The Ethics of Exit from Afghanistan

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Patrol in Afghanistan
Credit: U.S. Army (CC)

Introduction

DAVID SPEEDIE: I am delighted to moderate and introduce our distinguished panel this evening.

Let me just say a few words by way of introduction, I direct the program on U.S. Global Engagement here at the Council. For obvious reasons, we have paid pretty close attention to Afghanistan under that rubric over the past couple of years, it being perhaps the most significant challenge for the Administration at this point.

A few things we have done: last summer, the summer of '09, we posted four white papers on the whole basket of issues involving U.S.-NATO involvement in Afghanistan, implication for an extended region, including Central Asia and Pakistan. We commissioned two papers from Americans, two from Russians, because obviously the Russian experience, the Soviet experience, in Afghanistan was important, and our two writers had had direct experience there. So I invite you to go back after this invigorating discussion and visit our website and go back to these papers.

Then we had a couple of special sessions. Our colleague and other Senior Fellow, Jeff McCausland**,** gave a somewhat somber briefing on the military/economic/societal on-the-ground situation in Afghanistan. This was October of last year.

And then, finally, or most recently I should say, in January of this year we had a really extraordinary session actually with David Rohde, *The New York Times* journalist who was taken by the Taliban in late 2008 into 2009 for a five-month period. David gave us his own experience. [Mr. Rohde's talk was off the record.]

So we have had a pretty diverse portfolio on Afghanistan. In all of this we have tried to be true to ourselves, to look at the ethical questions of the Afghan engagement since 2001 actually, the three phases of the engagement in Afghanistan.

This we feel is important, not only because it is our ecological niche, ethics in international affairs, but also the debate generally seems to be stuck in the groove of the military engagement, whether the surge is succeeding and whether the military outcome will be favorable. It all seems to focus on that particular aspect.

David Brooks, you may have read in *The New York Times* over the weekend, said as one of the significant achievements of the Obama Administration: "He [the president] has emerged as a liberal hawk pursuing victory in Iraq and adopting an Afghan surge that has already utterly transformed the momentum in that war. The Taliban is now in retreat and its leaders are being assassinated or captured at a steady rate."

On the same day, of course, as Brooks' encomium, the Taliban conducted concerted attacks on the southern Afghanistan city, the third-largest city, of Kandahar, with 35 killed and 60 injured. So the question of the military success, or whatever, is both questionable and we feel not by any means the name of the game.

Let me cut this short because I want to move ahead. Let me say finally that I was very taken, in this context of whether there is more to it than the military outcome by the military scholar Andy Bacevich, who has been here

at the Council, quoted in a recent *Atlantic Monthly* article**.** Andy said—I'm paraphrasing slightly—with the emphasis on better ways of fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq, he said, we are indulging in a triumph of tactics over strategy—in other words, finding better ways of doing a job that perhaps should not have been done in the first place.

So, on that somewhat sober note, I think that's a good, reasonable segue to the question of the ethics of exit from Afghanistan.

We have two really terrific and very complementary panelists, both of whom have had direct experience. One, Katherine Brown, has been in the policymaking community as well as an academic. Robert Diamond, chair of the Truman Project's New York Region and a Fellow of the Truman National Security Project, is a veteran. So we have a nice kind of balance here of experience. I look forward very much to their presentations.

Katherine, why don't you lead us off? We'll talk for about 15 minutes each and then, of course, open the floor to questions from the audience. Katherine.

Katherine Brown

KATHERINE BROWN: Thank you, and thanks, everyone, for coming.

It is exactly that moral dimension of the Afghanistan question that has been lost in our national discourse. What I am going to talk about is really what I believe is ethical for an exit from Afghanistan. It is also pragmatic.

There are four areas I want to review: first, to put the ethical issue into an overall context; then talk about the ongoing work of our diplomatic and aid corps; and then about the role of women in Afghanistan's development, which is an issue that we have let drop, I feel, from our discussions about the country and our role in it.

When the Afghanistan war was first launched, it was largely described in security terms, as a direct retaliation to 9/11, but soon after, the war was framed as a humanitarian issue. By the January 2002 State of the Union, President Bush was really talking about the quality of life of Afghans improving, and we heard less and less about the urgency of the crisis there.

Afghanistan was, as you know, absolutely devastated. It had severe economic, political, and ecological problems. Today, still a quarter of the population does not meet its food standards, life expectancy is 43 years old, only 12 percent of Afghans have access to sanitized drinking water, and over 80 percent of the Afghan women are still illiterate. Overall, it is still the fifth least-developed country in the world.

So the sweeping rhetoric that we heard about how we were going to rebuild the Afghan nation, it was a belief that was actually shared by many of the diplomats and aid workers who arrived there early on in 2002, 2003, 2004, when I was there. It was aid workers, diplomats, from across the political spectrum. This was just simply, we felt, the right thing to do.

It was utterly destroyed, as anyone who landed in there at that time saw. Life was extremely bleak. We all desperately wanted to do something to help.

A lot of the diplomats and aid workers that I worked with when I was based at the U.S. Embassy had actually been engaged with Afghanistan before, in the 1980s and a little bit in the 1990s, and most of them felt as if after the embassy closed in January 1989, after the Soviets withdrew, or right before the Soviets withdrew, that this was only temporary, that we were going to be back, that Afghanistan deserved aid delivery after the Mujahideen had defeated the Soviets.

But we had different priorities. The Berlin Wall fell and all the attention kind of shifted to Eastern Europe and Russia.

There were a lot of efforts, especially by USAID officers, to bring back in aid in the 1990s. But then we forgot about it. So there was this kind of moral sense of obligation that a lot of us felt when we went back in there.

But we also saw the issue as being very pragmatic. It was the poverty and the low governance that were the underlying sources of conflicts. So in order to bring stability to the country, we needed to improve the standard of living, the economic livelihoods, and subnational governance.

In the early years between 2002 and 2007, Afghanistan was largely off the public radar. But the tragedy was that we were back, but we couldn't do much with what we were given. In 2003, when I arrived on Thanksgiving Day, there was less than $1 billion given to aid and reconstruction in Afghanistan.

In many ways, reconstruction was a misnomer. You know, there was little to reconstruct. You had to completely construct.

I don't know if anyone really remembers this, but in April 2002 President Bush gave a speech about bringing a Marshall Plan to Afghanistan at the Virginia Military Institute. It was really, to be honest, one of the most dishonest moments of the Bush Administration's plans towards Afghanistan, because what it really did was promise large-scale aid, on the scale of the Marshall Plan, which in 2002 dollars was something like $90 billion, whereas we were giving less than $1 billion.

So when I arrived in 2003 it was with Zalmay Khalilzad, who is Afghan-American. He had asked—really, he did not want to be set up to fail—so he asked for a doubling of aid, which was really just shy of $2 billion and some private-sector experts to come over.

The Bush administration admits now, or they admitted back in 2007, that they came to the idea of nation-building reluctantly. But our sweeping rhetoric about the issue was disconnected largely from what we were actually able to provide.

We also failed to realize at the time how much subnational governance Afghanistan needed. We were really focusing on the federal government level. So we left vacuums of space for the Taliban to move back into, and today Afghanistan is suffering from what Anthony Cordesman at CSIS calls strategic neglect.

I bring up the past because it's important to how we act if we want future credibility in Afghanistan and in South Asia. You know, President Bush no longer represents the United States, but Afghans don't decipher between politics. They heard it as being "the United States." You know, they have long memories, and they view the current U.S. actions in the context of years of ongoing conflict. They are always mindful of what has happened before. So, pragmatically speaking, it's an issue of credibility with the Afghan people, also with our credibility in the region.

Now, at the moment, all is not lost with the Afghan people. I think in 2004 the Asia Foundation did a poll where I think 64 percent of the country thought things were moving in the right direction. This is understandable. In 2004, there was a lot of momentum about their first presidential election, a lot of optimism, and it was right at the heart of the Bonn Agreement implementation. So they felt like things were getting better. That has dropped now to about 42 percent, but it's still marginally better than 2008, when it was 38 percent.

Also, we are not seen—58 percent—this is the ABC poll that I saw—58 percent see the Taliban as the biggest threat and only 8 percent see the United States as the biggest threat. Over 50 percent, I think, still have a favorable view of the United States. So we haven't completely lost the Afghan people, but this is of concern absolutely.

So in discussing the region and credibility in the region, any stable solution to the war will have to take into account Afghanistan's neighbors, in a region where Pakistan, India, China, Iran, and others all jostle for power. But, you know, Pakistan is far more complicated than Afghanistan, and that is a whole separate issue that I won't get into right now, because it's so complicated.

But President Obama said in his West Point speech that we'll begin to consider troop drawdown next summer and that we will continue to aid the Afghan people. So part of what I'm trying to say is that our military exit has to ensure that civilian efforts, not just ours but other aid programs, need to continue to work effectively, and there must be the right security conditions on the ground so that the aid community, but also the network of charities and NGOs that work there, can continue to do their work.

So, hopefully, when it does come time for an exit, there is an Afghan government that we can recognize so that our aid—obviously, we don't want to abandon the mission again, as we did in January 1989, and leave for 12 years—but also, that alternative livelihoods are developed to curb people from growing poppy, marijuana, and that corruption is being significantly countered. This is going to take time. You hear "clear, hold, and build," but there's also clear, hold, build, and transfer.

Our work right now is very limited. We currently have about 970 diplomats at the U.S. Mission, in the embassy in Kabul, but also there are other PRTs [provincial reconstruction teams]. This is significantly more people. I think about the 150 colleagues that I had six years ago there.

But still, even though they're out in the country, their ability to actually get out and do their work is limited by security. And as for the PRTs, I'm being told that few of the civilians can actually work independently and autonomously from the military. They do have to coordinate all their efforts. So if the security conditions aren't there after we leave, then these aid workers and the development community actually won't be able to deliver on

a lot of the work that they want to.

So the goals to bolster the Afghan security forces must be met, but the professionalization of the forces is going to take a long time. Obama hinted towards this, that he will continue his security support. I don't know exactly what that means. But we definitely need to ensure that there are the security conditions on the ground if we are going to be able to realistically move forward their development goals, which are necessary for sustainable peace.

Last, as a woman, I just wanted to close with the condition of Afghan women in Afghan society and what that means for an ethical outset.

I've worked with a lot of professional Afghan women in the past six years. I lived there and have been going back. And granted, they are in Kabul, so this is a very progressive group of women. They are extremely smart, dedicated, courageous, but they are also very scared that their newfound freedoms are going to be taken away from them again.

Basically, they say, "Yes, things are bad, but they're better; they're better than they were." There was talk, when I was there last summer and there was talk about maybe us pulling out, like, "Our country will fall back into fundamentalism and all of our freedoms will be taken away."

It's really difficult as an American woman who really believed in this mission—I was a young woman when I arrived there—it is difficult looking at your Afghan peers and not knowing what to say to that.

So there is this kind of moral sense of obligation for many of us who served there, but it is especially difficult for the women who served there.

Now they have this major concern that we are going to be negotiating with the Taliban and that conservative elements are going to come back in the government.

And there has been some progress with women, especially in reversing maternal mortality rates. But that was one of the worst in the world. There was a sizable increase, but it is still pretty bad.

Women still suffer from violence and intimidation, low literacy (over 80 percent of the women are illiterate), poor access to health care, and a really fledgling justice system. So while the constitution, which says that men and women are equal, allocates 25 percent of seats to women in parliament, it's one of the most—it is heralded by my old boss Zalmay Khalilzad as one of the most progressive in the Muslim world. But we need to make sure that—everyone says this, Holbrooke says this repeatedly—if we are going to be negotiating with the Taliban, that we have to make sure that they will accept the Afghan constitution.

But women are just concerned that one of the elements that will be negotiable is their rights, and we need to bring this back into national discourse and really be thinking about their full participation in Afghan society, mostly because no country can actually be at peace and move forward if half their country is not represented.

The last thing I want to close with is that we're feeling pressure right now to show results quickly. That's a lot of the same pressure that we felt in 2004 with the Bonn Agreement. It's that we have to set up this framework for a democratic government and then things will be okay, there will be a full transfer of power back to the Afghans and we'll be more or less done. That was exactly what we shouldn't have been doing. We should have been thinking more long term. We should have been thinking about how we're going to fill out these government institutions.

So, unlike six years ago, we actually do have the resources, the attention, the focus, and this actually is the number one foreign policy issue. But we need to make sure that we're not in such a rush to get out of there that we overlook these very key programs in governance development and aid delivery that will in the long term have a huge effect on Afghanistan's sustainability and peace.

So in any exit, in my opinion—an ethical exit is also pragmatic—we need to have adequate security for civilian aid work and establish democratic governance, and we need to see the strategy through, and the "clear, hold, build, and transfer." But the build-and-transfer part will take much longer than 2011, when we're thinking about doing a troop drawdown. And we do need more patience and not feel so rushed to get out of there if we want this to be sustainable and if we want this to be ethical.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Thanks, Katherine. A very special and in personal terms very moving perspective from, as you say, an American woman dealing with the Afghan women in the current situation.

Robert Diamond

ROBERT DIAMOND: Thanks, David, and thank you, everybody, for being here.

I'll start by recognizing two aspects: (1) the controversy; and (2) the irony when we ever talk about the word "exit" in Afghanistan—the controversy stemming from the fact that we've been there for now eight and a half years, if you look back all the way to October of 2001, when the first CIA and Special Forces operators landed shortly after 9/11 to launch our counterattacks; the irony, moving forward to December 1st, when the president spoke at West Point announcing this 30,000 additional troop deployment to Afghanistan, and in the very next sentence mentioning that we would begin withdrawal from Afghanistan within 18 months.

Secondly, we are sitting here tonight talking about an exit from Afghanistan, when in reality on the ground right now we have essentially, in a military point of view, started over. We are in the middle of—you all follow the news closely, I know—we are in the middle of the offensive in Helmand Province, in the town of Marja, which is the largest offensive to date in eight and a half years in Afghanistan. That's a town of 80,000 people that was the largest sanctuary for the Taliban outside of Pakistan. We have essentially moved back into the southern portion of the country that we had ceded to them for the last eight and a half years, as they slowly crept back in.

This is just the beginning. This Marja offensive is just the start. Everyone, if you follow, knows that Kandahar is next, which is another major population center, where 30,000 U.S. and NATO forces are already in the city and the surrounding regions. General McChrystal himself has said that that 30,000-troop number is not enough. It is really one of the key drivers of the forces that are arriving daily and being put right to use and right into the fight.

So we are retaking that southern arc through Helmand Province, through Kandahar Province, that has really been the weak spot in our strategy for the last few years in a military point of view.

Another piece in the irony of an exit is that we have had finally a second front open in Pakistan. I don't want to get too far into Pakistan, as Katherine mentioned, because we could spend a semester talking about that. But we finally have a partner in the Pakistani government and the Pakistani military, putting pressure from the east on the Pakistani Taliban and the safe havens in those tribal areas in the mountains there.

I just want to throw some numbers out at you just to highlight the sense of irony at play here.

As of February 1st, our troop levels in Afghanistan are at right about 100,000. Sixty thousand of those are U.S. forces. That's estimated to grow by another 40,000, and three-quarters of that will be U.S. forces.

We have approximately 100,000 trained and fielded Afghan national army troops today, and just recently the Afghan government agreed to grow that to 171,000 troops by October of 2011. So the trend line in terms of force-structure is growing.

If you look at the kinetic impact of the fight—"kinetic impact" being a nice military term—in 2001 we only had 12 U.S. casualties in Afghanistan; in 2004 we had 52; in 2009 we had 316; and to date in 2010 we already have 75. So you can see the escalation of violence that is taking place just in the last 12-to-18 months.

Let's talk about war funding. Katherine highlighted the numbers on the aid and diplomatic side. In 2003 the United States was committing $14.7 billion to the military fight in Afghanistan. It is estimated that in fiscal year 2010 (this includes the president's troop increase) we'll be spending approximately $90 billion in Afghanistan. So you can see the fiscal trend line is increasing.

Any of you who read the Internet news late this afternoon probably saw that General Petraeus was testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee today, talking about his budget. I quote him by saying that this is going to be a "long and difficult year in Afghanistan" and that "the fight is only going to get harder before it gets easier."

So the question is: Why is the military doing all this? Why has it taken us eight and a half years to get to a serious military offensive in Afghanistan since we took the country down with a handful of Special Forces and CIA operators and a whole lot of indigenous forces back in October of 2001? Well, that's the key question—Why are we doing this? How do we get to an exit strategy?

What I think we have to remember in a military context is that a military victory is not the answer. We are not fighting against al-Qaeda. The National Security Adviser has said that there are no more than a few hundred al-Qaeda operatives alive and planning and working in this entire region, be it Afghanistan, Pakistan, or the areas in between.

So we are fighting against the Taliban. We are fighting against essentially a quasi-governmental force that once ruled this country. But we are fighting against them to provide the central government the security and the political space necessary, as Katherine talked about, to solidify both their central government, their regional government, and their local government's hold on the people.

That's where we get to the key on our exit strategy. Will we be there in 18 months? I don't think anybody knows the answer to that question. But if we create the conditions on the ground where the Taliban is defeated militarily, that the central and regional and local governments have established a true rapport and a true record of success with the people in terms of development, in terms of government, in terms of moving away from sort of this corrupt tribal mentality that we have had in the past, then I think we will see the conditions necessary for withdrawal to begin.

I'll end by asking a question: When do we think the military will finally leave? I think you can look at South Korea and answer the question. We may be there for quite a long time.

Questions and Answers

DAVID SPEEDIE: Thanks.

There is something of a conundrum that has occurred, and certainly it is reinforced by what you say. On the one hand, we are looking to leave behind something that is more stable than when we moved in, so to speak, so the military withdrawal is precluding this. Now, as you said, Katherine, the term "win, hold, build, transfer" became the fourth part of the equation, so to speak.

And yet, you also made reference to the other players in the extended region, typically much stronger, more established states than Afghanistan. They are jockeying for position, as you put it.

India, for example, has a network now of consulates in Afghanistan. The Pakistanis are greatly neuralgic about this—why is India establishing its presence in Afghanistan?

It seems that the whole history, from the British in the 19th century—the whole history of the contesting over the country has been in reverse proportion to any sort of strategic significance or gain that will come from it. Nothing good has come out of engagement in Afghanistan from the Brits to the Soviets in the 1980s.

How do these two things—it's a big question I know—but how do these two things somehow come together, that on the one hand we are trying to leave behind a stable, prosperous, developed Afghanistan, and yet there is this constant jockeying that doesn't come out well either for the jockeys or for the country, for Afghanistan itself?

KATHERINE BROWN: Yes, it's a big question.

I think it's exactly because of the geopolitical significance of Afghanistan being in that region that it is important for us to maintain our credibility there.

Pakistan and India have been using Afghanistan like a proxy front in that sense. That has layers of complications that I'm not very suited to really delve into. But it is exactly for this reason. You know, this is a part of the world with nuclear arms, with other strategic importance with regards to Iran being a neighbor, the former Soviet Union countries that are bordering on the top, the oil interests. There is much, much interest for us in the entire region.

We need to have some kind of developed Afghanistan where we have a presence, or at least we are able to develop the country so that it does stand on its own, because if we do leave prematurely and if we do leave before they have a stable government, I feel that we will lose all credibility in the region. That's the best answer I have for your question.

ROBERT DIAMOND: I'll add to that in response to what probably sounded like a pretty skeptical opening statement.

I fundamentally believe in the mission that we have undertaken in Afghanistan across the spectrum—militarily, diplomatically, and developmental-wise.

I say militarily because it is a fact that this is where we were attacked from on September 11th, and as New Yorkers that certainly resonates with us. I think time has shown that failed states and the amorphous nature of al-Qaeda and global terrorism will quickly move to wherever the path of least resistance leads them. So I do believe in the military mission and its roots.

I do believe in the diplomatic mission there because, as Katherine mentioned, this region of the world is a tinderbox, and it has been for a very long time. We are talking about Pakistan really at the heart of a lot of this, with the Islamic fanatic and terrorist regimes who would love nothing more than to take down the Pakistani government and get their hands on a nuclear Islamic state. And then we have the interplay between India and Pakistan and China and some of the other major players moving forward. So there is a critical diplomatic piece to the region.

Thirdly, developmental-wise, in some respects I really think we owe the Afghan people a lot. We certainly left them in the 1980s post-Russian invasion and sort of said, "See you later." That country has a long way to go. For a country with such a long history with the United States to be still where it is, fifth from the bottom of the list in terms of developed nations in the world, is not a good reflection on U.S. development policy and U.S. foreign policy in general.

So, with that, I'll answer your question by saying the controversy is there, and people butt heads about why we are there, but fundamentally I believe in the mission.

KATHERINE BROWN: Can I add one more thing? When I say "credibility" about Afghanistan, it's not just the United States; it's also NATO countries and the United Nations. It's the fact that all of us have come together in this alliance. If we do not succeed there, what does that say about the western world coming together to support this mission and yet it's still not succeeding? That's kind of the larger question of credibility. It's not just the United States.

ROBERT DIAMOND: There's a lot of controversy about that coalition, but as of right now there are 43 countries that are present on the ground in Afghanistan in some way, shape, or form. Obviously, their roles, both militarily and diplomatically, are very strictly determined by their home governments, but it is a very broad coalition.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Okay. Some thought-provoking comments about the rationale for, the conduct of, and the eventual exit from. Plenty to talk about.

QUESTION: The Truman Fellows are sympathetic to the Democratic Party, so I started my career on Capitol Hill working for the Democratic Party. That's one of the reasons why the Truman Fellows allowed me into their exclusive club.

But I want to ask you: So what does Obama mean by exit in 18 months if we're going to end up being there in perpetuity like Korea? I'd like to hear what is the exit.

ROBERT DIAMOND: Sure. I'll start off first by saying I don't even think the president knows the answer to that question.

But I will tell you that his rhetorical technique at West Point was heavily influenced, I think, by domestic politics. You have an American public who is on one hand very detached from the wars in both Iraq and Afghanistan. Less than 1 percent of our population will serve or will have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Obviously, that's a fact, that we no longer have the draft. We could, again, have a separate conversation on that. But that's a fact, that less than 1 percent of the population will serve or has served in Iraq and Afghanistan. So you have a public that's initially detached.

Secondly, you have a public that, although detached, realizes that we have been doing something for eight and a half years and spending a whole lot of money and manpower and blood and treasure, twice as long as it took us to fight World War II. You start throwing facts out like that and people just start scratching their heads.

So I think the president was under—not under pressure, but he's the president, he's a politician, he's got to run for office, and he's got to recognize what the domestic political atmosphere is. So I think it required him to thread a needle.

Is that ideal foreign policy, is that ideal military policy, to put that 18-month timeline on there? That's up for debate. But I don't think he had a choice but to put a number, a date, on the table.

Now, he also put that date on the table giving himself maximum flexibility. He did not say that "18 months from now we are out of here." He said, "18 months from now we are going to reassess the situation on the ground and determine whether or not our troops can start coming home." So there's a lot of wiggle room in that.

Frankly, I think we have learned the lesson that the commanders on the ground are going to make that [determination]. He has, I think, demonstrated a great choice in putting General McChrystal in charge. McChrystal has had quite a lot of success.

The team that he has built in the region there—from the ambassador level, to Dick Holbrooke and you name it—there is a whole-of-government effort in Afghanistan and Pakistan right now.

So again, 18 months? In my opinion that's aggressive. I think we are going to be there longer than that.

KATHERINE BROWN: I agree with Rob.

I just want to say from an Afghan standpoint there are two ways of looking at it. The reaction that, to be honest, I had, which was that he was handing the Taliban a strategy more or less—there's this famous quote, it's kind of a fable—I'm not exactly sure who said it—but there's a detainee in Guantanamo who said, "You guys have the watches but we have the time." That's one way to look at it.

Also, the other way is that really he was giving a strong message to Karzai that he needed to stand up and really take control of his government because we were not going to be there for forever.

So there are those two ways of looking at it. But I think that I agree with Rob, I don't think that by next summer there is going to be a significant troop drawdown. It will probably phase out, but nothing significant.

QUESTION: I have two comments.

One is just sort of a not-so-important comment. I just wanted you to clarify. You made a statement about President Bush's remarks and you said, "He does not represent us." I thought to myself: What do you mean by that? As the president of the country, that's part of the problem—he does represent us. When he makes a statement that is off-the-wall and he is representing us, that is part of the problem that's there. So I'm not quite sure—I think I might have taken your statement out of context. But I just wanted you to clarify what you meant by that.

But my real question has to do with the rebuilding. So far, Mr. Diamond has focused on the military and you have spoken in general about the diplomatic community that is there. I want to hear a little bit more about the PRTs, which you mentioned, because I would imagine that an exit strategy will depend very heavily on what is left behind after the military pulls out. And so I wanted you to comment on the work of the PRTs, because, from my understanding, there is a lot of reconstruction of the PRT mission, because part of the initial work was not going very well. So there has to be some kind of restructuring of their efforts to make the rebuilding successful.

Can you comment on what is going on on the ground with the PRTs, their relationship with the people on the ground? Can they assist those women that you talked about? Can they actually ensure that the women are protected? Can they ensure that the rebuilding effort takes place with much of the civilian concerns represented?

I was at a conference a couple weeks ago at NYU [New York University] and there was a gentleman from Columbia who said that the PRTs are discouraging civilian initiatives, that we want it done our way and we want our policies and our methodologies implemented on the ground, which, according to the speaker, was an absolute disaster.

So if you could comment on what is going on with the PRTs, and define the PRTS too, I would appreciate it. Thank you so much.

KATHERINE BROWN: Sure. I'll do the first question first and then I'll define PRT and answer your second question.

I said that President Bush doesn't represent us anymore. I was saying then too. Of course, he was our president for eight years. But when I was talking about what he said and the remarks that he delivered and saying why is that relevant now, my point was it's very relevant because it was the United States speaking, in the eyes of Afghans.

The PRTs are the Provincial Reconstruction Teams. It was a very innovative program developed in 2002 by—I forget his name—a State Department senior official. It was really to bring together civilian and military units throughout the country so that civilian efforts could work in tandem with military, but USAID and State Department would have representatives at the PRTs.

I can't speak to those in much detail now. I know that they have expanded the PRTs considerably from 2004. They are also doing much to make sure that there is more work done at the district level, which is vitally important.

But I do know from what I've been told that there is still some—that the civilian part of the mission cannot work completely autonomously from the military. So everything that they do has to be a military effort. There is some very good work that our soldiers are doing. They are absolutely making sure that our construction projects are happening. But it can't be as amplified as it could be if they were working autonomously side by side.

In regard to the women, I think one of the major pillars of reconstruction projects is women's projects and women's empowerment programs. The USAID and State Department reps during my time there were women, and that was something that was very important to them.

There are also some—these are the Marines, not the PRT staff—that are realizing that the more you work with women, the more women you have out there, the more it really endears you to the population, because they're seeing "you helped my mother, you helped my wife, my children." It really does build trust.

So I think that is already a core part of the PRTs' work. I guess my point was about the security conditions, that they really can't do what they are sent out there to do.

The last point, about discouraging civilian work, I'm not sure—I can't remember exactly the statement that gentleman said. I don't necessarily agree with that, because the thing about the PRTs is that it is incredibly idiosyncratic. It depends so much on the country that's running the PRT, the people who are running the PRT, the security conditions. So you can't really speak about the PRTs in general; you really have to take them one by one to say what in fact they are able to do.

QUESTIONER: I was talking about the American State Department.

KATHERINE BROWN: Okay.

I have had some colleagues and friends who worked with PRTs and had very positive experiences, and then others that are in areas where it's almost impossible for them to do their work on their own. So it depends, largely.

ROBERT DIAMOND: I'd just add two thoughts to the answer and really echo what Katherine said.

One, recognizing the security piece, you really have to see it to believe it. If you were a USAID worker and you want to go visit a remote village somewhere, you can't just get in your Land Cruiser and drive out there and pay a visit. It takes a convoy of soldiers to escort that PRT mission out into less-developed regions. So you have a Catch-22 there, where you have aid workers who are handicapped from doing their job, and you have trigger-pullers who are much better put to use doing more fighting, more military-natured missions.

The second point I would add is I would tend to push back on the argument that you quoted, saying it's a disincentive to civilians taking responsibility. If you look at what the PRTs are doing, they are doing such basic, fundamental-level work, in terms of schools and roads and clean water and electricity, just basic levels. We're not stealing commerce from the Afghan people or trying to build an Afghan stock market. We are talking about very, very basic things that the PRTs are out there trying to do.

In fact, a lot of those missions are exactly the opposite. I mean if you look at any of the agricultural programs and the Department of Agriculture personnel that are over there, that's all about teaching skills and crop-growing in harsh climates to the Afghan people themselves to increase their sustainability. So I would disagree with that.

QUESTION: I just have a basic question. It occurred to me that the theme both of you are endorsing is that the ethics of exit requires us to leave adequate security behind. The question that occurs to me is: Should the security we leave behind itself be ethical? I mean it's possible for us to leave behind an Afghan army, an Afghan police apparatus, that is very repressive, that violates the rights of the Afghan people.

Today we saw in a *Times* article that, apparently, Special Forces operations in Afghanistan have been causing undue civilian casualties. Of course, General McChrystal is trying, I think quite admirably and ethically, to limit civilian casualties, and the indication is that he is trying to exercise control over these Special Forces.

So it occurred to me that one thing that the troops we leave behind might do—and this is my question: Should we leave troops behind to try to limit ethical lapses on the part of the Afghan security apparatus that we leave behind, maybe even being embedded as commanders who will continue to drive what the Afghan forces do?

Finally, responding to your analogy with Korea, the obvious difference with Korea is there are forces there for deterrence. Who knows? A major war could break out.

We still are not engaged in combat there. So, pursuing your analogy, I wonder what kind of deterrence could we be engaged in in Afghanistan? Obviously, deterring al-Qaeda. But how about deterring a Taliban coup? If there is a negotiated entrance of the Taliban into government, that kind of thing is inherently unstable. We saw that in Rwanda, where a negotiated unity government was unstable and genocide broke out.

Another function of the U.S. military is we'd just be there with rapid reaction forces that could just prevent the Taliban from a military takeover. They would know that, and then maybe the government would operate better.

ROBERT DIAMOND: I guess I'll start backwards and go back.

The "will we leave troops behind?" question or "should we leave troops behind?" question—I think the answer is it is going to happen whether you like it or not. That's where I get to my South Korean analogy. I do agree with you that there are aspects of that analogy—certainly, we are not occupying a demilitarized zone or anything like that—but my point being that there is a long-term presence here, which I think is at the heart of your question.

Whether that presence is in the form of some sort of just looking like a threat to the Taliban or the resurgence of the Taliban or a check on the growth of al-Qaeda—yes, I think those are all parts of the fore-structure that will be left behind.

I think what you are going to see in the long term is just like you're seeing in Iraq, where you are going to have a withdrawal essentially of your combat forces and you are going to have almost just an overwatch structure left that is enough of a presence that people get it, that there is still a force there that the government can rely on and call on in case of an emergency, something like a coup attempt or something like that. I think you will see something similar to that.

To your first question about the Afghan security forces themselves, that's the million-dollar question. The irony of this is we have seen a lot of this in Iraq already. Look at what took place with the regrouping and the retraining and the rebuilding of the Iraqi army. You had serious tribal factionalism within the military and the police—still do to this day.

Are we going to see that again? Probably. Do we need to do everything we can to mitigate that and blend those forces? We made some mistakes in Iraq where we allowed units to be strictly built by the city. You can see the recipe for disaster that's there.

In answer to your question also, I think, yes, we will see those trainers and those high-level U.S. command structure types of things in place, embedded with the Afghan police and army for the foreseeable future, absolutely.

This is a military and a police force that has a long, long way to go. If there's a mission that's probably going to take the longest, it's probably that. I mean we're ramping up, as I mentioned here, essentially almost doubling the fore-structure of the Afghan army in a year. That doesn't mean we're doubling the professionalism of the Afghan army in the course of a year.

Great question. Thank you.

KATHERINE BROWN: Just to add to that real quickly, the tension between security and diplomacy and aid in an environment like this is very strong. It's extremely tense. That was one of the things I struggled with a lot being a diplomat there, is what's the point of us being there sometimes if we can't actually do our work? That's why I'm saying there need to be security conditions on the ground so that you can adequately have diplomatic and aid work.

But I think that the population-centric approach that was adopted was one of the most ethical things that we've done. And the fact that McChrystal, as we've read today, is pulling in the Special Forces and is trying to address this is really the best we can do in a situation like this.

The most important thing also is that part of our governance work is strengthening the rule of law in Afghanistan so that later there is accountability. That's the most important thing that we can do.

I mean it is a million-dollar question. What is within our control right now, what we should be focusing on, is strengthening the rule of law, strengthening governance, and really focusing on having a population-centric approach where we do really care about the civilians.

ROBERT DIAMOND: The issue of civilian casualties is so important, it is just so fundamental to the concept of counterinsurgency. In some respects, I'm actually quite proud of how far the U.S. military has come to adopt institutionally, from top to bottom and across all the services, an understanding of what it takes to fight and win a counterinsurgency.

If you go back to 2003 and look at how we fought our initial invasion in Iraq, and if you look at just how the military is equipped and structured and how we're still buying equipment today, it is geared for this big, old-fashioned, nation-on-nation—pick your service, whether it's the Navy and aircraft carriers or the Army.

But institutionally, from top to bottom, starting with General Petraeus and General Odierno in Iraq, and now General McChrystal in Afghanistan, they have rewritten and reoriented the entire U.S. military into a counterinsurgency strategy—and down to the lowest level. I fundamentally believe that our soldiers and sailors

and airmen and marines on the ground understand it.

The issue of civilian casualties—as McChrystal says, he's the guy who's accountable for them, he's the guy that's got to face the Afghan government and apologize to the Afghan population every time it happens.

So it is a serious issue, and I fundamentally believe that the U.S. military from top to bottom takes it seriously.

QUESTION: I wanted to ask a question about the ethics of our own military and how in many cases they are coming home. Maybe they are leaving Afghanistan and Iraq. They will do things like actually fly UAVs [Unmanned Aerial Vehicles] from abroad. So in many aspects, even though they are home, they are still at war for now eight years, going on a decade. How do you factor all that?

ROBERT DIAMOND: Are you a veteran?

QUESTIONER: No. I'm, my roommate is there now.

ROBERT DIAMOND: That's an issue close to my heart. When I'm not dabbling with Katherine in foreign policy, I work on veterans' issues quite a bit. It's a new paradigm for today's veterans.

If you think back to—just Sunday night I was watching *"The Pacific"* on HBO, the debut of the new HBO miniseries about the campaign in the Pacific with the Marines in Guadalcanal and the Philippines. You look at leaving combat 50 years ago, when you went to another island, then you went to Hawaii, and then you had about a two-or three-month journey home where you decompressed.

You have cited the example that you have people who leave combat and then in 24 hours they're back on the streets of their hometowns after an overnight flight through Germany, or you have men and women at Air Force bases in the west who leave their family every morning, get in their car and drive to their base, get in a trailer, and fly a UAV and fire Predator missiles at terrorists in the Pakistani mountains, and then at 5 o'clock turn over, shut the door, get back in their car, and go have dinner with their children.

So you want to talk about a new paradigm of warfare for soldiers and veterans—and a situation where you have the advances in battlefield medicine today, where you have soldiers surviving injuries and wounds that they would never have survived just ten or 15 years ago, the fact that if you are injured on the battlefield you are literally at a surgical trauma center within hours and then you are in Landstuhl, Germany, within 12-to-15 hours. I mean it's absolutely stunning. What you have is a generation of soldiers that are coming back with blast injuries and limbs and arms and legs and things like that that they have to live with for the rest of their lives, that, honestly, you would have died from having in a previous conflict.

So yes, the issues of post-traumatic stress disorder, the issues that we have with blast injuries, and how the federal government and the Veterans Administration is regrouping and reorganizing for these things, are very real.

It's a credit to this administration—I don't mean to play politics, but it's a credit to this administration that they have had significant—in the order of magnitude of 20 percent in the last two budgets—increase in funding for the Veterans Administration, trying to treat the new injuries that we see.

There is an entirely new generation of women veterans and women's issues related to their service. If you think women aren't in combat, you're not dealing with reality, because they are every day, even though it's still against the law. I had women flying fighter planes and helicopters and on the ground. Asha is a good female army officer right here. That's an entirely new area of postwar things we have to deal with in terms of the issues and how they affect women veterans.

Thank you for your question.

QUESTION: I guess my question has to do with more of a clarification of what exactly is happening on the ground. A few people have asked questions about the security issues, and you have spoken about that at length. But I was wondering if you could just tell us specifically what are the security issues. Is it retaliation from Afghan citizens? Or is it the Taliban—although I'm thinking we've been there for eight and a half years, and the general idea—you read the news, you get the gist of it—is that a lot of the Taliban forces have fled into Pakistan.

So what exactly is happening in the areas that you have stabilized, and what are the specific security issues that are still presenting an obstacle to stability?

ROBERT DIAMOND: Sure. Well, I think one thing you need to recognize is that the Taliban has obviously followed closely the Iraq model of insurgency and has adapted that to what has been arguably up until the last

few months a reasonable amount of success.

Again, the Taliban was the government and they were a military force. They fought the Northern Alliance and the Tribal Alliance and the U.S. Special Forces and CIA force-on-force in October of 2001. They were defeated and they were run out of the population centers.

That is not how they are fighting today. They are fighting an insurgency. You saw a handful, maybe that numbered in a couple of hundreds, that stayed in this town of Marja to fight against the U.S. Marine Corps. But pretty much everybody else fled and blended into the countryside.

That goes back to my point about will you ever actually have a military victory. There is not going to be a signing of a document on a battleship or at a table somewhere.

But the security situation, because of adopting that insurgent strategy—the security threat are roadside bombs—all those things you saw in Iraq you are seeing in Afghanistan. They have stolen all that technology and all those ideas and are using them to effect today in Afghanistan.

The problem with that is that doesn't just affect the military but it affects civilians. When you talk about commerce, just trying to drive on roads and highways and bridges, and they're just going to blow up. Why are you going to get in a car if you think the bridge is going to blow up every time you cross it? So there are real effects on the civilian population too in the insurgency strategy that the Taliban has adopted.

KATHERINE BROWN: And also, just to add to that, Kabul itself, as the capital, has become much more dangerous. In 2004 when I was there, there was one suicide bombing the entire year. I don't have the exact figure now, but we read about large-scale attacks in central Kabul, in downtown Kabul, pretty much once a month now.

So that has become, I think, a serious change in tactics, obviously, of the Taliban. It's not just Kabul, but it's also the surrounding provinces. It goes right to the heart of the Afghan government and also the international community. They are getting absolutely as close as they can.

There's no "Green Zone" in Kabul the way there was in Iraq, but there is this neighborhood called Wazir Akbar Khan, which is where ISAF [NATO's International Security Assistance Force] is, the American Embassy is and a lot of the other embassies, and the Afghan Palace. They will get absolutely as close as they can. A lot of the attacks before the election in August 2009 were right up there against that part of the city.

ROBERT DIAMOND: They recognize that these suicide bombings and truck bombings in the government and population centers not only deal a blow directly to the credibility of the government, but they are massive PR events because they get global news coverage. You see it happening in Pakistan too, with the Pakistani Taliban launching retaliatory strikes in response to a military mission that is taking place in the frontier provinces of Pakistan.

Where is the retaliation, where is the fighting back? It's in the cities in Pakistan. It's terrorist attacks. It's high-level, high-visibility suicide bombings and truck bombings at government installations and government buildings.

QUESTION: I think it's very important to highlight that the change in strategy is very significant in terms of going from the military agenda and moving on to a diplomatic agenda where they are negotiating with the Taliban. I think it is successful.

But at the same time we know that Afghanistan has a history of a 30-year war, where these local groups have been switching groups. They come from different tribes. They say, "If you come to my team we will give you economic means and security." But, at the same time, the next day they could switch and move to somebody else, any day.

You can measure success by looking at security, transportation, education, women going out to go shopping—you know, very basic things. But at the same time, how does the U.S. government plan to measure change when you know that it's a very flip-flop agenda with the local people, where they can switch any day to any other Taliban group?

At the same time, in terms of being Pakistani, I think our main agenda will always be the problem with India. That is a key issue. We have a lot of Taliban bands in the country. But the majority of the people do not like the Taliban. They completely disapprove of the U.S. tragedy. But at the same time, if you ask anybody locally, their main threat is India, and it will always be.

I just wanted to give that opinion and at the same time ask about measuring success in terms of dealing with the Taliban at the local level.

KATHERINE BROWN: I think the United States does recognize that Pakistan will always see India as their first priority.

In regards to flipping, I think that is also part of what plays into the strategy in negotiating with the Taliban, is that you can flip the Taliban. There was actually a piece in *Foreign Affairs* last year called exactly that, "*Flipping the Taliban*."

It is very much one of the main reasons why we do need to increase our expertise on Afghanistan and have more local understanding. We need to absolutely understand the nuances of the tribal culture, the specific tribal personalities, and really learn what they need, so that we can provide that so that they don't feel a need to flip or negotiate or go back to the Taliban right after they negotiate with us. That is exactly the reason why we need to have more of our State Department diplomats and aid workers out there, to really understand the different elders and the people who are negotiating on behalf of these populations, to make sure that they absolutely are getting everything that they need, so that they don't have an incentive to flip or go back.

This speaks to—I think someone said in *The New York Times* once that every district in Afghanistan is its own universe. Each one is so vastly different from the next, you can walk five miles and be in a completely different place.

That is one of the reasons why we need to have sustained civilian efforts, and we can only do that if we have the security there to make that possible.

ROBERT DIAMOND: I think your question gets at the heart of the concept of the credible partner, which is really what I think the president spent all that time on in the fall in all those sessions in the Situation Room with his War Cabinet. I was not there, but I speculate that at the end of the day what they were talking about was all this military effort and all this diplomatic effort and all this aid effort and development doesn't mean anything if we don't have credible partners. That applies to Hamid Karzai at the top and it applies all the way down the chain to that level of, can we actually flip these people and get them to participate in a government, or is this just a pipedream?

So I agree with you and your question. I really think it strikes at the heart of credible partners. I think the decision was made that we can do it.

To the India question, that is absolutely fundamental to the understanding of the geopolitics of the region. It has taken the U.S. military—and I'll speak for the U.S. military—years to get the Pakistani military to put that threat aside for a few minutes and launch this offensive in Pakistan. It has taken a personal relationship between Admiral Mullen, who is the chairman of our Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the head of the Pakistani military, which has literally been built over and years and years, finally to personally convince the Pakistani military that they needed to launch this offensive, because you are actually 100 percent right that at the end of the day and forever it is going to be about India.

DAVID SPEEDIE: Well, hopefully not forever. It has only been 60-odd years.

A complicated melange of security and ethical questions amply reflected in your excellent questions. So thank you.

Please join me in thanking our speakers.