KEANE: I would just add one point, is that we are strengthening, helping to strengthen the capacity of the ministries at the national level, some of whom have very fine leaders at the top of them, but the bureaucratic processes aren't anywhere near the kind of level of maturity you would expect, so that they can provide an increased measure of effectiveness.

The Shuras that we're talking about at the local level, where local leaders come together to address the needs of their people, are certainly very important. It's part of the culture of the country. We've helped to strengthen that, and our commanders routinely participate in that. It's pretty remarkable to watch that unfold as they grapple with local issues, which security obviously is a part of that, and that's why we're a part of those Shuras ourselves.

And helping to strengthen that and assist them in any way that we can, they are their meetings, not our meetings, but we are participating in them routinely because they want us to participate, and it certainly makes sense for us to participate in it.

I always felt the seminal event in Iraq politically in terms of governance was January of 2009 when the people elected their own provincial leaders. Every single governor who had been appointed by the Central Government who ran for office was not elected, and it was essentially an election of secular people versus religious zealots. And as a result of that, the people for the first time had a government that they had elected and was going to be held accountable to them..

We don't have that form of government in Afghanistan, nor is it in the near future to run elections at the local level, and that is certainly one of the challenges. So we are trying to strengthen that local government for the same reason we knew it was such a seminal event in Iraq. It's because at the local level is where the people are, and that government has an opportunity to be responsive to those people and assist them with their needs and services. And given the rural nature of the communities in Afghanistan, it's even more an issue as opposed to the urban nature of what we were dealing with in Iraq.

I want to thank my colleagues for participating on this panel today, taking time out of their busy schedules, and certainly appreciate all the comments that you made here, and all of you for attending and also the thoughtful questions that you asked. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]

•-•-•