

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

**U.S. AFGHAN STRATEGY:
THE BIG QUESTIONS**

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GEORGE PERKOVICH: Welcome. My name is George Perkovich. I'm vice president for studies here at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The moderator was to be and may still be Jessica Mathews, the president of the Carnegie Endowment, but she is stopped somewhere on 66 and we've had a long discussion on her cell phone as she was not moving on 66, I think due to an accident.

But I also understand traffic is stopped in town and so other people may be straggling in. It's a pleasure to welcome you as well as our audience on C-SPAN today. This is the latest in a series that Carnegie's done on discussing the future role of the U.S. in Afghanistan. Every day, we hear more speculation about the administration's looming announcement of the new strategy for the war.

But as the media focuses – and many of us – focus on the debate about troop levels and placement, we feel like we're getting stuck in a numbers game and focusing on numbers and not often enough standing back and asking whether and why the U.S. should remain involved in Afghanistan and what purposes we're trying to accomplish there and whether those can be done – those purposes accomplished at all.

As the number of casualties rise and public support declines, Washington must not only define a strategy but make the case for war. We've asked today's panelists, who spent considerable time on the ground and understand the realities facing both coalition forces and the Afghan people, and I might add many in Pakistan, to address the critical questions the United States and its allies should be considering.

Are we focusing on the right enemy? Should we focus on counterterrorism or state-building? Does our current strategy in Afghanistan risk other national security interests, including economic renewal at home and the stabilization of Pakistan? Can the war be won and at a cost that can be sustained in terms of the U.S., NATO, Pakistan, Afghanistan? What would happen if the conclusion were made that the U.S. had to scale down and get out? What would the consequences of that be?

To answer these and other questions, we're delighted to have with us such an outstanding panel. Stephen Biddle will speak first. He's with the Council on Foreign Relations. He has served on Gen. McChrystal's initial strategic assessment team in Kabul earlier this year, Gen. Petraeus' joint strategic assessment team in Baghdad in 2007 and is a senior advisor to Gen. Petraeus' Central Command assessment team in Washington from 2008 to 2009.

The second speaker will be by Carnegie colleague, Gilles Dorronsoro, who has made more than 20 trips to Afghanistan during his career, written a leading book in the field on the Taliban based on research in the early '90s and throughout the '90s and had spent two months in Afghanistan this summer and has just published this report, "Fixing a Failed Strategy in Afghanistan," which I trust and see, actually, is on many of your tables. And for the C-SPAN audience, it's available on the Carnegie Web site for free, I might add.

And finally, a quite prolific author, Peter Bergen, who is CNN's national security analyst and a senior research fellow at the New America Foundation. Peter's the author of "Holy War, Inc.:

Inside the Secret World of Osama bin Laden” and also of the book, “The Osama bin Laden I knew: An Oral History of al-Qaida’s Leader.”

I’m going to start the questioning and do a little bit of follow-up. And then we’ll turn it to you and throughout, I may be tempted to interject if we do get immediately into tactical issues to try to pull back to be asking the bigger strategic questions, which is our focus here today. First question would be to Stephen Biddle and that is, you know, what are the strategic interests of the United States in Afghanistan and how would you define that and explain it to the public?

STEPHEN BIDDLE: Let me just start by pointing out that I’m speaking only for myself. I’m not speaking for Gen. McChrystal or the command. In terms of the interests we have engaged in the country, there’s a broad penumbra of things that we would like for Afghanistan, as we would like for any country in the international system.

We would like Afghanistan to be ruled in accordance with the will of the governed; we would like minority rights to be respected; we would like Afghanistan’s children to be educated, its people to be prosperous, as we would for any country, surely. We would therefore want those things for Afghanistan.

Most of that larger agenda are goals that we normally pursue through means other than killing in the name of the state. The set of things that would ordinarily be considered potentially worth waging a war in order to pursue is much narrower and I think boils down largely to the two U.S. interests that the administration has articulated in Afghanistan – that the country not become a base for striking us and that the country not become a base for destabilizing its neighbors, and especially Pakistan.

Of those two interests, the one that tends to be talked about the most is the first. I tend to think that of the two, the more important strategically is the second. Afghanistan obviously can be a base for attacking us. It was in 2001. It could be again. In many ways, Afghanistan and Pakistan collectively constitute preferred basing areas for al-Qaida and Osama bin Laden.

But while they may be preferred and while they may be more suitable at the margin than other alternatives, there are other alternatives. Even if we were to completely deny Osama bin Laden base opportunities in Afghanistan, he’s currently located in Pakistan. Other possibilities could include Yemen, Somalia, Djibouti. There are a variety of other ill-governed spaces around the world, which, with proper investment from al-Qaida, could become alternative base areas to Afghanistan.

If we’re going to deal in the larger grand strategic problem with denying Osama bin Laden base areas by deploying multiple brigades of American ground forces in order to secure those areas from potential infiltration, we’re going to run out of brigades a long time before Osama bin Laden runs out of havens. I think that in the larger sense isn’t the right way to pursue al-Qaida globally.

But whereas there’s nothing literally unique – preferable perhaps, but not literally unique about Afghanistan as a potential base for striking us, it is unique as a base for destabilizing Pakistan. It’s immediately on the other side of the Durand Line. It involves a Pashtun ethnic group which straddles the border and is actually more numerous on the Pakistani side than on the Afghan side. And our strategic interests at stake in Pakistan are probably unique and clearly extraordinary.

This is a country that has a variety of deep and powerful internal divisions and an ongoing, real live, actual insurgency which includes Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida's current global base and which has at stake, a real live honest-to-goodness functioning nuclear arsenal, which is secure today but in the event that Pakistan's internal violence were to topple the state, the security of that arsenal would be very much in question and I would argue constitutes one of the few really plausible ways by which al-Qaida could obtain a useable weapon of mass destruction.

So the stability of Pakistan is, I would argue, perhaps a unique vital national security interest of the United States and it's tied up with the security of Afghanistan. Now, given that the unique threat is on the eastern side of the Durand Line, why not pursue the policy that the vice president has advocated on several occasions? Why are we investing so much effort on the wrong side of the Durand Line when our interests are on the other one?

The problem here is that when I look at the menu of U.S. options available to us to reduce the scale of the threat in Pakistan, I'm struck by how ineffective they all look. The United States is politically radioactive in Pakistan. We are not going to deploy 68,000 U.S. ground troops to assist the Pakistani army in the conduct of counterinsurgency within their borders.

We could conceivably use aid to try and assist the Pakistanis in the conduct of this war as we have been doing on some scale since about 2001 to 2002. Our aid is routinely and easily diverted to purposes other than those which we intend and it's hard for me to imagine, regardless of conditionality provisions that we might try to attach to that aid, that, that cannot continue to be the case.

We could down a longer list of possibilities. In the interests of time, I'll truncate it there. The net assessment of that menu that I come to is that our opportunities for dealing with the threat we face from Pakistan directly by U.S. policy in Pakistan has serious limits to it. And in a situation where we have very important interests at stake, a very limited ability to deal with them directly in a positive way, in many ways, the most appropriate policy might very well be to invoke the Hippocratic Oath and at least do no harm.

"Don't make a bad situation any worse than it is already" and it strikes me that one of the more impressive ways in which we can make things worse in Pakistan is if the counterinsurgency project on the other side of the Durand Line were to fail and the Karzai government were to be replaced either with a condition of chaos and renewed civil warfare or with some sort of Taliban version 2.0 restoration in the south or the entirety of the country.

This would create a state-scale haven for Pakistani insurgents on the other side of the Durand Line. Much has been made of the role of Taliban safe havens on the Pakistani side of the border for destabilizing Afghanistan. The problem works both ways. And in many respects, the opposite direction is a larger long-term threat to U.S. national security interests.

It seems to me that of the various interests we have engaged in the interconnected problems of Afghanistan and Pakistan, although many are important and none can be ignored, the most serious is the way in which failure in Afghanistan, should that occur, would undermine U.S. national security interests in Pakistan.

Now, that means that we have important interests engaged in Afghanistan. But they are not unlimited and they're largely indirect rather than direct. You could imagine, for example, that we could succeed in Afghanistan and yet, if the Pakistani government fails to put its house in order and it loses its counterinsurgency effort on its side of the Durand Line, U.S. national security interests could be lost anyway.

Conversely, you could imagine that if Pakistan does get its house in order and defeat its internal insurgency, even a Karzai government collapse in Kabul could leave the Pakistani nuclear arsenal off limits to al-Qaida in the foreseeable future. Failure in Afghanistan, should it occur, increases the odds of bad results in Pakistan, but it does not guarantee it.

That, I think, makes U.S. policy in Afghanistan a real, true and honest dilemma. We have real interests. They have limits and they're indirect. And for reasons that I suspect we'll pick up later in the conversation, the costs of pursuing them in Afghanistan are likely to be very high. And in my view, the opportunities we have for pursuing those interests with a reasonable chance of success at substantially lower sacrifice in cost have serious limits to them.

And what that leaves us with, I think, is a decision that's very close to call on the analytic merits. Real but limited interest, expensive to pursue, success, I suspect, is possible but cannot be guaranteed – what that boils down to at the end of the day, I don't believe, is an analytically resolvable question. As an analyst in a close call like this, I can't tell you whether a substantial expenditure to secure a real but limited U.S. national security interest is worth the cost or not.

That's ultimately a value judgment on how much cost are we willing to incur to reduce risk by how much. For me, that value judgment comes down in favor of the waging war in – waging of war in Afghanistan in an attempt to reduce the risk to U.S. national interests engaged there. But because it's a close call; reasonable people will differ in the way they cast that judgment and I suspect they will continue to do so.

MR. PERKOVICH: Stephen, thanks so much for so succinctly framing your sense of the U.S. strategic interests. I'm going to turn to Gilles and you know, ask you to give your sense of what the interests are there, but also to reflect on the question that – or the point that Stephen made about the importance of Pakistan as a strategic priority and the relationship of the war in Afghanistan to helping to accomplish the objectives of stability and Pakistan – securing the Pakistani nuclear arsenal, all the things that Stephen talked about.

GILLES DORRONSORO: Thanks. I will probably speak more about objectives than interests exactly because there are a lot of interests possible in Afghanistan – democracy, fighting al-Qaida or building the Afghan state – you know, all these interests or having long-term strategic relations with Afghanistan. All these interests are not necessarily realistic, you know, so let's speak about what I would call reasonable objectives for the next 5 years.

I would say that some things are not doable. Afghan democracy, for example, is totally out of the agenda for obvious reasons after the last election. We are now in a post-democratic Afghanistan and we have to deal with that. The second thing that is not doable is to win against the Taliban. Winning against the Taliban means marginalize the Taliban – in a way, be sure that 80 or 90 percent of the territory is under the control of the central government.

And that, I don't think is possible for the next 5 years or even 10 years. I will explain later, I think, in the question and answer why it's not doable. What is now doable is very limited objectives. The one – the most important one would be to keep al-Qaida out of Afghanistan. Al-Qaida does not need or doesn't want to come back in the countryside in Afghanistan.

They could do it now; they don't want because it's relatively dangerous for them and because they need cities to plan attacks against Western countries. By the way, 9/11 was planned mostly from Germany, not from Afghanistan. Afghanistan has a very marginal role in 9/11. It's good to say it again, maybe.

If the objective is to keep just al-Qaida out of Afghanistan, the strategy must be defined accordingly to that. It means that we don't need to win against the insurgency. We need to keep a functioning state in Afghanistan – to build a functioning state in Afghanistan to keep the cities and to make sure that actually, we can slowly withdraw and the exit strategy is probably one of the major objectives we have in Afghanistan – or we should have in Afghanistan.

Why? Because the current war has a lot of cost – political costs. We have seen with Vietnam how bad it is in a society where people are divided about foreign war, external war. We are seeing that in Europe right now. We're seeing that more and more in the United States. In itself, it's a cost. It's a political cost. The second political cost is the relationship between the United States and its allies.

The situation on the ground is extremely bad. The level of cooperation between certain countries in Afghanistan is not very good. What we are seeing more and more is a militarization of all the foreign intervention in Afghanistan. The U.N. is obviously of use a little bit out of the game, but more and more we are seeing the U.N., generally speaking, out of the game in Afghanistan.

And this militarization of all politics in Afghanistan is a strain on the relationship between allies. NATO is the first casualty – political casualty in Afghanistan. NATO is not functioning military alliance in Afghanistan right now. And of course, it has very bad long-term effect on the credibility of the United States and on the possible next crisis. It's clear that nobody's going to take very seriously, the idea that NATO country can intervene in a foreign country. I think it's a major political cost of the war right now in Afghanistan.

And the last point, very quickly, is about Pakistan. Of course, the relationship with Pakistan is full ambiguities. On the one hand, the Pakistani army is supporting the Taliban, at least passively. The Taliban have a very good and protected sanctuary in Pakistan right now. To give you an example, the current operation in Waziristan is targeting strictly the Southern Waziristan but not at all Northern Waziristan, where the Haqqani network is based.

So it's clearly disconnected in the mind of the Pakistani military. The Afghan Taliban are protected; the Pakistani Taliban are the target. And second aspect – if we want long-term to stabilize Pakistan, we need to exit from Afghanistan – does not mean we need to exit totally from Afghanistan, but we need to be in a phase where the Pakistani state will have to accept that the Kabul state in Afghanistan is going to survive without foreign intervention.

Because right now, the bet of the Pakistani military is that we are bleeding in Afghanistan and that in a few years, we are going to exit. And then they think that they will put back the Taliban

in control in Kabul. The only way to change their mind, in a way, is to exit from Afghanistan with a guarantee that the Afghan state is going to survive.

In very concrete terms, I don't think that the current strategy, with its very high level of casualties, is very credible on these grounds and at least, it's very clear that on the Pakistani side, everybody is betting that it's going to fail. And the very last thing, maybe, I would say is that people tend to overemphasize the importance of Afghanistan.

This country – and I like very much this country – but this country is not that strategic. I don't think it's a good idea to put too much resources in Afghanistan. Long-term, it's too costly. We are going to have more than 100,000 troops at the end of the year. Next year, at the end of next year, it's going to be 150,000.

I think it's probably far too much resources in Afghanistan for the objective of fighting al-Qaida, which is probably less than 2,000 militants. So I think it asks a question about the general affectation – allocation of resources in the U.S. foreign policy and I don't think that it's going the right way.

MR. PERKOVICH: Thank you, Gilles. Last in this opening round on strategic interests is Peter Bergen and you say whatever you wish, Peter, but I think there's a potential contradiction or tension in what Stephen and Gilles were saying about the importance of Pakistan and the relationship of Afghanistan to that. So if at some point, you could give your views on that as well, that would be great, Peter.

PETER BERGEN: Thank you. On March 27th, President Obama laid out his Afghanistan strategy. And basically, it was a counterinsurgency strategy that was sold to the American public as a counterterrorism strategy. And while as a rhetorical matter, this might have been the right way to sell it to the American public, there are other interests that he could have mentioned.

And I count six that he could have mentioned in addition and I presume he will mention or discuss in his next speech to the American public. One is regional stability, which Steve Biddle and Gilles Dorransoro have ably already talked about. Two, we don't want the return of the Taliban for obvious reasons.

Three, we have a moral obligation to the Afghan people, having overthrown their government, not to leave them to the predations of the Taliban. Four, this is the first war in NATO's history where Article V, collective right to self-defense was invoked and the NATO alliance, to some degree, rises or falls on its success in Afghanistan.

Five, the Afghans are behind us. This is not Iraq. Every poll – there have been dozens of polls taken in Afghanistan. They all have the same results. At the same time that Iraqis wanted us out of the country immediately after the American occupation, Afghans repeatedly say that they're in favor of international forces. One recent poll even had a – Afghans having a 63 percent favorable view of the U.S. military. There are parts of the United States, probably, that doesn't have quite that favorable a view of the U.S. military.

This is in a Muslim country, by the way, where 60 percent of the population has a favorable view of the United States. There's no other Muslim country, save Lebanon, with these kinds of

numbers. The final point – and this is something that I think is often forgotten, is Afghanistan is not simply the home of al-Qaida. It was the home of every single major insurgency movement in the Muslim world.

And if we let it revert back into a sort of Taliban state or even a semi-Taliban state, every major Muslim insurgency movement in the world would come back and train in Afghanistan. So those are some other ideas about potential reasons or actual reasons we're in Afghanistan. Critics of a larger – of a larger American role in Afghanistan have to answer a very simple question, which would be one thing if we already didn't have a great deal of experience in Afghanistan to make some decisions already.

The United States, after the most successful covert operation of the Cold War, closed its embassy in Afghanistan in 1989, zeroed out aid to one of the poorest countries in the world and into the vacuum stepped the Taliban and then of course, al-Qaida. So we've already done the nothing approach. The second approach is doing it lightly.

Well, this has already been done by the Bush administration because of an ideological aversion to nation-building. This was the least resourced post-World War II reconstruction effort the United States has been engaged in, the least number of boots on the ground. American soldiers in Afghanistan numbered 6,000 in 2003. That's the size of a police force in a city like Houston in a country the size of Texas.

So we've already done the do-it-light approach. Now, we're doing something-somewhat-seriously approach, which has a fighting chance of success. And we can argue about the deep tactics about the details, but – and I want to also indicate something that Gilles raised, very important. Pakistan, of course, is the prize in all this and our discussions are maybe ratcheting down our involvement in Afghanistan.

It's precisely the wrong kind of signal to be sending because just at the point where the Pakistanis are really getting serious about the militant problem inside their own country, I've been to Afghanistan repeatedly and I've often heard about hammer and anvil operations. Well, in the United States case, it was never really a hammer and in the Pakistani case, it was never really anvil.

Now, for the first time, you really have a chance of a hammer and anvil operation with the Pakistanis in Waziristan and the larger number of American troops. And also, we don't want to change the Pakistani's hedging strategies which is, of course, if they do believe we're not going to be there for a long-term commitment, they'll never really take the Afghan-Taliban card off the table.

So those are just some quick points about some ideas about our strategy in Afghanistan. I wanted also just to quickly raise seven common objections, which I will do very quickly about why the strategy won't work. The first is – the cliché about the graveyard of empires, which shall be retired into the graveyard of clichés – lost of empires have gone into Afghanistan and taken the country.

And we're not Soviets. The Soviets killed a million Afghans. They made 5 million of them homeless. They imposed a totalitarian war on the population and they were hated. We are not hated. Quite the reverse – if you look at – referring back to the polling data I've already discussed.

The other idea is Afghanistan is simply too violent. Well, you're more likely to be murdered in the United States in 1991 than you are to be killed in the war in Afghanistan today.

And I can give you the numbers because they're important: 24,000 Americans were murdered in 1991 in a population of 260 million. About 2,000 Afghan civilians were killed in the war last year in a population of about 30 million. So just do the math. You're four times more likely to be killed in Iraq today than you are in Afghanistan and you're 20 times more likely to be killed in Iraq in January of 2007 at the height of the violence.

So you know, the idea that somehow this is just too difficult is nonsensical. The other idea – common idea is that it's not a nation-state. Well, actually, Afghanistan's been a nation-state since 1747. So it's an older country than the United States. It's always had a weak central government but the idea that it doesn't have a sense of nation, though, I think is wrong. Afghans do want us, as I've already explained.

And I want to take issue slightly with my friend, Steve Biddle, about this idea that there are lots of other safe havens in the world where al-Qaida could go. Well, of course there are. But in fact, the safe haven where they actually are is on the Afghan/Pakistan border. Al-Qaida was founded in Pakistan in 1988. Every major anti-Western terrorist attack except the Madrid attack of 2004 was traceable back to the Afghan/Pakistan border region. Whether it was 9/11, the embassy attacks, the USS Cole attack, the 7/7 attacks, Bali, the list goes on and on. So that's where they are, and so it's not about potential other safe havens; it's about the safe havens where they actually are.

And then one final point, if I may. Can I make two final points, then? (Laughter.) You know, people also say, what's the end state in Afghanistan? Well, the end state, it's not dreamer vision; it's 1970s Afghanistan, which was a tourist destination – a country at peace with its neighbors, at peace with itself – a relatively liberal society, by the way.

Pictures of women in Kabul in 1968 from guidebooks that I've seen show women wearing Western clothing. In fact, upper-middle class Pakistani women would go to Kabul on vacation to kind of get away from the strictures of their home country. So there is a model of it existing. It's not a sort of dreamer vision model.

And finally, on Pakistan: I think Stephen is absolutely right about the Hippocratic Oath with Pakistan, but there are some underlying tectonic shifts which I think are very important, which we must be aware of despite all the violence in Pakistan. The Taliban are committing – I think they're in the process of committing suicide in Pakistan.

If you were to devise an information operations campaign against the Pakistani Taliban, you could do no better than send a text to every Pakistani parent saying, keep your kids out of school for the foreseeable future because of potential attacks on these schools. And that's so that if you're living in Karachi, you're now aware that the Taliban are really a problem.

As a result, support for suicide bombings dropped from 33 percent to 5 percent in the last several years in Pakistan. Support for the Taliban is cratering, support for al-Qaida is cratering and that makes a huge difference to what the Pakistanis are doing. When you do a counterinsurgency operation in Pakistan, you don't have to win the hearts and minds of the local population because they're behind you. The operation in Swat in 2007 was unpopular; the operation in Swat that

happened earlier this year was done with the full support of the Pakistani population, as is the operation in Waziristan.

When Pakistan went into Waziristan in 2005, it was really a performance art operation that was done to satisfy the United States, in the view of the Pakistani population. This one is done for real. And so if you think about what the biggest prize is and if we can still call it this – the war on terror – it is the views of the Pakistani population because that's where al-Qaida is headquartered; that's where the Taliban is headquartered. And those views are shifting. It's not the end for al-Qaida and the Taliban, but it is enormously significant.

MR. PERKOVICH: Thank you, Peter, and thank all three of you. I want to ask you to go ahead and ask each other questions, but it seemed to me that a lot of the focus in each of your remarks was on Pakistan. And Stephen talked about how the U.S. can't do much to achieve its objectives in Pakistan from Pakistan because we're politically radioactive there, was the expression you used.

But then Gilles made the point that one of the reasons we're politically radioactive in Pakistan is because of the war in Afghanistan. So I'm just wondering how – and none of these is a neat problem, obviously – but if the way to help solve our problem in Pakistan is to fight in Afghanistan but part of our problem in Pakistan is that we're fighting in Afghanistan, how do we kind of exit from that circle?

MR. BIDDLE: Well, there's a short-term, medium/long-term tradeoff vis-à-vis Afghanistan and Pakistan. In the short term, A, our presence in Afghanistan is unpopular in Pakistan, as is just about everything else about us, as far as I can observe, but, B, U.S. reinforcements in Afghanistan will tend at the margin to drive some number of militants across the border into Pakistan, and the Pakistanis have articulated concern with this effect.

The trouble is if we respond to those short-term problems by disengaging in Afghanistan and liquidating our position there, we create precisely the risk that Gilles suggested was important to avoid vis-à-vis Pakistan – that the project fails in Afghanistan, that the government in Kabul collapses, and that's replaced either with chaos or with an actively hostile regime there.

In the medium term, this, I would argue, creates a much more severe threat to the stability of Pakistan than near-term effects of driving a handful of militants one way or another across the Durand Line, and in effecting at the margin, U.S. unpopularity that's practically pegged the meter already. If we think we're going to become political heroes in Islamabad or in Pakistan at large by withdrawing from Afghanistan, I suspect that's overstated.

So I think the disadvantages in Pakistani stability of counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan are non-zero but small and near term. The disadvantages for Pakistani stability of a liquidation of the U.S. position in Afghanistan on a collapse of the project there, it seems to me, are much larger, albeit medium term or longer term.

MR. DORRONSORO: Yeah, a quick comment, maybe. First, on the fact that the United States is extremely unpopular in Pakistan, and that bin Laden is still very popular, and that a large range of people in Pakistan are still thinking that the CIA organized 9/11. And we have to take into account these perceptions.

So one of these perceptions – and that’s true of the people who are making the decision – is that the Afghan Taliban are not afraid against Pakistan, and, still, in the public opinion in Pakistan, it’s very clear that they mostly support the Afghan Taliban who are making a jihad against the United States in Afghanistan.

And it’s very disconnected from the Pakistani Taliban – Tehrik-i-Taliban – who are a coalitional movement – Swat, Waziristan, Bajaur, et cetera, et cetera. And I don’t think that the perception of the Pakistani state is that they are threatened by this movement. They think and they have proved that they can militarily, at least, win against this movement.

So my real point is we are speaking about the interest of Pakistan. We were taking in account their own perception of their interest. So we are here in Washington defining what is a threat against Pakistan, but the way they, themselves, define the threat is different. So here we have a major problem.

Second point, I think that the priority – the absolute priority – is Afghanistan because fighting in Afghanistan makes the relationship with Pakistan much more difficult. And the cooperation against al-Qaida is not bad with Pakistan; it’s not a bad cooperation. Basically, they are giving things and people. But, it could be better if the Pakistani regime – the Pakistan military, especially – could understand that we can withdraw from Afghanistan and still, the Afghan state is going to survive.

The real problem right now is that they feel they can put pressure on the coalition, the coalition is going to leave. And the only way to be sure that they change their perception is to be able to exit in the next few years. If we stay there, they will still support the Taliban and we are not going to win against an insurgency that has such a perfect sanctuary in Pakistan. It’s not technically not doable.

And the last thing, maybe – it was just a comment. I’m very skeptical about the polls but I’m going to quote one: 44 percent of the Afghans are against more international troops in Afghanistan. Only 18 percent of the Afghans are supporting an increase of international troops in Afghanistan.

MR. PERKOVICH: And I know it will be tempting to debate that number and other numbers, but I don’t want to lose sight of – because there’s a common denominator in terms of the strategic interest in what each of you said, which is related to Pakistan. And so I want to stay on that for a second, and follow up on Gilles’s very important point, which is – he said that the Pakistani leadership defines the threat differently than we do.

And from my own experience, I have seen measures of that in the sense that when you talk to many Pakistani leaders, they see the threat in Afghanistan to be India, which is a U.S. partner and ally. So that if we are focusing right now – I’m not commenting on that; I’m just saying that the – passing along that problematic, because if a strategic objective is, in a sense, to help stabilize Pakistan but at some point, to have a coalescence of interest between the U.S. and Pakistan, as well as cooperation, then do we not have to then get at this underlying Pakistani – whether it’s an obsession or otherwise – with India and the U.S. relationship with India, and the broader grand strategy of the U.S. and India in the region? Any comments on that?

(Off-side conversation.)

MR. BIDDLE: Arguably, the underlying central problem here is that U.S. interests and Pakistani interests do not align properly, or completely. And one of the several reasons they don't align completely is because the Pakistani assessment of the threat to Pakistani stability is not the one we have.

Many Pakistanis view, for better or worse, India as a more severe and longer-term threat. Many of the internal terrorist and insurgent organizations that are currently causing so much violence in Pakistan were created by the Pakistani intelligence service as a source of asymmetric military capability against India.

Those organizations then became Frankenstein's monsters in the American view after the Bush administration, figuratively speaking, put a revolver to President Musharraf's temple and said, either you turn on these people or we're going to declare you an enemy; and he said, oh, okay. At which point, a variety of organizations created by the Pakistani intelligence service began to doubt the reliability of the government that had created them and had subsequently turned on them.

That whole history and that problem of a different perception of where the central threat lies – is it India? Or is it internal insurgents? Or is it al-Qaida? – gives rise to the whole problem we have right now of mixed Pakistani motives and incomplete Pakistani responses to threats that we view as quite severe, but they view as less severe; more amenable to management, on their part. And that, I think, is, in many ways, the heart of the problem.

Now, if one were going to put an optimist brief for Pakistan, the optimist brief would very much build on some of the observations quite well put that Peter made earlier; that if the internal insurgency is eventually going to topple the government in Islamabad, it is in the process going to become, per force, much more violent, much more virulent and much more evidently and apparently threatening to the government in Islamabad. And one could imagine, one could hope, that that will shift Pakistani threat perception in our direction.

Eh, not quite the right way of phrasing that – they will come to see the threat much the way we do. They tend to see us as rather more of a threat now than we would like. And if they respond appropriately, one might reasonably expect that Pakistan, as a state, has the resources required in order to succeed in managing this insurgency if not defeating it outright.

My concern with all of this, however, is that the agility of the Pakistani state in responding to what is – as Peter also correctly put it – a tectonic shift in threat perception, may or may not be up to that job. I could easily imagine, given the number of internal divisions, fiefdoms, factions and institutional challenges facing the Pakistani state, that the insurgency could prove able to grow virulent faster than the Pakistani state will prove able to pivot and change its threat perception and its security response from one oriented primarily to the national threat from India and toward the internal threat from their insurgents.

And thus – especially if the insurgents get the added advantages of large-scale havens on the other side of the Durand Line – could overwhelm the capacity of the Pakistani state to adapt in time, and could lead to the collapse of that government. But the heart of this whole problem is the

issue of where do Pakistanis see the primary threat to their security, given that there are several that they might choose from? And they have historically chosen differently than we would.

MR. BERGEN: Yeah, I'd just like to amplify what Steve said. I mean, you know, Pakistan is three-and-a-half for zero against India, a country of nuclear weapons. It has either lost or drawn three-and-a-half wars in the last 60 years. If you are a general staff officer, you've lived through that experience.

Think about how hard it was for United States military to change its doctrine after the Cold War. It didn't happen for more than a decade. It was only in the bloodbath of Iraq that some serious rethinking about the kinds of wars we were going to be involved in actually took place. So it's very hard for militaries to change their doctrine. Why should the Pakistanis change theirs, particularly when the threat is so real in their own minds? So that first point.

The second point is not since the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979 have our interests and the Pakistani interests begun to so closely align. It will never be a perfect alignment, but it is much closer today than it was several years ago. And of course, Pakistan is one of the most anti-American countries in the world. But we're not in the business of persuading people about how great the United States are. We're hopefully in the business of persuading that our enemies are people to be attacked, and that right now, the Pakistani military is attacking people that we can legitimately describe as our enemies.

The Pakistani Taliban made a major strategic error. They killed the most popular politician in the country, Benazir Bhutto; a widely circulated videotape of a 17-year-old girl was being flogged by the Taliban was shown on every independent media channel, of which there are very many in Pakistan now. And so the Pakistani Taliban has – and they attacked, of course, the equivalent of the Pentagon. You couldn't really design an information operation better designed to get the Pakistani military angry than attacking GCHQ in Rawalpindi.

So there are some shifts that are positive, but the interests will never align, and we can all say, look, it'd be great if we solved Kashmir; well, good luck with that. It's not a very easy thing to solve and clearly the United States right now has made a sort of decision that that's not something it can really engage in for all sorts of reasons, including that the Pakistanis and the Indians have had a two-track process and it was somewhat successful, and the United States doesn't want to interfere.

MR. PERKOVICH: Gilles, briefly, and then I'm going to ask a follow-up, and then we'll open it up soon.

MR. DORRONSORO: I'm not very convinced that there is an alignment of interests between Pakistan and the United States because, basically, Pakistan is supporting people who are killing American soldiers, so I think it's not a perfect alignment, let's say.

The second thing is that what we are seeing right now is not an alignment; it's two different kinds of interests. The Pakistanis are ready to cooperate with the United States when it's about al-Qaida or, let's say, transnational groups. They are ready to do it; they can do it; they will do it.

They are not at all – and less and less ready to cooperate – concerning the Taliban in Afghanistan because they think they are winning and they think they just have to wait. So they will

support the Taliban in the next few years, and, again, we have absolutely to – we don't have leverage on Pakistan because they have leverage on us. That's the problem, you know.

So we have to change the perspective. The only way to change the perspective is to deescalate the conflict in Afghanistan and to be free from this Afghan conflict. When we have 100 – and next year more than 100,000 – troops in Afghanistan, you're not free to deal with Pakistan; you're not free to negotiate with Pakistan. And so that's why the United States is giving billions and billions of dollars every year to Pakistan when Pakistan is supporting the Taliban.

MR. PERKOVICH: Let me, in an effort to – because we're not going to resolve all of these strategic interests, but I think we can narrow them – but let me help in that process by asking each of you a question, and that is – it's whether there are still valid and practical distinctions between the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban and al-Qaida because we used to kind of – you know, in a typical sense or paragraph, they kind of all appear as the problem or the enemy, and who has to be defeated, and so on.

And it seems to me that how you define your interests and also your strategy would depend on whether those are separable adversaries – again, the Pakistani Taliban, the Afghan Taliban and al-Qaida – or whether they're all kind of merged in the same thing so you have to go after all of them. And each of you knows much more about this, certainly, than I do, but I think than a lot of others do. So if you would comment on that issue, that would be great.

MR. BERGEN: The Afghan Taliban is headquartered in Pakistan. (Chuckles.) So you get into this very strange thing where the Pakistani Taliban, which is also headquartered in Pakistan, and al-Qaida is headquartered in Pakistan. What are the differences between these groups?

Yes, there's always some local-level commander in Afghanistan you can pay off or bribe or coerce to lay down his arms, but in my view – since 9/11 – al-Qaida and the Taliban in its upper levels have morphed together ideologically and tactically. They're much closer today than they were on 9/11.

Mullah Omar was prepared to lose everything on the point of principle that he wouldn't give up bin Laden. I don't think that suggests a sort of Henry Kissinger-like willingness to do negotiations on this issue in the future. Baitullah Mehsud sends suicide bombers to Barcelona, indicating that the Pakistani Taliban sees itself as part of the global jihad.

So I think that these groups are closer together today than they were in the past, and that's part of the problem. The idea, by the way, that the Taliban wouldn't offer refuge to al-Qaida if they came back in some shape or form in Afghanistan is ludicrous. Just look at history. The whole Taliban project has been embedded in the idea of giving refuge to al-Qaida.

MR. BIDDLE: Let me just add a little bit to this, which is clearly, there are a large collection of – in principle – separable actors, here. Not just the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban and al-Qaida; the Afghan Taliban is made up of a variety of factions which do not have completely collinear interests, either.

And groups of this kind grow closer together or further apart over time in either or both directions at different times. And what we know about the interrelationships among them has

inherent limits to it, given the secretive nature of these organizations and their interest in denying us this kind of information.

I think in many ways, the indications I've seen are strongest, but the interconnections among these groups have grown stronger rather than weaker in recent years. I'm very much in agreement with Peter on that. That doesn't necessarily imply that they are some sort of monolith. It does suggest that for the near term, our ability to split them has serious limits to it.

Downstream, I could imagine a variety of negotiating strategies designed to drive wedges between members of this coalition should conditions on the ground in Afghanistan change in ways that lead one or more of these factions to conclude that the alternative to a negotiated agreement of continuing to fight with the Americans does not lead to near-term success, but, instead, leads to a long-term grinding stalemate or, worse, defeat.

If we changed the situation on the ground in this way, I could imagine that setting the table for eventual attempts to split this coalition and drive wedges among its elements. I don't see the conditions as being ripe for that at the moment. Let me add one final point, though, with respect to the degree to which one or more of these groups does or does not threaten the government in Islamabad.

Because these alignments change over time, I think – I suspect that Pakistani government representatives would differ with me – I think that it's not an answerable question, or one cannot safely conclude that a success by one or more groups currently aligned with this constellation of actors within Pakistan will not constitute a threat to the government in Islamabad.

Ethnic separatism within Pakistan has been a fundamental threat to the stability of the Pakistani state since its creation. There have, in the past, been acts of violence by Pashtun separatists against the Pakistani government, as a whole.

If I were conducting this analysis from a perch in Islamabad, my own view would be the collapse of the Karzai government and its potential replacement with a Pashtun alternative that might either in the mid-term future or in the longer-term future harbor revanchist interests for a larger Pashtunistan, including a large piece of Pakistan that in the past has had separatist rumblings is not a particularly safe gamble to take.

Clearly, at the moment, the Pakistani government is engaged in a variety of hedging strategies. Not just one; they're equal opportunity-hedgers at the moment. And that hedging strategy certainly includes the Afghan Taliban. Their success to-date in managing the threat posed by internal terrorist and insurgent organizations – many of which they created – doesn't lead me to be monumentally optimistic about their ability to manage these things in the future.

Therefore, for a variety of reasons – although I view these groups as separable but interconnected – I think that constitutes basis for concern about where the future development of all this will leave the problem of stability in Pakistan, especially if the Karzai government collapses.

MR. DORRONSORO: Very briefly, the first thing is that al-Qaida and the Afghan Taliban do not need each other. They are connected; they can help each other from time to time, but they

are not, in a sense, fighting the same war. It's clear that al-Qaida is not fighting in Afghanistan and al-Qaida is very much directing against Pakistani interests right now. That's the first thing.

The second is that a success against the Taliban doesn't give the coalition much against al-Qaida because al-Qaida is not in Afghanistan. So even if the coalition succeeds against the Taliban, it's not going to help directly. The actual al-Qaida threat is going to be more or less the same.

The last point is that probably, the problem with the Pakistanis is that they are able to separate, to distinguish very clearly between Pakistani Taliban and Afghan Taliban. And that's their major – that's our major problem, basically; that they can make a deal with Haqqani and fighting Baitullah – the Mehsud tribe at the same time.

And their ability to disconnect the two movements makes that it's not very clear that there is any possibility to push Pakistan to fight against the Afghan Taliban or to secure the border. I think they are able to disconnect the two, and that's it.

MR. PERKOVICH: In the discussion, I hope maybe we'll come back to this because I think there's a big distinction that I'm hearing, anyway, between Gilles, who sees lots of important differences between the Afghan Taliban, the Pakistani Taliban and al-Qaida, and Peter and Stephen, with a kind of closer relationship or implications.

The last question I want to ask, and then we'll open it up, is less at the question of what are our interests, but it's more at the question of, kind of, how do you define a strategy? And that is a question that follows: How much does our strategy – whatever it's going to be – depend on a legitimate government in Afghanistan, number one?

And then there's a variation on that, which is, okay, maybe it doesn't have to be a legitimate government but at least a functioning government. And so one question is, does functionality depend on its being legitimate, or can you separate those two things? But in any case, how much are we really, really dependent on something that does not now exist in Afghanistan, which is a functioning, legitimate state?

MR. BIDDLE: Maybe I'll start. Orthodox counterinsurgency theory puts tremendous emphasis on legitimacy. And the McChrystal report – interestingly, for a military organization – cites as coequally important, security and governance in Afghanistan. Either one, if it's a failure, leads to mission failure, according to Gen. McChrystal and the report.

That having been said, legitimacy is a very loaded term in the way that Americans and many others use it. In terms of the requirements of counterinsurgency theory, legitimacy is a minimalist concept. It does not necessarily require democracy; it does not necessarily require respect for minority rights; it does not necessarily require prosperity or even administrative efficiency. What legitimacy requires in terms of counterinsurgency theory is a stable public preference for the government over the insurgents. Period, full stop. A wide variety of governmental systems and structures could conceivably meet the requirement of legitimacy in the context of counterinsurgency theory.

I think an important issue that, to my mind, the analytical community has not completely resolved yet is what is the achievable maximum state strength in Afghanistan? And the associated

institutional design that would bring that about – I think in terms of the administration’s making a case to the American public that the achievable outcome in this conflict is worthwhile – developing that kind of more detailed, more fleshed out picture of what would an Afghan government that would meet those requirements look like would be very helpful.

But it’s very important to recognize that the bar here is remarkably low. We are talking about a stable public preference for the government over an organization that the population of Afghanistan feels it knows pretty well, and in repeated surveys since 2001, has never expressed any substantial interest in being governed by.

The Afghan Taliban, to my knowledge, have never pulled above single digits in Afghanistan, as a whole, and that preference has remained substantially stable over time. That’s the hurdle we need to get over! Now, left to its own devices, I could easily imagine that the Karzai government might succeed in driving its own popularity down into the single digits, too, in which case we would fail to meet the criterion for success in counterinsurgency theory and we would be in deep jeopardy.

Our requirement in governance reform, however, is not to create Switzerland in the Hindu Kush. It is not to create a Jeffersonian democracy in Kabul. It is to arrest a perspective decline in the public’s preference for its own government at a level stably above that of the Taliban. And that, I think, is substantially more modest and rather more doable.

MR. BERGEN: You know, think about the neighborhood that Afghanistan is in. Pakistan’s had four military dictatorships in the last 60 years. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Iran. These are hardly, you know, perfect democracies. So let us first stipulate that Afghanistan is an imperfect democracy in a part of the world where there are a lot of imperfect political models.

Secondly, Karzai just won 49 percent of the vote – really won 49 percent of the vote when it got recounted. You know, that is a pretty high number. That’s not a poll, that’s an election. As Steve indicated, you know, the Taliban consistently polls at 7 percent. There’s nothing like living under the Taliban to have a naturally very hostile view of the kind of utopia they’re promising.

So I can completely endorse the idea that we’re getting very caught up in the idea that we have to this super legitimate government in Kabul. We actually need to do something much, much more basic, which is give Afghan security – the last time they really had good security was under the Taliban, a more illegitimate government in a sense than you could possibly imagine. But, so Afghans in fact, did a very interesting survey of the Taliban and people who support them.

And it came out in August. And it had a very interesting result, which is Afghans actually don’t expect a lot of government in their lives. They’ve never had it, they don’t really want it. There’s the idea that we ought to provide services for every Afghan and Wi-Fi in their villages is just ridiculous. What we need to do is provide security and that’s what we’re failing to do.

So just one very concrete example. The Kabul to Kandahar road, you could – anybody in this room could have driven down in 2005. Now, it would be suicidal for anybody in this room to take. The most important road politically and economically in the country – very similar to Route Irish, the road between Baghdad City Airport and Baghdad.

The fact that you couldn't secure that road said everything you need or want to know about Iraq. The fact that we can't secure this road says everything you need to know about Afghanistan today. So it's really about providing security, you know connecting Afghans to a legitimate government is nice, but not vital.

MR. PERKOVICH: Gilles, on this one? Because you've written ahead of a lot of people, I think, about roads and governance in Afghanistan. So comment on this one?

MR. DORRONSORO: Quickly, I think we agree that the key is to build an Afghan state able to survive without too much international presence, you know. I think we agree on that. I think saying that now, we are going to disagree – first thing, the last election in Afghanistan was a real disaster.

I think that contrary to what it is said, the turnout was not 38 or 40 percent but much more 20, 25 percent. On that, probably Karzai won some votes; we'll never know exactly how and why and – but let's say that 10 to 15 percent maximum of the people voted for Karzai in Afghanistan. That sounds reasonable.

So I think we have a major problem and we have no – in Afghanistan, people are contesting directly the legitimacy of the Karzai government. Compared to what happened in 2004 and 2005, where the election was reasonably fair, it's a major, major, major drawback. A second point is that legitimacy is a very difficult word.

There is two kinds of legitimacy. Let's say the local one. So you don't necessarily have big ideas about the government, but the policeman is here. There is a judge, so you go to see the judge. And there's a general marginal sense is that do you think the government is legitimate? And the – (unintelligible) – most of the people think that the current system is a joke.

But on the first point, we have different situation according to the region in Afghanistan. But the general trend is that the state is disappearing in Afghanistan. It's not state-building. It's state breaking or state you know? The state is disappearing. So in less and less places in Afghanistan, you have really district governor. You have less and less places where policeman – an Afghan policeman can work, survive, try to do his work.

So the fact that the state is legitimate or not is the second question – the first question is there a state at all? And the answer is less and less and probably what we are seeing now is the militarization of the polarization and militarization of Afghan politics. More and more, you have the U.S. military on one side and the Taliban on the other and nothing in between because no local administration, because more and more, the Afghan players are relatively weak, which are not Taliban.

And the Taliban are taking control of the countryside. That's a major problem for any kind of counterinsurgency strategy and I think that another argument against the McChrystal strategy, the McChrystal report.

MR. PERKOVICH: Okay, what I want to do is open it up for discussion. And we have people who will bring microphones to you and I would like you to state your name and affiliation

when we do that. Let's start – the gentleman in the back, start there. And meanwhile, let's bring the microphone up here to the front as well so we have somebody lined up ready to go.

Q: Thank you. Masood Aziz from Afghanistan. To say that Afghanistan and Pakistan is now strategically important because the planning for 9/11 was done in Germany is really not to understand al-Qaida or 9/11 or Afghanistan or Pakistan.

Al-Qaida obviously was supported and it needed the garnish support, and it was institutionally supported because the Taliban had a state in Afghanistan. And now, as Peter and others have pointed out, the Afghan Taliban's headquarters is in Pakistan, the Pakistani Taliban headquarters is in Pakistan, al-Qaida's headquarters is in Pakistan, and to say that this is not a strategically important area is, you know, part of an older idea that is not going to work today.

My question is for Steve Biddle in the scenarios that he presented and the importance of the topic about leverage over Pakistan, and perhaps our lack of leverage over Pakistan.

Is it possible to imagine a scenario where failure in Afghanistan would actually help us – or an exit from Afghanistan, as advocated here – but more of a failure of a state or the rise of the Taliban again in Pakistan – any scenario like that, is it possible to imagine that as possibly actually giving us more leverage over Pakistan? Not in terms of stability in Pakistan from their point of view, like you said, but from a U.S. national interests point of view? Thanks.

MR. BIDDLE: Yeah, that's very much Gilles' view, as I understand it. Gilles and I disagree on this point for a number of reasons, including that I don't think our leverage over Pakistan is going to be very high with or without a U.S. presence in Afghanistan.

I mean, if the underlying condition of a difference in threat assessment continues, the whole problem here is that I don't see any opportunity for significant U.S. leverage over what happens in Pakistan, given that fact and given the degree of unpopularity that we see among Pakistanis for the United States, and the degree of internal division in the Pakistani government.

If you combine those things within Pakistan, what I think you get is a situation in which any significant U.S. use of bargaining leverage to try and move Pakistani behavior from what the Pakistanis would otherwise prefer to what we want them to do but they do not will be unpopular among Pakistani voters and will be exploitable by opponents of whatever government is now in charge for domestic political advantage within Pakistan.

Given that, and given the fact that our aid as a percentage of the Pakistani economy at large is always going to be small, it's hard for me to imagine the situation under which any of the actors in a deeply divided Pakistani political system decides that its self-interest lies in aligning itself with American preferences over domestic political opponents who will exploit them for that, given whatever is available from the United States in terms of aid.

The only conceivable argument here, it seems to me, is one speaking to moral hazard. Perhaps one could argue that at the moment, our problems of leverage in Pakistan result from the fact that the Pakistanis think that we think they're so important that we can't possibly abandon them, evidenced by our presence across the border in Afghanistan.

If we liquidated that presence across the border in Afghanistan, perhaps they would believe that we don't think they're so important, after all, and, hence, they would do what we asked them to do in order to get aid that they now think could be withdrawn.

I think that effect is dwarfed by the domestic political disadvantages to any of the actors in a divided country in aligning with a party that's this substantially disliked among the Pakistani public.

MR. PERKOVICH: (Inaudible, off mike.) I'll take two – I'll take this gentleman here and then the gentleman in the middle back there. We'll take two in a row because there are so many questions – (inaudible).

Q: Thank you, George. Edward Joseph with U.S. Helsinki Commission. To follow up your question, George, to Mr. Dorrnsoros.

I'm having trouble following the crux of your argument. If I understand you correctly, sir, you say that you've enumerated the many costs – which, of course, everybody would agree on – to continuing the present strategy.

And yet, you say the key objective is to leave behind a government in Kabul that can survive. And yet, the very threats to achieving that objective are that government's inherent weaknesses and an insurgency. So how do you achieve that core objective without countering the insurgency – i.e. COIN – and doing some nation-building?

And then, for any of the panelists, anything that they might say about a potential for conflagration between India and Pakistan, given continued deterioration in Afghanistan. Thank you, sir.

MR. PERKOVICH: (Inaudible, off mike.) But go ahead, Gilles. They were good questions.

MR. DORRONSORO: Well, to answer quickly to your point, the problem is how you go from this situation where every year, you're asking more – I mean, the military is asking more resources to a situation where it's more or less stable and we can't start exiting Afghanistan.

Here, first, I think the more we put troops in Afghanistan, the more people feel alienated. And that's what we have seen in the Pashtun Belt south and east of Afghanistan; that's what we are seeing more and more.

So the idea that the more you put troops and you are going (inaudible) – no, I don't think it's working like that. What's happening right now is that the polarization – I was explaining the polarization of the situation – makes impossible to build an Afghan state. It's already extremely difficult, but when the U.S. military is taking charge of everything, and more and more so, in the South of Afghanistan and the East, you don't have room for an Afghan state, to rebuild an Afghan state.

The second point is that it's a time problem. If we continue like that with this level of casualties – there've been 75 this summer – we are going to just be obliged to withdraw. So we need a low-level casualty strategy. If not, it's not politically sustainable.

And that means concentrating on cities where, maybe if an Afghan state is going to be rebuilt, it will be done. So the cities, the strategic areas and in the North, some places you can be more aggressive against the insurgents.

Saying that, what's the difference of McChrystal strategy, but I guess it's the idea. McChrystal strategy as we have seen in Helmand this summer, is going back into population centers but the population centers, I'll describe as villages, the countryside.

And that's not doable. Helmand is a total failure. And that's the key thing to understand. If we are doing another Helmand in the next province of Kandahar or in Zabul, it's going to be a disaster. That's the key thing.

For the relationship with India, I think it's going to be this slow, this kind of low-level conflict with India. It's going to continue; I don't see any kind of solution. In the case of Afghanistan, the situations are quite bad. Maybe you have seen what Musharraf said recently. It's clear that it's a point of view that is the point of view of the Pakistani army; that's what I think, at least.

And so, yes, there will be a level of conflict. I don't think how we can deal with that because, fundamentally, the Pakistani interests in Afghanistan are much more important than the U.S. interests in Afghanistan. And I think that's the thing to understand.

MR. PERKOVICH: On any of these points, but especially the India-Pakistan conflagration question, and I think more broadly, the regional strategy and how do you deal with Indian interests – or Pakistani perceptions of the contest with India there?

MR. BIDDLE: Let me deal with that very briefly and then I want to respond to a couple of Gilles' responses to the question. On the Indian-Pakistani front, the problem here is that terrorism against India from Pakistan is a wonderful opportunity to scotch any rapprochement, will probably continue to be exploited by terrorist organizations for self-interest. And that both makes the prospect of rapprochement substantially less achievable and it creates a serious danger of a larger war between precisely these two countries.

I think that is, indeed, a serious concern. It's also a concern that, short of succeeding in the counterinsurgency effort in Pakistan, it's very hard for us to address. The quickest way to torpedo an Indo-Pakistani rapprochement over Kashmir is for the United States to play any visible role in it. I mean, we can offer good offices, perhaps indirectly, very quietly and subtly, but if we play a direct role, I think we reduce the odds of the success rather than increase them.

And now let me respond to a couple of points Gilles raised. The issue of whether we're the problem or the solution in Afghanistan – and the whole issue of concentrating on cities and what exactly that means and what its pros and cons are – many people have argued that the central problem in Afghanistan is an antibody reaction in which a xenophobic, nationalist society reacts with hostility to any foreign presence, regardless of its intention, its mission or its scale or size, and hence, it's our presence there that's creating the war.

And I disagree with that quite strongly for a couple of reasons, one of which Peter has already made. We've tried the anti-antibody strategy! Donald Rumsfeld was very concerned about antibody reactions. The dominating trait in the early period of U.S. strategy toward Afghanistan was

precisely the Rumsfeld Defense Department's reluctance to engage in a large, visible effort in Afghanistan because it would produce exactly this kind of reaction and a nationalist insurgency against the foreign occupier. Therefore, he did what he did and of course, that's why we have no insurgency in Afghanistan today – (laughter) – is because this thesis is demonstrably correct.

I think what we have in Afghanistan today is evidence of quite the contrary – that it doesn't take much of a foreign presence to be viewed as corrosive and a source of alienation if in exchange, it provides nothing. If a foreign presence is nontrivial in the country and it's surrounded by declining security, it will be increasingly resisted. That does not, however, suggest either that the foreign presence is the source of the insecurity – I think our experience in Afghanistan to date suggests quite the contrary – nor does it suggest that the appropriate response to that is to liquidate the foreign presence, even were that possible.

I give you the alternative of a foreign presence that is, in fact, large enough to provide something that the population desperately wants above all other goods – security – in exchange for the imposition of its presence, I think, creates a stable outcome. And I give you, as an illustrative example, the Anbar province in Iraq, where the American presence in Anbar, between about 2004 and about the end of 2006 was large enough to be visible, too small to provide security, Anbaris were threatened and Americans were shot at on sight.

When a collection of events – some of which we had things to do with, some of which happened in spite of us – produced the coexistence of a larger American presence, but actual security for Anbari civilians, the result was that folk like me were able to walk down the central market street in Fallujah handing out candy to schoolchildren in November of 2007. And I survived to tell the tale and be here with you today not because we were loved in Anbar in 2007, or even today, but because our presence, burdensome as it may have been, brought with it security and was therefore tolerated.

I think what we have in Afghanistan at the moment and have had since 2001 is the worst of all worlds; we're there in large enough numbers to be resisted and too small in number to provide the security that people actually want.

MR. PERKOVICH: I know Gilles wants to respond. Peter, do you want in on this?

MR. BERGEN: Sorry to pile onto Gilles, but I mean he says part of our strategy should be a low American casualty rate. Well of course that is highly desirable, but let me make two observations. Americans are more tolerant of casualties if it's in service of a war they think they're either winning or, perhaps, making some progress on. The reason they turned against the Iraq War was not only the casualties, but because we were losing there.

When losing became a non-issue – when the war turned around for some of the reasons that Steve is now mentioning, the issue became much less politically charged. So we should not make a goal of our strategy – the main goal – a low American casualty rate. That's how we almost lost the war in Iraq. It was precisely the strategy of withdrawing American soldiers to very badly named forward-operating bases, which are in fact several-thousand-strong places where you could go and have a meal and a Starbucks coffee and this kind of thing.

It was putting people out inside in the population, taking more risk that precisely turned the war around. And on Helmand – because I've heard Gilles say this many times and I want to – Helmand, of course, is where the main U.S. effort has been this summer. Now, according to an Afghan National Army map that I reported on for CNN, in April of this year, Helmand was either completely controlled by the Taliban or at high risk for Taliban attack – the most dangerous province in the country.

According to the Marines, who are now, of course, in Helmand, of the 13 districts that were basically controlled by the Taliban, only one is now controlled by the Taliban. Let's assume that is even a sort of rosier picture than it is real, but clearly, something has shifted in Helmand. And I was in Helmand in Nawa province just in September, and our principal problem, to be frank, was boredom.

We went there thinking there would be a great deal of action; there wasn't. The Marines went in, in July. They had a very tough fight. They either killed a lot of Taliban or a lot of Taliban went underground or they went to other parts of the country – all true. But something has changed in Helmand. This was the most dangerous province in the country and now, it's probably one of the safest.

MR. PERKOVICH: Go ahead and respond and then I want to –

MR. DORRONSORO: Very quickly, because I'm terribly surprised by the arguments that have been used, to say the least. First about Anbar, as you know, there was something in Anbar you don't have in Afghanistan – it's tribes. So I'm sorry to insist, if there was some success – and qualified success – with the surge in Iraq, it's not because there was counterinsurgency in the villages and candies and all that; it was about tribes – paying tribes, having an alliance with tribes.

Well, you don't have these tribes in Afghanistan. The second point is about the Afghan society. What everybody is saying – U.S. military included – is that in places like Kunar, people just don't want foreigners in their valley – it's just that. So they are taking guns at night, they are firing and they are coming back in the village normal during the day. Read every witnesses about the U.S. military in Kunar. They will all tell the same story – people don't want us in the valley because, just, we are foreigners and we are armed.

So there is something very deep here as a misunderstanding of the Afghan society. I think it's worrying, you know, to hear that people want to be protected by U.S. military. No, they don't want – no, they don't want that – clearly not. And it's not just me, you know. Forget about the polls five minutes and just try to speak to people in Afghanistan. Stop being embedded with the U.S. military for one second and try to speak to people. What they are going to say about the U.S. military is not very nice, you know.

They feel occupied right now in Afghanistan, right or wrong. So we have to be much more careful about this general assumption about the Afghan society. It's not grounded in empirical work. It's going against all what we know as sociologists and anthropologists about the Afghan society. And it's dangerous – it's extremely dangerous.

Last point about Helmand, saying that you have 13 districts – you have 12 districts you would be safe in Helmand. It's kind of a joke – it's a joke. Just look at the casualties in Helmand

the last three months and you will see, clearly, that it's not exactly a safe place. A safe place for me is a place where I can go. You cannot go out of the military outposts in Helmand. So let's be reasonable. Out of the record, the assessment of the British military is unsustainable.

MR. PERKOVICH: The gentleman back here has the microphone. Yes, please.

Q: Hi, Ricky Goldstein, Human Rights Watch. Mr. Biddle's argument that the main strategic interest of the United States is preventing the destabilization of Pakistan next door – you say that the collapse of the Afghan state would be destabilizing for Pakistan, yet sending 68,000 troops – U.S. troops or NATO troops – is unthinkable because of public opinion there. My question is whether there are alternatives to those two strategies that will contribute to stabilizing or preventing the collapse of Pakistan?

Of course, there are no good solutions in all of this, but to what extent can sharing of intelligence, securing the very difficult-to-secure border, make a difference? Let's say that the Afghan state did collapse. What would be the best – least worst – options for the United States or the Europeans to prevent the collapse of Pakistan?

MR. PERKOVICH: And then, could we get the microphone quickly to this gentleman here? Right in the middle, yeah – please.

Q: Judd Heriot, documentary filmmaker. I'd like to direct a question to Steve – and I think you may have answered this in part – but assuming there was a partial or complete Taliban takeover in Afghanistan, what would be the motivation of that regime to destabilize Pakistan? I don't understand what the motivation would be. It would seem to me they would be more interested in consolidation, staying out of trouble for a while, avoiding any violent reaction from the U.S. or from Pakistan as a result of their actions.

MR. BIDDLE: Well, in the best tradition of such things, I'll start with the second and move to the first. Part of the motivation – first of all, let me suggest that the fall of the Karzai government doesn't necessarily lead to a Taliban governing alternative; it could simply lead to a civil war and chaos, which isn't necessarily a good thing for Pakistan either. But let's pursue the thread of what if a Taliban version 2.0 does reestablish itself in Kabul as a possibility.

This collection of actors that was sketched earlier have a variety of quid pro quos operating among them that are, in part, responsible for their ability to collaborate. And moreover, they will presumably continue to have assets that are either made available to each other or not on the basis of some form of exchange for the foreseeable future. Parties that collaborate with one another in the international system often do so according to a cost-benefit calculus in which they get something in exchange for what they proffer.

I could easily imagine that a Taliban government in Kabul could have gotten there, in part, through the support of entities within Pakistan whose interests are in Pakistan – not on the other side of the Durand Line – and who would expect something in exchange for their support and who may be in a position to provide continuing support for the government in Kabul as a part of some larger system of quid pro quos.

So one set of possibilities is that the very interconnections among these groups and the various kind of exchange of cost and benefit within them could continue even after some Taliban restoration in Kabul in ways that create a substantial threat to the stability of the government in Pakistan by the interconnections between the new government in Kabul and a variety of actors in Pakistan whose interests are essentially, Pakistan.

That sets aside the larger question of ideological linkages that go beyond this utilitarian quid pro quo. Many would argue that over time, the salience of ideology, conventionally understood, among the other motives of several of these entities is going up, not down, perhaps, because, for instance, the foot soldiers that all of these actors need to flesh out their movements are increasingly graduates of Pakistani madrassas, which have been radicalized as a result of exposure to bin Ladenism over the course of the last decade or the last generation.

For a variety of reasons, one could imagine a degree of colinearity of interest – imperfect, but nonetheless important enough to be threatening between a Taliban restoration, if that’s what we were to get following a Karzai collapse in Kabul and the collection of problems internal to Pakistan that could increase the scale of the threat to the Pakistani government as a downstream consequence. Let me move to the question of, are there other, better ways to stabilize Pakistan.

You suggested two – let me speak to them in particular. What about intelligence sharing and what about better border security? Most of the intelligence sharing is coming the other way, at the moment. Now, we have technological assets that the Pakistanis don’t have. At the end of the day, to know the relative utility of the intelligence going from them to us and from us to them requires access to information that wouldn’t be appropriate to discuss in this setting anyway.

But I suspect that against terrorist organizations, in which human intelligence through penetration of the terrorist organization is an unusually salient issue, I’m not sure that the intelligence we have to offer is so important to the Pakistanis that they would accept cost with respect to their own conception of where the threat lies in order to keep it flowing. I suspect that too much of it has gone the other way for that.

With respect to border security, I am not a border security optimist for this border. (Laughter.) I wouldn’t quite say that I despair the prospect of sealing the border, but I suspect that securing the population in Afghanistan is probably an easier military undertaking than sealing the border.

And were I to think about ways in which I could reduce the prospects of Pakistan collapsing as a result of internal conflict, I suspect the way to do that on the Afghan side of the Durand Line is reduce the ability of populated areas in Afghanistan to serve as havens for insurgents, rather than closing the thousands of potential border-crossing points in some of the worst interdiction terrain in the world.

MR. BERGEN: I’d just add, you know, the border is 1500 miles long. That’s the distance between Washington and Denver. It also happens to go through the middle of the Hindu Kush, so not an easy thing to secure.

MR. DORRONSORO: I agree about the border, but let’s – I mean, let’s face the consequences of that. If you cannot secure the border, how do you want to secure Helmand, which

has a border with Pakistan? Hit-and-run operations are very easy from Pakistan, to strike Afghanistan. And so I think that's a major thing. We should start from that and face the consequences.

MR. PERKOVICH: The gentlemen right back there, Shayla, and then this gentleman up here, please.

Q: This is Dr. Vadic (ph) from India. By chance, I am here. I have some reflections on the views expressed by the panelists, but there is no time. I basically believe that the Americans especially – the Obama administration – must have a first-class, urgent exit strategy from Afghanistan. So I have – within two minutes, I will make five points.

MR. PERKOVICH: Uh, how about we give you one minute and you make two points, okay? (Laughter.) There are other questions, too. It was a nice, try, but –

Q: The first one is, that please, don't send your armies in installments. Since you have made so much sacrifice in Afghanistan in terms of blood and money, please send at least 100,000 Jawans immediately into Afghanistan. This I suggested 7.5 years ago to Richard Haass in – (inaudible) – but nobody listened to it. This is one.

MR. PERKOVICH: That's not going to happen. So go ahead – what's the next idea?

Q: The next point is, once you send that number of Jawans, tell Hamid Karzai government that on the 31st of December, 2010, you will withdraw all of your soldiers from Afghanistan – they have to fight their own war. You are not supposed to shed blood for them. And how do you do it? Unless you raise an army of half a million Afghan Jawans, you cannot do it. Raising an army of half a million Jawans would cost you a very small fraction of expenditure that you are making in Afghanistan today. Not a single young boy will remain unemployed. And it won't be preyed by the Taliban or the smugglers or the opium growers. That will be a great panacea for the exit of Americans.

The third is handling the opium trade. The fourth is, in my view, is to create political parties in Afghanistan. There are one or two more points. Just one line – one line. India can help you a lot, and perhaps now, you are moving correctly in the right direction and India can play a major role in Afghanistan for the exit of the NATO forces. Thank you.

MR. PERKOVICH: Thank you. This gentleman right here.

Q: My name is Abdullah Wajid al-Abdel (ph) from the Voice of America. First of all, I would say that Afghanistan Taliban and Pakistani Taliban – in the eyes of Afghans, both are creation of ISI. It is – to the Afghan eye, Afghanistan is a project of Pakistan that even the Western countries are drawn into it for the longer interest of Pakistan. And for the United States strategy toward Afghanistan, many Afghans are complaining because they are not consulted about their future and how the strategy can work.

There is Afghan parliament and there are many, many groups in Afghanistan – not only in Afghanistan, but outside even in Washington – that they can be consulted in some parts of the strategy. And the other issue is the pacification of ISI. Why not ISI is punished or somehow

pressurized because of their long-term objectives that they have for Afghanistan and even Central Asia? Thank you.

MR. PERKOVICH: Okay, well, I have one comment, which is on the Pakistan question, which I think takes off partly from what Gilles said, and then one of the questions about – (inaudible). And it's the question of the leverage over Pakistan, and I think there is – I'm not saying it's what should be done – but right now, Pakistan, and for a long time, has it both ways because we're operating in Afghanistan, sending lots of money to Afghanistan and to Pakistan to facilitate that.

They know that we can't do it without the logistics through Pakistan and without the intelligence-sharing with Pakistan. So then, the things that Pakistan are doing to undermine our interests in Afghanistan, we go and tell them and they basically say thanks for sharing, we'll check into it. But they know they have the leverage because we depend on them for our operations in Afghanistan.

So in a sense, to the degree that it's desirable to change Pakistan's operations in Afghanistan, their calculation of interest, whether it's in Kashmir or vis-à-vis India in Afghanistan, taking away having it both ways would concentrate the mind. Now, whether – what result that leads to, we don't know. But right now, the Pakistani state has been able to avoid having a choice and been able to play us both ways, and – (audio break).

MR. DORRONSORO: And that's not only true for Pakistan, you know. It's true also for Russia. It's true also for Iran, you know, because everybody has leverage on the United States. For example, if we do something really bad against Iran, Iran can open its border to the Taliban, you know, and that would be a major, major problem for the United States.

And of course, if we want to send logistics for Tajikistan or Uzbekistan, we need to give something to the Russians or to the Uzbekistan or something. So that's why this war is putting the United States in a very weak position regionally. So the United States has no leverage on anybody right now; it's the contrary: Everybody has leverage on the United States because the United States has some people dying in Afghanistan.

MR. BERGEN: I agree with everything that's been said, but I just want to make one point, which changes the dynamic a little, which is when Baitullah Mehsud was killed, you know, the headline in Dawn, which is the main, quality English-language newspaper, was "Good Riddance Killer Baitullah." You know, three years ago, the headline would have been very different. There was sort of a lingering image that the Pakistani Taliban were sort of Robin Hood figures and basically were good guys. That image has evaporated.

Simultaneously, Baitullah Mehsud and his network, before he was killed, were the subject of at least 15 American drone strikes. The Pakistani politicians who used to complain about these strikes have stopped complaining about them completely, again, because our interests and their interests have somewhat aligned. They will never align perfectly, but they are closer together today than they were two years ago. So some of the things George has just raised, I think it has moved on from that in the past 2 years.

And the enemy of the perfect is not the reasonably okay, and what is going on in Pakistan right now is the reasonably okay. And I agree with Gilles – you know, expectations the Pakistani government is going to go in and knock out the Haqqani network – you know, I'm not holding my breath. Expectations that they're going to go in and arrest the Quetta Shura – similarly, I'm not holding my breath.

But you know, going after Mehsud, who, by the way, the United Nations said was the source of 80 percent of the suicide attackers in Afghanistan, is in our interests and the interests of all our allies, even if that 80 percent number is inflated, Baitullah Mehsud was certainly sending a lot of suicide bombers across the border into Afghanistan.

MR. BIDDLE: Just briefly with respect to this, kind of, consistent problem of Pakistani multiple interests, moral hazard really is at the heart of this, but that means that moral hazard really is at the heart of this! One of the reasons that the Pakistanis are able to continue to not serve our interests as well as we would like is because they understand that we really do have security interests in Pakistan. We don't make those go away by deciding that we're going to make them go away.

We don't make them go away by liquidating our position in Afghanistan. That doesn't mean that we suddenly can view with equanimity the possibility that the Pakistani government collapses and is replaced by a form of chaos that results in al-Qaida perhaps getting ahold of the nuclear weapon. That is not a threat that we can dismiss by changing U.S. policy.

Now, there are things at the margin we can do to reduce the severity of moral hazard somewhat. For example, I think the development of alternative lines of supply and communication into Afghanistan through the North so that we're not totally dependent on the two primary locks of the day through Pakistan is clearly a good thing, and we are in fact doing that.

But at the end of the day, the strategic reality of this situation is a very uncomfortable circumstance in which we're very unlikely to get unambiguous alignment of U.S. and Pakistani interests regardless of what we do because they perceive a threat that we do not perceive, and that will inevitably pull their policy away from what we would like.

And what we're about, then, in terms of U.S. policy, is trying to take a muddy, murky, unsatisfactory, very unsatisfying relationship between the United States and Pakistan and moving it in a favorable direction rather than an unfavorable direction by small steps, and trying to avoid an outcome – a collapse of the project in Afghanistan – that moves it, potentially dramatically, in the wrong direction.

The idea that we can somehow cut through this Gordian knot and provide an unambiguous situation in which our interests and theirs align and we no longer have this multiplicity of interests, I think we're not going to get.

MR. PERKOVICH: (Inaudible, off mike.)

Q: Hi, James Kitfield from National Journal magazine. I'd like to ask Peter and anyone else who likes to comment about sort of a threat assessment with al-Qaida because we've heard they're less than 2,000 people. When Hillary Clinton was recently in Pakistan, she kind of poked them for not going after al-Qaida. You hear that we're hitting a lot of their leaders. So if I could just get sort

of an idea of – since it's been used as the core reason we're sort of engaged so heavily in this region, what is our threat assessment of al-Qaida right now?

MR. BERGEN: I think the ability of al-Qaida to attack the United States – al-Qaida central to attack the United States right now is close to zero, in terms of a 9/11-type attack. In terms of pulling off something that was somewhere between the first Trade Center attack of '93 that killed six Americans and the Oklahoma City bomb of '95 that killed 168 Americans, they're still capable. The Najibullah Zazi case, you know, if the allegations are true, he probably would have killed scores of people with what Bruce Hoffman described as a plan that resembled Mumbai on the Hudson.

We have a guy called Vinus who went to an al-Qaida training camp from Long Island, astonishingly, in 2008. He conducted a rocket attack on an American base in Afghanistan in 2008. If he'd come back, again, he would have been a serious threat. So the problem is – and you know, there's some debate about the gentleman who did this attack in Fort Hood, Maj. Hasan. The story is still being reported out. ABC News is suggesting that he was trying to reach out to al-Qaida.

So the kinds of attacks that al-Qaida can do are, in my view, not national security threats like 9/11 was. They're sort of second-order threats, for the moment. But if we allowed the situation in Afghanistan to reverse, we would simply be back to where we were on September 10th, which is an al-Qaida that did have entire country at its disposal, was able to train thousands of people and was able to do major, mass casualty attacks.

And if the planes plot of the summer of 2006, by the way, had worked out, we would be having a very different conversation today. That was an al-Qaida-directed plot against seven American and Canadian and British airliners. If it had succeeded, there would be 1500 dead Americans, Canadians and Brits in the middle of the Atlantic with no forensics to find out who had done it. So al-Qaida is still interested in mass-casualty attacks and still has some capability and might be able to pull one off outside the United States that would still kill a lot of Americans.

MR. PERKOVICH: Just to clarify, though, but I think part of the point is that we wouldn't go back to September 10th, 2001, precisely because there's been a lot of adaptation and change on the other end – not from al-Qaida but on the end here and in other societies in terms of intelligence and policing and so on so that a number of these other plots have been disrupted, in part because of changes from 2001, which I think is.

MR. DORRONSORO: I mean, I agree with Peter, basically, but there is still a problem. It's that al-Qaida is not necessarily a very pyramidal organization, you know? What we have seen, for example in Turkey a few years ago, remember, is that you have cells – just two or three people; that's enough – in a country.

Their (inaudible) connection may be in Peshawar in the '90s or whatever – they can stay silent for years. And at some point, they are going to attack the U.S. or European interests somewhere. So my point is that it's extremely difficult to assess what al-Qaida can do from what they are now in Pakistan. So I think that I would be careful – you say just, probably from Pakistan directly, no major operation, but a politically significant operation directly from other countries.

MR. PERKOVICH: Well, I want to thank all of you for coming and I especially want to thank Stephen Biddle, Peter Bergen, Gilles Dorronsoro for their contribution and welcome you a good afternoon. Thanks a lot. (Applause.)

(END)