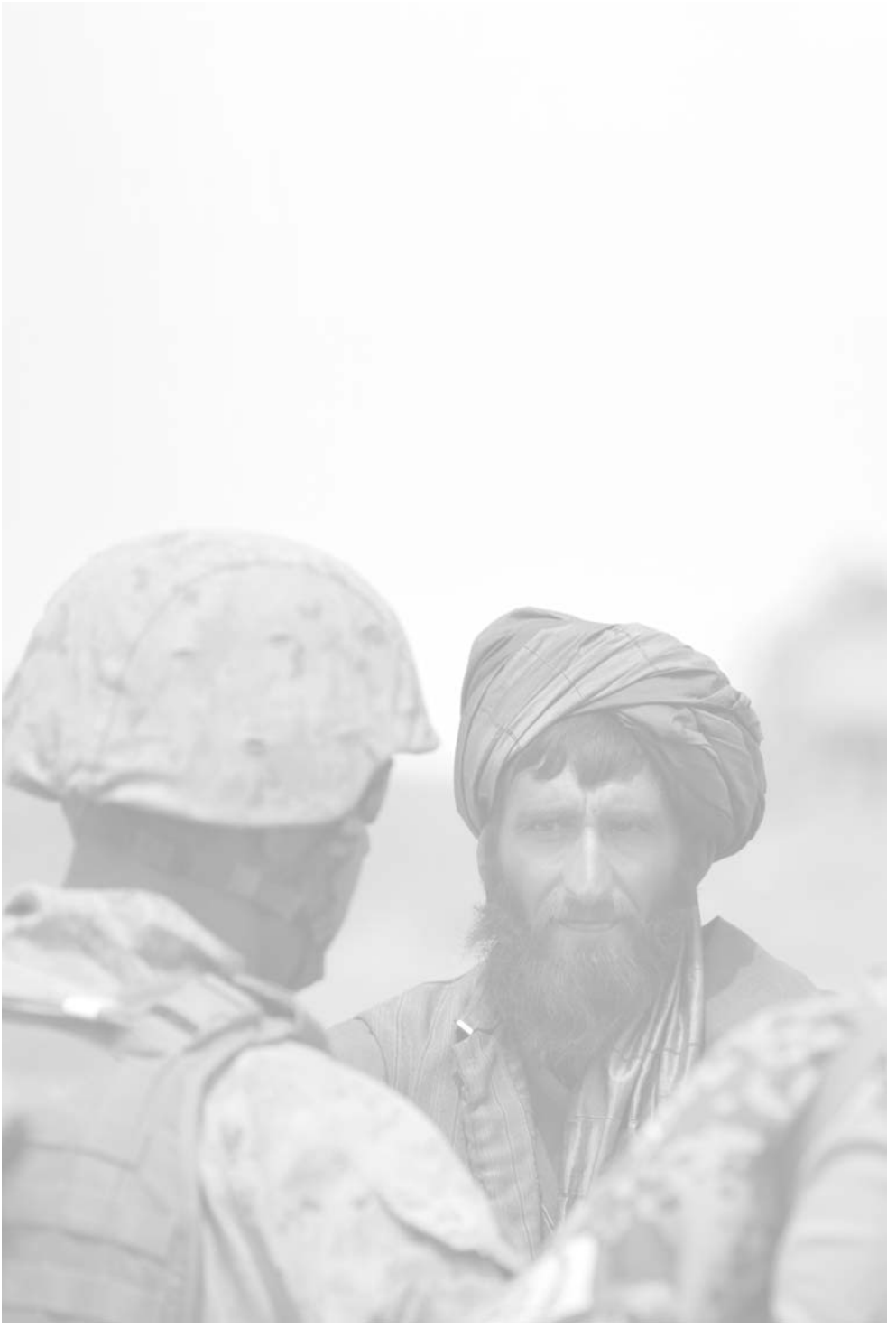
THE CENTER ON LAW AND SECURITY AT THE NYU SCHOOL OF LAW

COUNTERINSURGENCY:
America's Strategic Burden



The transcripts herein have been edited – the original audio from the conference is available for free download via the Center on Law and Security's podcast series on iTunes.

The speakers herein do not represent the Center on Law and Security.

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Image accompanying Executive Director's introduction by Guido Mannucci

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COUNTERINSURGENCY: America's Strategic Burden

November 20, 2009

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America's counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan and in Iraq has been the topic of many Center on Law and Security conferences and meetings – microcosms of the larger debate that the nation at large has been having both inside Washington and in the public arena. At the core of these discussions have been several questions – not only military but also historical, philosophical, and political. And in each area, the topic of security and how to assess and define it going forward has been a centerpiece of discussion. Ambassador Richard Holbrooke summed it up well at a conference held here in the fall of 2008:

> If there is no security, or insufficient security, the insurgents can intimidate people by blowing up a school, blowing up a bridge, or beheading teachers . . . . The rest of the people would say that they cannot build anything if we cannot protect them. This is the pattern in every insurgency that I have seen in the world. Security must come first.

A year later, the Center convened a day-long conference to brief security experts, policy experts, and government officials on the history of counterinsurgency theory and practice and on the progress of the current U.S. and international counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan. Overall, the participants expressed a wide range of disagreement about both the definition of counterinsurgency and whether it is the appropriate means of accomplishing the nation's goals in the region. One point of consensus, however, among those who spoke about counterinsurgency in Vietnam and among military and counterterrorism experts, was that the U.S. policy in Afghanistan had not yet achieved notable successes in more than a handful of disparate locations.

There was also, however, one important takeaway from the conference. It was that the U.S. COIN policy still has much work to do in order to operate effectively within the context of the complex political realities, however anticipated, that are so often associated with governmental dealings in Afghanistan – whether involving the fight against drugs, or infrastructure projects, civic projects or police training. Future policy discussions, our panelists urged, will depend on ever more creative, ever more open-minded ideas about the potential mix of diplomatic, military, and development initiatives that collectively define the territory encompassed within COIN doctrine.

Karen J. Greenberg, Executive Director

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Participant Biographies; November 20, 2009

Lt. Gen. David Barno, U.S. Army (ret.) is the director of the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies at National Defense University. Lt. Gen. Barno has served in a variety of command and staff positions in the continental United States and around the world. Subsequent to his selection to Major General in 2001, he served as Commanding General, United States Army Training Center and Fort Jackson. During this assignment, he deployed to Hungary in 2003 as the Commanding General of Task Force Warrior with the mission to train the free Iraqi forces in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. General Barno deployed in October 2003 to Afghanistan, commanding over 20,000 U.S. and Coalition Forces in Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan as part of Operation Enduring Freedom. For 19 months in this position, he was responsible to U.S. Central Command for regional efforts in Afghanistan, most of Pakistan, and the southern parts of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. His duties involved close coordination with the United States Department of State, the government of Afghanistan, the United Nations, NATO International Security Assistance Force, and the senior military leaders of many surrounding nations.

Peter Bergen is a print and television journalist; a Schwartz senior fellow at the New America Foundation in Washington, D.C.; a research fellow at New York University's Center on Law and Security; and CNN's national security analyst. He has written about al Qaeda, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq, and counterterrorism for newspapers and magazines including *The New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *The New Republic*, *Foreign Affairs, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal, The Atlantic, The Guardian, The Times, The Daily Telegraph, El Mundo*, and *Die Welt*. He has worked as a correspondent for National Geographic Television, Discovery Television, and CNN. From 2003-2007 he taught at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins University and at the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University in 2008. His most recent book, *The Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al Qaeda's Leader* (Free Press, 2006), was named one of the best non-fiction books of 2006 by *The Washington Post*. CNN produced a two hour-documentary, *In the Footsteps of bin Laden*, based on it. Bergen was one of the producers of the documentary, which was named the best documentary of 2006 by the Society of Professional Journalists and nominated for an Emmy. He is also the author of *Holy War, Inc.: Inside the Secret World of Bin Laden* (Free Press, 2001), a *New York Times* bestseller named one of the best non-fiction books of 2001 by *The Washington Post*. A documentary based on it, which aired on National Geographic Television, was nominated for an Emmy in 2002.

Conrad Crane is the Director of the U. S. Army Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, PA. He joined the Strategic Studies Institute in September 2000 after 26 years of military service that concluded with nine years as Professor of History at the U.S. Military Academy. He has written or edited books on the Civil War, World War I, World War II, and Korea, and has published articles on military issues in such journals as *The Journal of Strategic Studies, The Journal of Military History, The Historian*, and *Aerospace Historian*, as well as in a number of collections and reference books. Dr. Crane holds a

B.S. from the U.S. Military Academy and an M.A. and Ph.D. from Stanford University. He is also a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and the U.S. Army War College.

Roger W. Cressey served in senior cyber security and counterterrorism positions in the Clinton and Bush administrations. He has been a crisis manager in Africa, the Middle East, and the Balkans. He currently advises clients on homeland security, cyber security, and counterterrorism issues and is an on-air counterterrorism analyst for NBC News. Previously, he served as Chief of Staff to the President's Critical Infrastructure Protection Board at the White House from November 2001 to September 2002. From November 1999 to November 2001, he served as Director for Transnational Threats on the National Security Council staff, where he was responsible for coordination and implementation of U.S. counterterrorism policy. During this period, he managed the U.S. government's response to the Millennium terror alert, the USS *Cole* attack, and the September 11th attacks. Prior to his White House service, Mr. Cressey served in the Department of Defense, including as Deputy Director for War Plans. From 1991-1995, he served in the Department of State working on Middle East security issues. He has also served overseas with the U.S. Embassy in Israel and with United Nations peacekeeping missions in Somalia and the former Yugoslavia. While in the former Yugoslavia, he was part of a United Nations team that planned the successful capture of the first individual indicted for war crimes in Croatia. He has taught a graduate course on U.S. counterterrorism policy at Georgetown University, and is a recipient of the State Department's Meritorious and Superior Honor Awards and the Defense Department's Exceptional Civilian Service Award.

Janine Davidson was appointed as the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Plans in April 2009. Dr. Davidson joined the Defense Department from the faculty of George Mason University, where she was an Assistant Professor in the School of Public Policy, and the Brookings Institution, where she was a non-resident fellow for the 21st Century Defense Initiative. As Director, in the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Defense for Stability Operations, she oversaw the implementation of DoD Directive 3000.05, "Military Support to Stability, Security, Transition, and Reconstruction." She was the Department of Defense lead for the Interagency Counterinsurgency Initiative and was the head of the Consortium for Complex Operations, an interagency project to enhance education, training, and performance in complex emergencies, including conflict prevention, peace operations, stabilization, reconstruction, and counterinsurgency. Dr. Davidson previously served as Director, Counterinsurgency Studies with the Center for Adaptive Strategies and Threats at Hicks and Associates, Inc. Prior, she was an Associate and consultant at DFI Government Practice in Washington, D.C., where she directed projects for the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Reserve Affairs and for the Air Force Directorate of Strategic Planning. Dr. Davidson served in the U.S. Air Force as an aircraft commander and senior pilot for the C-130 and the C-17, and she has taught flying, aerodynamics, and navigation at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

C. Christine Fair is an assistant professor in the Center for Peace and Security Studies, within Georgetown University's Edmund A. Walsh School of Foreign Service. Previously, she served as a senior political scientist with the RAND Corporation, a political officer to the United Nations Assistance Mission to

Afghanistan in Kabul, and as a senior research associate in USIP's Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention. She is a senior fellow with the Counter Terrorism Center at West Point. She is a frequent commentator on television and radio, including CBS, BBC, Al Jazeera, CNN, Voice of America, Fox, Reuters, and NPR. Her research focuses upon political and military affairs in South Asia. She has authored, co-authored, and co-edited several books, including *Treading Softly on Sacred Ground:Counterinsurgency Operations on Sacred Space* (OUP, 2008), *The Madrassah Challenge: Militancy and Religious Education in Pakistan* (USIP, 2008), and *Fortifying Pakistan: The Role of U.S. Internal Security Assistance* (USIP, 2006), and has written numerous peer-reviewed articles covering a range of security issues in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. She is a member of the International Institute of Strategic Studies and the Council on Foreign Relations, serves on the editorial board of Studies in Conflict and Terrorism, and is the Managing Editor of *India Review*.

Steve Fondacaro has been the Program Manager for the Human Terrain System since its inception in 2006. He has over 30 years of active duty military service, and has served in wide variety of Infantry and Special Operations assignments in Korea, Panama, and Iraq. He has performed duties as a unit leader and commander in operational Infantry and Ranger units from platoon through Major Army Training Installation levels. In addition, he has been assigned as the Operations Officer in operational units at all levels from battalion through Field Army, and served on the Joint Staff J3 (Special Technical Operations) section. He has served as the Chief of the CINC's Initiatives Group for the Commanding General, United Nations Command/Combined Forces Command/ United States Forces, Korea, and has directed numerous focused studies for the Commanding General of U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, the Army Chief of Staff, and the Secretary of the Army. His final assignment was commander of the Joint IED Task Force-Iraq in 2006. Mr. Fondacaro's awards include the Legion of Merit (3 awards), Bronze Star Medal, Defense Meritorious Service Medal, Meritorious Service Medal (7 awards), Army Commendation Medal (4 awards), and the Army Achievement Medal (4 awards). He also has been awarded the Iraq Campaign Medal, Global War on Terrorism Medal, Overseas Service Medal (10 awards), and the National Defense Service Medal (3 awards). He holds the Army Master Parachutist Badge, Military Freefall Badge, British Jump Wings, and Ranger Tab.

Karen J. Greenberg is the Executive Director of the Center on Law and Security at the NYU School of Law. She is the author of *The Least Worst Place: Guantanamo's First 100 Days* (Oxford University Press, 2009), co-editor with Joshua L. Dratel of *The Enemy Combatant Papers: American Justice, the Courts, and the War on Terror* (Cambridge University Press, 2008) and *The Torture Papers: The Road to Abu Ghraib* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), editor of the books *The Torture Debate in America* (Cambridge University Press, 2006) and *Al Qaeda Now* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), and editor of the *NYU Review of Law and Security*. Her work is frequently featured in *The New York Times, The Washington Post,* the *Los Angeles Times*, the San Francisco *Chronicle, The Nation, The National Interest, Mother Jones*, TomDispatch.com, and on major news channels. She is a permanent member of the Council on Foreign Relations.

Stephen Holmes is the Walter E. Meyer Professor of Law at NYU School of Law and a faculty advisor at the Center on Law and Security. His fields of specialization include the history of liberalism, the disappointments of democratization after communism, and the difficulty of combating terrorism within the limits of liberal constitutionalism. In 2003, he was selected as a Carnegie Scholar. From 1997 to 2000, he was a professor of politics at Princeton. From 1985 to 1997, he was professor of politics and law at the Law School and Political Science Department of the University of Chicago. From 1979 to 1985, he taught at the Department of Government at Harvard University. He was also the editor-in-chief of the *East European Constitutional Review* from 1993-2003. He is the author of *Benjamin Constant and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Yale University Press, 1984), *The Anatomy of Antiliberalism* (Harvard University Press, 1993), *Passions and Constraint: On the Theory of Liberal Democracy* (University of Chicago Press, 1995), and co-author (with Cass Sunstein) of *The Cost of Rights: Why Liberty Depends on Taxes* (Norton, 1999), and most recently, *The Matador's Cape: America's Reckless Response to Terror* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

Thomas H. Johnson has conducted research and written on Afghanistan and South Asia for over two decades. His publications have appeared in the *American Political Science Review, International Security, Journal of Politics, Orbis: A Journal of World Affairs, Central Asian Survey, Military Review, China and Eurasian Forum Quarterly, Small Wars and Insurgencies, Strategic Insights, Public Opinion, The Brown Journal of World Affairs, Strategic Review, Politikon: South African Journal of Political Science*, and *Journal of Modern African Studies*, as well as numerous scholarly edited volumes and texts. His commentaries have appeared in media outlets including *The Washington Post, Atlantic Monthly, Wall Street Journal, Chicago Tribune, Baltimore Sun, Globe and Mail, Toronto Star, Newsday, Newsweek* and on *Jim Lehrer NewsHour, Christiane Amanpour Show,* BBC, CNBC, KCBS, KQED*,* National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* and *Morning Edition*, and Voice of America. Johnson has taught at the University of Southern California and the Foreign Service Institute, and frequently lectures at Service Academies. Before joining the faculty of the Naval Postgraduate School, he served on the faculty of George Mason University. He spent much of the summers 2008 and 2009 in southern Afghanistan conducting field research for a book manuscript on the culture and implications of the Taliban narratives as expressed through their *shabnamah* or "night letters," poetry, and music.

David Kilcullen is a globally recognized expert on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism. He is the author of *The Accidental Guerrilla* (Oxford University Press, 2009), which analyzes the complex interplay between local guerrillas and global terrorists in contemporary war zones from Africa to Southeast Asia. He has appeared widely in both print and TV media, including *Fareed Zakaria GPS, The Charlie Rose Show*, MSNBC, and others. His contributions to U.S. foreign policy in Iraq are also cited in Thomas Ricks' book *The Gamble*. Dr. Kilcullen joined Crumpton Group after a distinguished tenure as Special Advisor for Counterinsurgency to the Secretary of State. He also served as senior counterinsurgency advisor to General David Petraeus, the Commander of Multinational Forces in Iraq, and has been widely credited for his contribution to designing the Iraq "surge" and for his on-the-ground advice to the military, diplomatic aid, and intelligence communities. He

worked in the Middle East, South Asia, Europe, Africa and Southeast Asia in his role as chief counterterrorism strategist at the U.S. State Department. Dr. Kilcullen helped design and implement the Regional Strategy Initiative, the policy that drives U.S. counterterrorism diplomacy worldwide, and wrote the counterterrorism strategy for the 2006 U.S. Quadrennial Defense Review. He is a former Australian infantry officer with 22 years' service, including operational deployments in East Timor, Bougainville, and throughout the Middle East.

W. Patrick Lang is a retired senior officer of U.S. Military Intelligence and U.S. Army Special Forces (Green Berets). He served in the Department of Defense both as a serving officer and then as a member of the Defense Senior Executive Service for many years. He is a highly decorated veteran of several of America's overseas conflicts, including the war in Vietnam. He was trained and educated as a specialist in the Middle East by the U.S. Army and served in that region for many years. He was the first Professor of the Arabic Language at the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York. In the Defense Intelligence Agency, he was the Defense Intelligence Officer for the Middle East, South Asia and Terrorism, and later the first Director of the Defense Humint Service. For his service in DIA, he was awarded the Presidential Rank of Distinguished Executive, the equivalent of a British knighthood. After leaving government he was a business executive for 10 years in a company operating in the Middle East and South Asia.

Montgomery McFate is the Senior Social Scientist for the U.S. Army's Human Terrain System. Previously, she was a Research Staff Member at the Institute for Defense Analysis and a Jennings Randolph Fellow at U.S. Institute of Peace. She has also worked at the U.S. Navy's Office of Naval Research from 2003-2005, where she was awarded a Distinguished Public Service Award by the Secretary of the Navy. Before coming to ONR, Dr. McFate was a social scientist in RAND's Intelligence Policy Center. She received a B.A. from University of California at Berkeley, a PhD in Anthropology from Yale University, and a J.D. from Harvard Law School. Her PhD dissertation concerned British counterinsurgency in Northern Ireland. Dr. McFate's legal background includes a clinical internship on the United States Attorney's Office Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Squad, a fellowship at Human Rights Watch, and experience as a litigation associate at the law firm of Baker & McKenzie in San Francisco. She has published in such journals as *Journal of Conflict Studies, Military Review,* and *Joint Forces Quarterly*.

John Nagl is the President of the Center for a New American Security. He is also a member of the Defense Policy Board, a Visiting Professor in the War Studies Department at Kings College of London, a life member of the Council on Foreign Relations and the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and a member of the International Institute of Strategic Studies. He was a Distinguished Graduate of the United States Military Academy Class of 1988 and served as an armor officer in the U.S. Army for 20 years, retiring with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. His last military assignment was as commander of the 1st Battalion, 34th Armor at Fort Riley, Kansas, training Transition Teams that embed with Iraqi and Afghan units. He led a tank platoon in Operation Desert Storm and served as the operations officer of a tank battalion task force in Operation Iraqi Freedom. He earned his doctorate from Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar. He served as a Military

Assistant to two Deputy Secretaries of Defense and later worked as a Senior Fellow at the Center for a New American Security. He also earned a Master of the Military Arts and Sciences Degree from the Command and General Staff College, where he received the George C. Marshall Award as the top graduate. He was awarded the Combat Action Badge by General James Mattis of the United States Marine Corps, under whose leadership he fought in Al Anbar in 2004. Dr. Nagl is the author of *Learning to Eat Soup with a Knife: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Malaya and Vietnam* and was on the writing team that produced the U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual. His writings have been published in *The New York Times, The Washington Post, The Wall Street Journal,* and *Foreign Policy*, among others. Dr. Nagl has appeared on *The NewsHour with Jim Leher,* NPR*, 60 Minutes, Washington Journal*, and *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart*.

Joanna Nathan was the Senior Analyst for the International Crisis Group in Afghanistan from May 2005-July 2009. Based in Kabul with fieldwork around the country, she focused on elections and the new representative institutions, security sector reform, and the growing violence and counter insurgency efforts. Drawing on her ICG work on Taliban propaganda, she has a chapter, "Reading the Taliban," in the new volume, *Decoding the New Taliban: Insights from the Afghan Field*. In 2003/04, she worked on a media development project in Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif, which later evolved into Afghanistan's first independent news agency. She is currently undertaking a Master of Public Policy at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University while maintaining ties to Afghan issues as a member of the Afghanistan Analysts Network.

Nir Rosen spent over four years reporting from Iraq, focusing on the Iraqi side of the story, particularly on the various religious movements and militias that soon formed, and on the civil war and crisis of internal and external displacement. He was most recently in Iraq in March 2009 and most recently in Afghanistan in July 2009. His work on Iraq has been published by *The New Yorker, The New York Times Magazine, Harper's, Rolling Stone*, and others. Rosen has also worked on documentaries in Iraq, including one for British Channel 4, and he filmed the scenes in Iraq for the groundbreaking documentary *No End in Sight*, which won an award at the Sundance film festival and was nominated for an Academy Award. He has also consulted for the advocacy group Refugees International, and wrote reports for them about Iraqi refugees and the internally displaced. His book *In the Belly of the Green Bird: The Triumph of the Martyrs in Iraq* was published in 2006 and republished in soft cover under the title *The Triumph of the Martyrs* in 2008. Rosen has also reported from Afghanistan, Pakistan, the former Yugoslavia, Somalia, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Kenya, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Yemen, Turkey and Egypt. His new book on the civil war in Iraq and its impact on the Arab world will be published in 2010. He is a Fellow at the New York University Center on Law and Security.

Michael A. Sheehan is a Distinguished Fellow at the Center on Law and Security, a security consultant, and author of the recently published *Crush the Cell* (Crown, 2008). He is best known for his work in counterterrorism, peacekeeping, and law enforcement operations. Sheehan was the Deputy Commissioner of Counterterrorism at the NYPD from 2003 to 2006. Prior to this he was the Assistant Secretary General in the Department of Peacekeeping Operations at the UN, where he

was responsible for mission support to UN military and police peacekeeping forces around the world. In the late 1990s, Sheehan served as the Ambassador at Large for Counterterrorism and Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of International Organizations. Sheehan served at the White House under three National Security Advisors and two Presidents (George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton). He is a retired LTC of the U.S. Army Special Forces and was awarded the Combat Infantry Badge among other decorations for his service in the Army.

Adam L. Silverman was the Field Social Scientist and Team Leader for Human Terrain Team Iraq 6 assigned to the 2BCT/1AD from October 2007 to October 2008. Upon his redeployment to the U.S., he served as the U.S. Army Human Terrain System Strategic Advisor through June 2009. During 2008 and 2009, Dr. Silverman has conducted a number of briefings for high-level military and civilian personnel from the Department of Defense and Department of State. He served as a socio-cultural subject matter expert for the U.S. Central Command Af/Pak Working Group in spring 2009 and has also lectured on COIN, Iraq, and Afghanistan at the U.S. Military Academy, the University of South Florida, the University of Miami, Florida International University, Cambridge University, and Seton Hall University. He is a regular contributor on COIN, U.S. foreign policy, Iraq, and Afghanistan to Sic Semper Tyrannis: A Committee of Correspondence, as well as a regular guest columnist at Informed Comment, and is working on two books: Voices of the *Mada'in: A Tribal History and Social Study and Mapping the Human Terrain: Conceptualizations* and *Applications of Social Science Research for Policy Making and Practice.*

Ken Silverstein is the Washington Editor for *Harper's Magazine* and writes Washington Babylon for *Harper's* online. A former reporter for the *Los Angeles Times*, Silverstein has covered such topics as intelligence collaboration between the CIA and controversial foreign governments in Sudan and Libya, political corruption in Washington, and links between American oil companies and repressive foreign governments. His 2004 series "The Politics of Petroleum," co-written with T. Christian Miller, won an Overseas Press Club Award. His stories on ties between the government of Equatorial Guinea and major U.S. companies – including Riggs Bank, ExxonMobil, and Marathon Oil – led to the convening of a federal grand jury, and to investigations by the Senate and the Securities and Exchange Commission. His report, co-written with Chuck Neubauer, on a lobbying business opened by Karen Weldon, daughter of Rep. Curt Weldon of Pennsylvania, led to the opening of an investigation by the House Ethics Committee. Silverstein had been a contributing editor to *Harper's* before joining the *Times*. One of his pieces for the magazine, "The Radioactive Boy Scout," became a highly acclaimed book of the same title published by Random House in 2004. He has also written for *Mother Jones, Washington Monthly*, *The Nation, Slate*, and *Salon*. From 1989 to 1993 he was a correspondent for the Associated Press in Brazil.

Steven Simon is adjunct senior fellow for Middle Eastern studies at the Council on Foreign Relations and the Goldman Sachs visiting professor in public policy at Princeton University. Prior to joining CFR, Mr. Simon specialized in Middle Eastern affairs at the RAND Corporation. He came to RAND from London, where he was the deputy director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies and Carol Deane senior fellow in U.S. security

studies. Before moving to Britain in 1999, Mr. Simon served at the White House for over five years as director for global issues and senior director for transnational threats. During this period, he was involved in U.S. counterterrorism policy and operations as well as security policy in the Near East and South Asia. These assignments followed a fifteen-year career at the U.S. Department of State. Mr. Simon is the author of the February 2007 Council Special Report "After the Surge: The Case for U.S. Military Disengagement from Iraq." He is the coauthor of *The Age of Sacred Terror* (Random House, 2002), which won the Council on Foreign Relations 2004 Arthur Ross Book Award, and coeditor of *Iraq at the Crossroads: State and Society in the Shadow of Regime Change* (Oxford University Press/IISS, 2003). He is also the coauthor of *Building a Successful Palestinian State* (Rand Corporation, 2005) and *The Arc: A Formal Structure for a Palestinian State* (Rand Corporation, 2005). Most recently, he coauthored *The Next Attack* (Henry Holt, 2005), which was a finalist for the Lionel Gelber Prize in 2006. He is working on a new book, with Daniel Benjamin, on Muslim integration in Europe. Mr. Simon has published in *Time, The New York Times, The Washington Post, Financial Times, The Wall Street Journal, Christian Science Monitor*, and others. He is a frequent guest on CNN, BBC, ABC, *60 Minutes, Nightline, The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer*, Fox, and NPR.

Martin N. Stanton is a retired Infantry/Foreign Area Officer with 20 years of working almost exclusively in USCENTCOM and the USCENTCOM AOR. He has participated in Operations Desert Shield/Desert Storm serving as an advisor to the Saudi Arabian National Guard; Operation Restore Hope in Somalia serving as an infantry battalion operations officer; Operations Desert Thunder I, II and Desert Fox serving as the commander of U.S. Army Forces Qatar; Operation Enduring Freedom serving as the senior ground forces liaison to the Pakistan Army; and Operation Iraqi Freedom serving as the senior civil military planner for 3rd U.S. Army (ARCENT) from July 2002-July 2004 and as the Reconciliation operations chief for Multi National Corps-Iraq from June 2007-June 2008. From July 2004-June 2007, he worked as the ARCENT liaison to CENTCOM. After returning from Iraq in 2008, he was assigned to the commander's initiatives group of CENTCOM and served as the team chief for the Afghanistan Pakistan team for the CENTCOM Theater Strategic Assessment Team from November 2008 to March 2009. Colonel Stanton retired from the U.S. Army on Sept. 30, 2008, after 33 years of service. He is employed as the senior analyst for the Afghanistan-Pakistan Intelligence Center of Excellence at USCENTCOM in Tampa. He is the author of two books (*Somalia on Five Dollars a Day* and *The Road to Baghdad*) and over 40 magazine articles on military subjects.

The Panels

Counterinsurgency Today: Theory vs. Reality

Panelists:
Conrad Crane, Janine Davidson, Montgomery McFate, John Nagl, Adam Silverman

Moderator:
Peter Bergen

Janine Davidson, Peter Bergen, Conrad Crane, and Adam Silverman. *Photo by Dan Creighton.*

Karen J. Greenberg:
Our last conference, which was on civilian-military relations in the broadest sense, focused on the ways the military deals with civilian communities, social services, and civil society building.

While the audience was listening to the people on the panels, I was standing as I always do in the back of the room and heard the discontent: What do these guys know about counterinsurgency? They are too young to know. They haven't read their history books. They don't know enough about Vietnam. They don't know enough about small wars. I think that was probably a little overstated, but the discontent was interesting. So we are having this conference today to think about the issue of counterinsurgency. What is it? What has it been? Where is it going? How well does it serve us? I think we are all going to learn something today.

On an episode of *60 Minutes* in September, General Stanley McChrystal faced his troops at a meeting and said, "The question is not whether we're making progress. The question is whether we're making enough progress fast enough." He continued by saying that if progress is made, but not quickly enough, "then people come visit, I come visit you, and every time I visit you, you say 'We're doing good. We're doing better. We made progress.' It doesn't matter, because at the end of the day you lost. At some point you lost." That struck me because we do hear, "it's getting better, it's getting better." The real issue is not whether it is working but what it means for it to be working. We all want it to come out right in the end, but we need to know what that would mean and what the U.S. role in it would be.

I think one of the most significant lessons that the Center has taken away from its study of the war on terror for the past seven years concerns how our categories and our understanding of things keep changing. Essentially, when our children and grandchildren have the luxury of looking back on where we have been, they are going to see that there was a theoretical football being passed back and forth between the courts, the executive, and the military, and that it has not stopped. Every time it gets passed, the definition of such things as "military commissions," "counterinsurgency," "insurgency," and maybe even "terrorism" get tweaked a little bit. You should consider this conference an attempt, for

starters, to get a handle on the language that we are using, and beyond that to begin to understand not only how hard it has been but also how exciting it is to have the opportunity to rethink so much of what we do in this country.

> **"In this type of war, perception is more important than reality. It is not what you have done that is most important; it is what people think you have done."**
> *Conrad Crane*

Peter Bergen:
Arguably the most knowledgeable group of people in the country on the issue of counterinsurgency will be speaking throughout the day. We begin with Dr. Conrad Crane.

Conrad Crane:
In November 2005, I got a call from my old West Point classmate David Petraeus, who said, "I've got a mission for you." It included John Nagl and Montgomery McFate, too, with Janine Davidson on the periphery of the efforts as well. So, in some ways this panel is a gathering of the usual suspects. But one thing I want to mention about the writing of the counterinsurgency (or "COIN") doctrine is that it was part of a much broader process. General Petraeus gets a lot of credit for the idea of rewriting the doctrine, but so should General James Mattis of the Marine Corps. The purpose of the doctrine was not to win the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan but to create better learning organizations from both the Army and Marine Corps as part of a much broader process of change, based on the perceptions of those two distinguished soldier scholars.

This was a true joint process between the Army and Marine Corps. Most chapters had both an Army and a Marine author. My role resembled that of editor in chief, while John was a kind of managing editor and Monty concentrated on intelligence. It was an eclectic group that included academics, historians, soldiers, Marines, and media personnel. The Petraeus approach was of inclusion. Anybody who criticized the manual became part of the team. I agreed with the general that we should have a vetting conference and suggested that we bring in 30 smart people to talk about the doctrine. He brought in 150. It was quite a three-ring circus at Fort Leavenworth, but I think the end product fits the Michael Howard definition of military doctrine, which is basically not to be so wrong that the soldiers in the field cannot make the adjustments they need to be successful in combat.

Doctrine, as the American military sees it, is not a substitute for the commander's judgment. It is not law. Innovation is always encouraged, and much of what has happened in Afghanistan and Iraq has gone beyond the doctrine. Many smart soldiers and Marines have come up with better ideas than we could think of.

Now I'll put out one caution about the manual because there are an immense number of straw men out there to be knocked down. You need to buy it and read it. Do not mistake execution for doctrine; there are different ways to apply it. The Petraeus approach in Iraq is one way, but there are other ways as well. Doctrine is always an attempt to balance insights from the past with contemporary best practices and visions of the future. However, the way the doctrine is processed and proofed always tends to pull it back toward contemporary best practices. So, there is not as much future in there as I would like, there is not as much past in there as I would like – there are many influences from Iraq and Afghanistan,

but that is the nature of the process. For instance, one of the paradoxes I wrote about was that *most* important decisions in counterinsurgency are not made by generals. Guess who the last people to review a doctrinal manual are? That particular paradox did not survive as I initially intended; it ended up as *many* important decisions in counterinsurgency are not made by generals. At least they kept it, but they magnified their role a bit.

In some places I think the doctrine has been very right, as I watch it play out in Iraq and Afghanistan: the emphasis on "clear, hold, build" and not "clear and leave;" the synchronization of multiple lines of effort; the importance of sociocultural intelligence, of which Dr. McFate was the pioneer in the manual; the need for campaign design to disaggregate enemies in a mosaic war. You have to figure out your problem set. This is not your grandmother's insurgency. These are loose coalitions of different approaches and players. Some you can turn, some you cannot; some you can talk to, some you have to shoot. You have to figure that out.

Because of that you need decentralized command and control – you have to empower down. I would say that it is a colonels' war in Iraq. They can control the key assets, the key battle space. In different places it may even be a lower-level war. It is very rarely a generals' war. The military has to be prepared to do nonmilitary tasks, and information operations dominate. In this type of war, perception is more important than reality. It is not what you have done that is most important; it is what people think you have done. That is where I think the emphasis of the manual is right on the mark and has been very important.

There are some things that need fixing. This was done in less than a year, which is light speed for military doctrine. We had to get it out to the field. One of John Nagl's key roles on the writing team was as our prod to get this done. We need more on carrots and sticks. How do you get your friends and allies to do what you think they need to do? We need more options when there are not enough resources to do clear, hold, and build, which is a resource-intensive approach to counterinsurgency. We need to do some more on other approaches when there aren't the same number of resources. We need a better discussion about how to sequence events. One of the worst things you can do in a situation with many sectarian divides is hold elections soon because all you do is lock in all those divides, which is exactly what we did in Iraq. We also need better definitions, which is a problem throughout the field. I am commuting between this conference and a conference on irregular warfare at West Point. It is a great conference with many sharp cadets and scholars but, of course, nobody really knows what irregular warfare is.

The joint publication 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, which just came out, has started to redress some of these faults and shortcomings. The FM 3-24 will be rewritten to adjust to some of those changes and to adapt from what we have seen in Iraq and Afghanistan. Perhaps the best and most important part of the manual is Dr. Nagl's great contribution: the theme of "learn and adapt," which is really the theme for the whole manual. It also gives us an excuse if we got something wrong.

I am concerned that the doctrine is not being read in the field. The manual has been out for three years, but people are just too busy, I guess. They are learning it from the education process, but they just do not seem to have the time to read it themselves.

Monty McFate's stuff was revolutionary but I hate the term "human terrain." People are not terrain. I think we have to be careful how we approach it. I am also concerned about the soul of Special Operations forces.

What is wrong with this scenario? If you want to do counterinsurgency or train host-nation forces, you get conventional forces; if you want to kill somebody, you get a special operator. What is wrong with this? We have reversed roles. I am worried about the Special Operations community getting too wrapped up in direct action and losing many of the things that make them unique in these environments. Has the reform pendulum swung too far or not far enough? There is a big debate within the Army. How much counterinsurgency do we do? How much do we not do? I am concerned about the continuing lack of interagency capability.

"We organize, train, and equip the military to be ready to do the nation's business, but we only let them do it when Congress approves. That check creates an inherent "short-termitis" that is incompatible with counterinsurgency in and of itself."

Janine Davidson

I am also concerned that FM 3-24 is not a national security strategy, but in a vacuum it seems to have become one. The Afghanistan decision has to be made under the auspices of a much broader strategy that answers certain questions: Can we afford to do counterinsurgency? Can we afford not to do counterinsurgency? How does Afghanistan fit within broad strategic interests? There is a big question that I have not heard anybody ask about the surge in Afghanistan: What is the rest of government other than the military going to do? We are going to send 40,000 troops; how many foreign service officers are we going to send? How many USAID people are we going to send?

Janine Davidson:

Let me start out by talking a little bit about doctrine, about how far I think the military and the government in general have come, and then about some of the remaining obstacles.

First of all, to piggyback on Dr. Crane's discussion, doctrine is either a lagging indicator of learning or it can be an engine of change – once you put it down, the leadership endorses it, puts it into training and education, and everybody starts to learn it. In this case I think it is sort of both. We are writing what we are learning because we are in a period of protracted conflict, and then we are kicking it back out to teach people how to do it. But what doctrine is *not* – and I think this is really important, given the title of today's conference – is grand strategy. We may have a grand strategy gap, but I would contend that we always have a grand strategy gap. It is a perennial problem. Doctrine tells us how to do stuff but does not tell us why, where, or when we are going to do it. So it is a conundrum.

I see doctrine as sort of like the Bible; not everybody reads it, but for some reason they all quote it and somehow figure out what is in it. That happens through the training and through our institutions, which have done a pretty good job. So let me talk a little bit about some of the things that we have learned so far as an institution, but then also about what the challenges are.

We have two obstacles to some of these pieces that we have learned. One is knowledge in and of itself, and the other is the bureaucracy and the politics in and of itself. So first is the competing theories: We are developing all these new theories and we are writing some of

them down, but we are still debating them. I am going to go through my five favorites for this week.

The first is about governance. We agree that counterinsurgency is about governance. It is a competition for governance, but we disagree over the level at which we should intervene and where it is the most important. Should we concentrate our efforts at the local and formal level, or should we concentrate our efforts at the state/national level? Some people say that we should obviously do both. But then the question is how to link the two. We are still debating, and while we debate it is hard to tell military guys in the field and their civilian counterparts what to do and how to act.

> **"Until we start lining up our words with our execution, until we are focused on deeds rather than just words or slogans, stability in Afghanistan, economic development, and legitimacy are not going to be possible."**
>
> *Montgomery McFate*

The second is the sense that it is all about the economy. Everybody sort of agrees about that, but then again we disagree or are still debating or just really do not know how to apply our normal development models in a conflict zone. On the conflict side, in Iraq for example, there is a big debate where you have had some of the military guys saying, "Get these guys off the street. Give them jobs and they'll stop shooting at us." The economists and the development experts will say, "It's not that easy. You can't just mess with the economy like that. For a short-term gain you are going to have a longer-term problem."

The third is corruption and crime. We have different standards about them. We all agree that it is a problem, but we do not necessarily have an idea what to do about it as an outside force. We agree, for instance, that the drug trade is fueling the fight, but we disagree about what to do about that. Is it about eradication? Is it about alternative crops? Is it about something else? What do we do about the transnational linkages? We tend to focus on Afghanistan or focus on Pakistan or focus on country by country because we are a nation- state and that is how we look at things. But they bleed over and have transnational links.

Number four is transition. We talk about the endgame as turning it over to the host nation, that the end of the intervention is not the same as the end of the conflict. Our role is to get the country on a path to something better, a new normal. But it is not clear that we know what that looks like or how to do that, and we are experimenting with it right now in Iraq. It is not a perfect science – we know what we are supposed to do but we are not sure how.

Along with that, metrics. How do we know that our efforts are working? What do we look for on the ground? What do we measure? How do we measure it? How do we know? How do we know when it is time to leave? And all that wraps into the transition piece as well. So there is progress being made intellectually and academically, but then how are we going to translate that while we are in a period of conflict?

Along with these academic and intellectual debates reverberating into our doctrine, we have very real bureaucratic and institutional barriers as a government. Some of our partner nations have similar problems, but let me just highlight my five favorites this week for this category as well.

The first is the perennial mismatch between military and civilian agencies in

terms of capabilities and capacities. It is mostly a capacity issue, and people focus on things like the fact that the U.S. Agency for International Development does not even have enough personnel to man an aircraft carrier. That is just one indicator. USAID and the State Department are much smaller just in numbers. People often talk about the numbers and the capacity, but they do not talk about the capability. While there are development experts in USAID doing amazing work on the ground, we still have intellectual debates about how to apply their models and how to work together with the military. Moreover, I think there is a huge misperception on the military side about what the State Department actually does – that if we could just get the State Department in there, things would be better. But you have to ask yourself, what do you want those diplomats to do? Dig wells? I think we really need to be more realistic about what we expect from our civilian agencies and what we expect the military to do.

You could make the case that the military should do everything, but I do not think that is necessarily the answer either. Even if we decided that, there are laws in the military against some of these activities, for instance – and that is my second point – legal authorities that have the military and civilians fighting over not only what they can do but what they should do, what they are allowed to do. There is a big debate about the authorities to train and equip security forces, which, if you read Con Crane's manual, you will know is probably one of the most important things in a counterinsurgency. And there are legal restrictions on having military forces, our most capable branch, training police forces. Again, if you read the doctrine, police forces are what matters, and so we have an institutional problem there. If it is not part of the Ministry of Interior or Ministry of Defense, then the military is not supposed to be in there. That is a problem.

The third is the need for institution building. We all know that there is such a need in counterinsurgency, but our institutions are not built for that. We do not have institutions that are designed to build ministries of agriculture. We have an Agriculture Department that focuses on our agricultural goods overseas. The Justice Department, Treasury Department, and Commerce Department also do not function abroad as people might think they do. If you talk to the small group of officials in the Commerce Department who have been working in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, they will say that they are dedicated to the task, but it is what they call an unfunded mandate. They are not geared for it. So if we expect other agencies to do this kind of work, we need to structure them for it.

The fourth problem is sustainment. We know that counterinsurgency is a protracted kind of a conflict, and that if we as a nation decide to intervene in such a situation, it is going to take a long time. But our systems are not set up for long-term anything. Our funding mechanisms run in two-year cycles, and when we are deployed oversees for the military, as many of you know, we have to operate on supplemental funding, which is by design. We organize, train, and equip the military to be ready to do the nation's business, but we only let them do it when Congress approves. That check creates an inherent "short-termitis" that is incompatible with counterinsurgency in and of itself. Trying to get multiyear funding is definitely difficult. This sort of short-termitis leads to what I call a "cheap coat of paint" civil–military dynamic, whereby savvy senior military officers whose job it is to come up with the plan and the strategy for certain operations are cognizant of the fact that the clock is ticking back home. So their challenge is to remain focused on their task while telling their civilian bosses that it is

going to take a certain number of years. They know they won't get that sort of time, so they create a strategy that is shorter term, even though they know in their heart of hearts that realistically it is not going to work. It is like putting on coat after coat of cheap paint that you know is not going to work. By the time you finally try invest in the good stuff, you are out of money or the Washington clock has run out. So it becomes a self-fulfilling prophesy. I think we really need to watch for that in civil-military relations.

The last obstacle to America's participation in counterinsurgency is the very ambivalence about the U.S. role in general. This gets back to the grand strategy piece. It is hard to sustain support for such an operation if there is great debate over whether we should be doing it in the first place. This has been a perennial debate in American national security about how far forward we want to put our troops, how far into other countries' business we want to get, and whether or not that is actually linked to our national interests.

"[T]he issue becomes not whether the doctrine makes sense or not as a conceptualization for an end state. It does. The issue becomes, in the places where we are trying to apply it, whether that end state can ever be achieved."

Adam Silverman

Montgomery McFate:
I want to touch on the difference between the theory and reality of counterinsurgency by describing something I witnessed in Afghanistan about two weeks ago – the famous firefight in Kapisa.

One of the central points of counterinsurgency theory is that the goal is to move a host-nation population from active or passive support of an insurgent group to active support of a legitimate host-nation government. I want to call attention to the word "legitimate," which you could quickly define as a government that meets the needs of the people for security, for services, for economic and political participation, and for the possibility of a future for their children.

I do not think it will surprise many people here that in Afghanistan, the issue is that representatives of the central government and the central government itself are generally not considered by the Afghan people to be legitimate. So here is a story that actually touches on some of the important themes that Dr. Davidson mentioned: the problems of corruption and crime – how we define them and how they affect people in the countries where we are engaged in a variety of operations; the problem of institution building in somebody else's country and also building institutions in our own country that are capable of carrying out the mission that we have set for ourselves; problems of stabilization and what that actually means; and the role of other entities of the United States government beyond the military.

In a place called Afghanya Valley, where there was heavy fighting during the Soviet war, there are many angry villagers now whose homes have been destroyed in order to widen a road. We all know how important the roads in Afghanistan are from reading David Kilcullen's book. What you have here is a situation in which a U.S. Provincial Reconstruction Team issued a contract to a local contractor worth about $4.4 million. The contractor has a good reputation. It is owned and run by a Tajik and a Pashtun, both of

them European trained and educated. Unfortunately, the contract was written with no oversight – that is, no way to actually monitor it and no contract design – meaning that there was no attention given to how the contract would be executed and delivered. (That is a whole other story having to do with how we as a government build institutions and how we implement our own processes in other countries).

There is no more money in the contract to pay people for their houses that are being destroyed, so it is a question of eminent domain. First of all, does the government of Afghanistan have the right to take people's property? There are many interesting legal questions there because at least three different legal systems are operating simultaneously in Afghanistan and there is little resolution about which one is supreme. That has not been resolved. Another question is who is responsible for the payment. Is it the contractor? Is it the U.S. government? Is it the government of Afghanistan? There are many open issues in this story.

The fact of the matter is that the road is not being built and people are not being paid for their houses that have been destroyed. Why not? We are trying to do the right thing, which is to build a road for the people of Afghanya Valley, but it is not happening, so why isn't it? Well, it is in part because local government officials want to do everything they can to prevent this road from being built, including looking the other way from Taliban activity, such as the emplacement of improvised explosive devices. And the Afghan National Army is complicit, either turning the other way and not doing anything about the Taliban activity there or participating directly when off duty in the destruction of the project. Again, why doesn't the local government and the ANA want this particular road to be built? It turns out that the governor of the province owns a construction business and wants the contract. Furthermore, the local ANA commander, who is a colonel and was trained and educated by the United States in the United States, is the governor's nephew, so he has no incentive whatsoever to help this road to be built. In fact, he has every incentive to help the Taliban prevent it.

The people who live there know that the governor of the province and the ANA and all of the henchmen who work for the governor and the ANA are corrupt. The contractors here, who are trying to do the right thing and do a good job, are basically perceived as victims of the government. And the United States is perceived as a behemoth that has absolutely no clue whatsoever about what's going on and is driven by the zeal to get things done, to build things like roads, without really thinking about the context, especially the political context, in which the construction projects are taking place.

There are many issues that you can tease out of this story. There are many platitudes at the ISAF level about enabling the legitimacy of the local government, as well as slogans about stability and development at the district or local level. When you talk to Afghans, the reality is that the government is not legitimate. Until we start lining up our words with our execution, until we are focused on deeds rather than just words or slogans, stability in Afghanistan, economic development, and legitimacy are not going to be possible.

The whole structure of the state of Afghanistan is basically engineered to enable this type of corruption. First of all, in the Afghan constitution the governors are not elected. They are appointed by Hamid Karzai. So it is not a representative government, and the people who live there know that. They are aware of what the constitution says. They know that the governor is not representing their interests. Furthermore, there are no con-

flict-of-interest laws. In the United States, if you are a general officer in the U.S. Army, you can neither own nor even serve on the board of a company that sells military equipment that you might be responsible for purchasing. In Afghanistan, there are no such laws. So there are people who use their positions of authority, whether appointed or elected, in order to enable the extraction of money from government opportunities. So in the end, what have we done? In my opinion looking at this particular situation, we have created one more thing for the Afghans to fight about. Second, the residents of Kapisa are homeless, and it is very cold in Afghanistan in the wintertime. Third, government officials of Afghanistan own 32 percent of the Palm Islands in Dubai. So there is a tremendous amount of money in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, that money is leaving the country. It is being extracted and invested elsewhere. That does not bode well for the future of Afghanistan.

Until this issue of real legitimacy rather than the slogans that you hear at ISAF is addressed, I am not sanguine about the prospects for peace or stability there.

Adam Silverman:
My field is the social behavior of political violence, specifically identity, religious, ethnic, and so forth. How do people learn the behaviors? How do we come to understand those behavioral pathways so that we can try to retard them, either in ways that are predominantly nonlethal before they become a problem and then in ways that would be driven either by law enforcement or the military once they do become a problem? So when I look at the doctrine, I start by asking what we are actually dealing with. What is the conceptualization? Not because that has a direct impact in terms of what the strategic specialist or sergeant or lieutenant or colonel is doing on a given day, but because that is how it affects the greater discussion about the policies and what the policymakers, both elected and appointed, do.

I want to talk about three areas. The first one is the conceptualization of insurgency. Everybody else on this panel, who were all involved in creating the manual, were constrained by the fact that there was already a definition of "insurgency" in Joint Publication 3-05 (*Doctrine for Joint Special Operations*), which originated in Joint Publication 1-02 (*Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*): An insurgency is "an organized movement that seeks the overthrow of a constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict." That conceptualization largely covers every form of political violence short of interstate war. If looked at in terms of conceptualizing political violence, it is like an inverted triangle. Interstate war is at the top, and you will often see examples of all the lesser forms in it. Then, depending on who is doing the dicing, the next two are revolution and civil war, in either order. Then there are rebellion, insurgency, and at the bottom terrorism. You will not see an insurgency, civil war, or interstate war in terrorism, but in an interstate war you may perhaps see examples of all of the lower ones.

If you have this overly broad conceptualization, it is an insurgency unless you are fighting what we think of as an army in the field in interstate war. And if it is an insurgency, we have a manual for that. The problem is not necessarily the military personnel dealing with that manual and that doctrine but rather the policymakers. In many cases, it is not even the appointed policymakers, because they know better. It is the elected policymakers, so there are problems with oversight. Some of the elected officials are lawyers, a few are doctors, and some are businessmen. A

John Nagl and Montgomery McFate. *Photo by Dan Creighton.*

couple of them have Ph.Ds. By and large, this is certainly outside their fields of expertise. The conceptualization here has the ability to warp the policy debate, and that is important.

As Dr. McFate and Dr. Crane said, the COIN end state essentially is to reconcile the societal elements to each other and to the state (the state here being the de facto term for government) and then to tether or retether government to the societal elements. You have to have a legitimate government to do that. So the issue becomes not whether the doctrine makes sense or not as a conceptualization for an end state. It does. The issue becomes, in the places where we are trying to apply it, whether that end state can ever be achieved. If it cannot, I would argue, you shouldn't assign the military a task and define victory as something that is unachievable. I don't want to say that it is unethical; it is unrealistic. It is not because the military people or their civilian agency partners – whatever they are actually chartered to do – won't try. It is not that they won't do it well. It is that, at the end of the day, there is a problem if it cannot be achieved.

This brings me to the third point. Whether you are talking about COIN or population-centric COIN, the population is important. I want to take a tack from my role within the Human Terrain System. (I agree that none of us really like this term – we are stuck with it. You were stuck with the definition of insurgency and we are stuck with the fact that we go to war with the euphemisms we have. That is just the way it works). When you look at the classical conceptualizations of COIN, it is political warfare. The key is to secure and stabilize the population by bringing them economic, social, and political stability, and at the same time neutralizing the red layer – the insurgent forces. That is one way to conceptualize it. What sort of underlays that – what we often talk about in the Human Terrain System because we work the nonlethal side – is empowering the lowest level so that the focus is on the population: work from the bottom up and focus on the population. Nonlethal operations get you farther than lethal ones, and this all creates the space to make the tethering and reconciliation happen.

We saw what happens when that space is created. It is sometimes created by the force, it is sometimes created by facts on the ground, and it is usually a combination. That is what happened in Iraq between 2006 and 2008. We know the opening was squandered in the diplomatic quest for this oversized Status of Forces Agreement that the Iraqis rolled us on. The space that was created in the combination of the Anbar Awakenings and the other Awakenings, the ethnic cleansings or reorderings in Baghdad, and the surge was not capitalized on because the leverage was used on questions that were important to what happens after the mission is done, such as how many troops we can keep and where they can be based. That is not an unimportant discussion, but if the key is to reconcile the elements and then the elements to the state and the state to

the elements, you do not use your leverage when you have it for something that can wait until later.

So, the focus on the population cannot just be on securing and stabilizing them. It has to be on what we talk about as mapping the human terrain – the sociocultural element. This has to be robust. It cannot simply be making map products with colored overlays showing where groups of people, mosques, and government facilities are. That is one part of it, and it is important to know where everything is in time and space. It is essentially sociocultural location.

The second component is what is often talked about as the network element, which is everybody's holy grail of solving terrorism and everything else – we are just going to social network analyze it enough, and then we will know who is connected to whom and then there will be a solution. Questions related to the sociocultural dynamic – the network – include: Who is related to whom? Is it hierarchical or nonhierarchical? Is it kinship? What is it?

The third and final element is sociocultural context. All three are important for understanding the population, whether you are doing population-centric COIN specifically or anything else.

As Dr. McFate laid out in her remarks, the population was basically telling us what the problem was. In cases in which you are dealing with high-context communicators – which is the case in Afghanistan, Iraq, and most of the places where we are doing stabilization reconstruction, whether in phase zero before a conflict or phase four after a conflict – they are going to let you know if they are angry. They are not going to let you know by coming and yelling at you but by blowing up your gun trucks, the interstate, or the road being built.

But there is another portion of this. If you are the external counterinsurgent force – if you are the second or third party, if you will – you have to pay attention to your own sociocultural elements. This is where the problem comes in.

"[A] a host of trends, from globalization to population growth to weapons proliferation, suggest that an era of persistent conflict against lethal nonstate irregular foes will not end any time soon."

John Nagl

We all know the big counterinsurgency success of Malaya. There are many good arguments for the actual counterinsurgency efforts in Vietnam, which were either working or had worked. What did not happen were other things going on policy-wise – other changes going on both back in the United States and in Vietnam. In the case of Algeria, the Algerians really could not withstand the French onslaught. Charles De Gaulle changed policy, and, depending on the interpretation, the Algerians basically forced the French to face the fact that in order to completely defeat the insurgency they would have to become something in their national consciousness that they did not want to be – Nazis. Remember that the French today really still have not reconciled their Vishy collaborationist past. That was the mirror the Algerians held up. So the problem was not the COIN operations on the ground; it was the sociocultural context, the human terrain, back home.

That is the other element that has to be paid attention to in terms of both Iraq and Afghanistan, which is really where our focus is now. If you look at good reporting from two

or three years ago, people were saying that 75 percent of the country was in the hands of the Taliban (however you define the Taliban on any given day since there are at least five distinct groups for which we are using the term, if not more) or the warlords (some of whom are also listed as Taliban). It is only now that suddenly everybody is saying that something new has happened. It hasn't. If you are following the good media reporting, this isn't anything new. So now we have our own sociocultural element that is going to affect the policymaking.

That is why there is this whole debate over whether President Obama is or is not taking enough time. This is really our own population-centric focus that we have to consider. If he is going to make these life-or-death decisions, I would prefer that he nail it down, do it right, and take the time he needs. But the issue becomes what our own population is going to allow. This all comes back and affects the policymaker and affects the end state.

We also know what the human terrain of the sociocultural elements in Afghanistan is telling us, which is that Afghanistan is largely not tribal the way Iraq is. It is driven by solidarity ties. These are socially constructed, contextual, layered, and change depending on context. It is ethno-linguistically broken down. It is ethno-regionally broken down. There are at least 136 different societal elements, some of whom cannot actually communicate dialectically with each other because they are completely isolated. There is no history of coherent, legitimate, or centralized government. How do you achieve that end state in which the elements are reconciled to each other and to the legitimate government and the government is reconciled to them?

So if the concept behind the doctrine causes a policy debate, then that has to be kept in mind while we are working on that focus. And if what we learn from studying the populations tells us that the end state may not be achievable, at what point then do we need to sit down and say that this is not the approach? It is not that the ideas that nonlethal works better than lethal and of working from the bottom up and empowering the lowest level do not make sense, but if doing all of that consistently is not going to get us that end state, then the question becomes, How much of that do we do before we redefine our end state and come up with something else to work on?

John Nagl:

The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have spurred long-overdue changes in the way the Department of Defense prioritizes irregular warfare. These changes have been paid for at an enormously high price in money, materiel, and the lives of our courageous service members. But as Dr. Crane indicated, they are not universally applauded. What I would like to do today is talk about why these changes should continue, with particular reference to the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Today the United States is not winning a counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan, and Dr. McFate indicated some of the reasons why. We have at great cost just over the past two and a half years, and very much in the nick of time, managed to turn around a counterinsurgency campaign that was on the verge of catastrophic collapse in Iraq. A continued American commitment to both campaigns will be necessary for some years to come, and a host of trends, from globalization to population growth to weapons proliferation, suggest that an era of persistent conflict against lethal nonstate irregular foes will not end any time soon. For all these reasons, the security of the nation and our national interests demand that we continue to learn and adapt to counterinsurgency and irregular warfare and that we institutionalize these lessons so that they are

not forgotten again.

Our military capability to succeed in the wars we are fighting today can only be explained in light of our experience in Vietnam. In the wake of that war, the nation opted to focus on large-scale conventional combat and forget counterinsurgency. Studies criticizing the Army's approach to the Vietnam War were largely ignored, and the solution was to rebuild a military focused exclusively on achieving decisive operational victories on a conventional battlefield. The military's superlative performance in Operation Desert Storm further entrenched the mindset that conventional state-on-state warfare was the future while counterinsurgencies and irregular warfare were but lesser-included contingencies. The saying in the Army at the time was that if you could skin the cat, you could skin the kitten. There was no appreciation that the kitten was actually an alligator. The nation did not adjust to the fact that its peer competitor had collapsed, spending a decade after the end of the Cold War continuing to prepare for war against a Soviet Union that no longer existed.

After the wake-up call of September 11th, our lack of preparedness was exacerbated by our failure to adapt fully and rapidly to the demands of counterinsurgency in Iraq and Afghanistan. By early 2002, the Taliban appeared to be defeated and Afghanistan firmly under the control of our Afghan allies. The fall of Baghdad in April 2003 after a three-week campaign initially appeared to be another confirmation of the superiority of American military capabilities. But in both instances, the enemy had other plans, and we forgot perhaps the most basic precept of strategy of any competition against a thinking enemy – the enemy has a vote. Inadequate contingency planning by civilian leaders and military commanders to secure the peace contributed to the chaotic conditions that enabled insurgent groups to establish themselves.

With some notable lower-level exceptions, we did not adapt to these conditions until we were perilously close to losing two wars. U.S. forces faced with insurgencies had no doctrinal or training background in irregular warfare and reacted in uncoordinated and often counterproductive fashion to the challenges they faced. Many of these early ad hoc approaches to counterinsurgency failed to protect the population from insurgent attacks and alienated the people through the excessive use of force. Although some units did deploy and employ effective population-centric counterinsurgency techniques independently, such improvements were not emulated in a coordinated fashion throughout the force until 2007. It was at that time, partly as a result of the work of Conrad Crane and the team he pulled together, that the United States finally adopted a unified approach that effectively secured the population and co-opted reconcilable insurgent fighters in Iraq. We are currently attempting to make that same leap in Afghanistan, a campaign that we have neglected in order to focus on the war that was viewed as the more important of the two. The price for that neglect is now coming due, and I would like to commend the Center on Law and Security for assembling this afternoon's panel on the way forward in Afghanistan and the heavy price we are going to have to pay for neglecting that fight for the past eight years.

Saint Augustine taught that the purpose of war is to build a better peace. We have not as a nation built the capacity to create that better peace in our national security establishment. A close look at the historical record reveals that the United States engages in ambiguous counterinsurgency and nation-building missions far more often than it faces large-scale war. Similar demands will only increase in a globalized world where local problems increasingly do not stay local and where, to quote Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, "The most

likely catastrophic threats to our homeland, for example an American city poisoned or reduced to rubble by a terrorist attack, are more likely to emanate from failing states than from aggressor states." This, I think, is one of the primary conclusions of the field of international relations developed in the wake of World War I to deal with the problems of states that were too strong: Germany twice in the first half of the twentieth century, Russia in the second half of the twentieth century.

> **"One of the things that you will find in the counterinsurgency field manual is the notion that if you are going to engage in governance activities … it has to be done in conjunction with locally existing institutions and concepts. If it is not, it will be very hard to execute, implement, and sustain."**
>
> *Montgomery McFate*

In the first half of this century – of our century – the primary challenge of international relations will be states that are too weak, and this is why Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has said that the greatest threat to U.S. national security today comes from the weak state of Pakistan, not from one of the strong or rising powers that attract far more of our national security resources. Both state and nonstate enemies will seek more asymmetric ways to challenge the United States and our allies. Our conventional military superiority, which remains substantial, will drive many of them to the same conclusion: When they fight America conventionally, they lose horribly in days or weeks, but when they fight unconventionally by employing guerilla tactics, terrorism, and information operations – all in an attempt to erode our national will, our strategic center of gravity in the wars we are now fighting – they have a far better chance of success. The developing strategic environment will find state and nonstate adversaries continuing to devise innovative strategies to counter American power by exploiting widely available technology in weapons and by integrating tactics from across the spectrum of conflict, so-called hybrid warfare.

This is the kind of war we are struggling to understand in Afghanistan. It is the kind of war we are most likely to face in the future. The learning curve is not going to get any easier, but discussions like the ones we are having here today are going to help.

Peter Bergen:
We heard much about legitimate government as being the end goal. It seems to me that Afghans actually want something much simpler because they have never really had any experience recently of a particularly legitimate government – security. We are not really offering them this rather basic good. The last government that did offer it was the Taliban. Second to that, it seems that we are ignoring lessons that we have already learned in Iraq. When we did the counterinsurgency, the surge, in Iraq, the Interior Ministry at the time was essentially a Shia death squad on steroids. So this was a very illegitimate government, and yet we did deliver this security piece eventually. We do not seem to have yet reached the point in the Afghan discussion where we decide that what we actually need to be doing is the security piece and not worrying about whether Hamid Karzai received 49 or 54 percent of the vote, which seems to me to be details. I was wondering if anybody has a comment on that.

John Nagl and Montgomery McFate. *Photo by Dan Creighton.*

Conrad Crane:
Let me talk about genesis of the focus on legitimacy in the manual. The first time we wrote the paragraph on legitimacy in the first draft, it came right out of John Locke. It talked about representation and the contract between the governed and the government. Many of the regional experts who read it said that that's not legitimacy in their part of the world. So the definition of legitimacy talks more about security than anything else. It says that in some areas, legitimacy may be based just on security. It might be based on a theocratic definition of legitimacy. It is not always a Western definition. So one of the first things you have to do, using the sociocultural intelligence, is to figure out what legitimacy means in that part of the world. So it may not be our definition, and legitimacy may be based on security. There is that great John Paul Vann quote. When asked how important security is in counterinsurgency, he thought about it and said – of course, in the Vietnam context – "I'm not sure if security is 90 percent of counterinsurgency or 10 percent of counterinsurgency. I know it's the first 90 percent of the first 10 percent."

Adam Silverman:
I was assigned in Iraq. We spent a lot of time talking to local elites and notables as well as regular folks and internally displaced persons. We consistently heard them discuss the government using a term that we would translate as "nonlegitimate."

What is interesting about this sociocultural concept of legitimacy is that when you read both Arabic literature about leadership and especially the Islamic literature, which is going to be more of a bridge, it talks about a social contract. It is not quite our social contract; I would argue that it is probably closer to what some of the people on the *Mayflower* had in mind. It has theocentric aspect; God plays a role. It is never going to be the Mayflower Compact, but it is closer in that sort of context. We heard much about this from internally displaced persons. They told us that they went to places where their relatives were, because their relatives said that they follow a sheik there because he protects them. They thought they would be protected too. We would hear from some of the tribal leaders that people wouldn't follow them if they didn't do specific things. That was coming not only out of the Arab context, regardless of Sunni or Shia, but out of the Islamic context.

An important thing to keep in mind is that the legitimacy does not just have to be the security. There is a way to tether that back to the local sociocultural context dealing with leadership and society. Two Afghans who were many miles apart told me independently that tribal law is a constitution. That floored us.

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Scott Horton (*from the audience*):
Could you please discuss the relationship between counterinsurgency doctrine and detention policy? I look at General Douglas Stone's proposal to set up what looks like a long-term detention system in Afghanistan, set up according to American rules with American review standards, perhaps with planning for some sort of habeas review, and I wonder what the implicit message is about Afghanistan, its criminal justice system, its law, and its courts. It strikes me as operating in contradiction with counterinsurgency policy.

Montgomery McFate:
My understanding is that in Afghanistan, detention – that is, restraint on freedom of movement – is not part of their concept of justice. Justice is something that is administered swiftly and can be punitive, restorative, or any other type, but it generally involves payment of money or extraction of blood. It does not involve detention. So there is somewhat of a mismatch, in my personal opinion, between the idea of setting up prisons, regardless of the system or how well we are able to administer the policies and laws regarding incarceration, and Afghan notions of justice. One of the things that you will find in the counterinsurgency field manual is the notion that if you are going to engage in governance activities – and indeed legal systems and legal processes, including incarceration, are a part of governance – it has to be done in conjunction with locally existing institutions and concepts. If it is not, it will be very hard to execute, implement, and sustain.

Conrad Crane:
I am not fully aware of the program, but this may be a case of trying to take something that worked well in Iraq and putting it in a different situation in Afghanistan. What General Stone did in Iraq was an immensely successful program that he called "counterinsurgency behind the wire." He had 20,000 people in detention in Camp Bucca. When he first got there, he found out that many of them had been there for three or four years for transgressions that under Iraqi law were punishable by a maximum detention of two years. The problem was that there was no court system to process them. So he had to set one up. He also figured out that not all of them were irreconcilable people. He divided the camp, with about three-fourths of them being reconcilable and one-fourth not. You barely could go into the part of the camp for irreconcilables and survive. The guards were being shot at all the time with slingshots – little rock balls made out of the local soil. For the other 15,000, he brought in teachers to teach them to read and write and moderate imams to teach them a moderate form of Islam. Then he would take them to the court system to have their cases adjudicated, and he would release them back into Iraqi society as what he called "moderate missiles."

When I was there in late 2007, his recidivism rate was two out of 2,200. Any prison in America would be proud of numbers like that. It was a very successful program, but again this worked in Iraq. Although I am not familiar with the whole program, it sounds as if he is trying to take what he did in Iraq and put it in Afghanistan. It goes back to what Monty said: If it does not fit over some of the current legal constructs and if it does not fit the society, it might not work.

John Nagl:
Let me just say one quick word in defense of the program in Afghanistan. The rule of law is obviously essential. To succeed in a counterinsurgency, there has to be justice. Maslow's hierarchy of needs applies in a combat zone

better than it does anywhere else. The first thing you need is security and the next thing is contract law – some belief that work will be rewarded and that crime will be punished.

The effort to create justice and the rule of law in Afghanistan is being overseen by a lawyer and enormously talented man, Brigadier General Mark Martins. There is an interesting piece on the front page of today's *USA Today* in which he talks about the problem he is trying to solve in Afghanistan, which is the extraordinary number of "accidental guerillas" (he uses that term, Dr. Kilcullen) detained in Afghanistan who have, in many cases, been in prison for a number of years – in a sort of jihad university – that he wants to push out. He thinks that perhaps only 10 percent or 15 percent of the people who we are currently holding are in fact long-term problems. We have one of the smartest people currently wearing a uniform at work on the problem.

Adam Silverman:
The immediate problem that you are concerned with is an issue, but the real problem is the transition when we are done or close to completion.

The rule-of-law system in Iraq does not line up with the societal notions of justice and conflict resolution. There are many people from outside the cities in Iraq who are used to dealing with a traditional or tribal model. They do not understand the formal – the official – model, and they are distrustful of it and the people running it. They know people who have gone into the system and who have never come out. So the problem is that there is this sort of disconnect. We want to push people using the traditional system into the formal system, but they do not line up. There is no tether there. Part of that is a problem inherited by successive waves of military and civilian allied personnel. During the initial transition, the Coalition Provisional Authority decided to keep many of those governmental institutions intact. They just cleaned out the people they didn't like and then handed them back over to the Iraqis with people we did like. Nobody sat down to figure out what it is that the Iraqis conceptually get.

This is going to be the issue in Afghanistan. In the cities, the more educated population will take more easily to the official governmental rule-of-law system, whereas in the remote areas things are going to be handled by a council of elders or tribal leaders. That is the nightmare system – the nightmare transition is at the end.

David Phillips (*from the audience*):
The conventional wisdom is that the surge and the counterinsurgency approach between 2006 and 2008 was successful. It did establish a modicum of security during that period. I wonder if you think that that approach, while successful in the short term, actually laid the seeds for deeper divisions today and going forward? Do the problems that we see over the electoral law actually have their roots in the strategy that we had during those years? If that is the case, how do we fix it?

John Nagl:
The situation in Iraq in 2006 was low-grade civil war between the Sunnis and the Shia. That was the culmination of al Qaeda in Iraq's strategy, and the precipitating event was the bombing of the Samarra mosque in February 2006. The surge, as shorthand for population-centric counterinsurgency, as well as General Petraeus's support of the Sunni Awakening – the so-called Sahwa movement – along with multiple other factors for success, including, frankly, some ethnic cleansing, and some separation between the Sunni and the Shia, particularly in Baghdad, all resulted in a dramatic diminution of violence. There are still fault

lines in Iraqi society, but the primary one now is no longer Sunni/Shia; it is actually Arab/Kurd. What we are seeing now is negotiations over the distribution of scarce resources. We are seeing politics, but politics conducted through negotiations and lawfare rather than warfare. That is a huge step in the right direction. Iraq, I would like to say, is well on its way to becoming a normal Middle Eastern country. That's not great, but it is a whole lot better than it used to be. It is my belief that, although it is not impossible, it is extraordinarily unlikely that the remnants of al Qaeda in Iraq can reignite the Sunni/Shia fault line. There are things we can do to minimize tensions between the Kurds and the Arabs, in particular by kicking issues down the road – agreeing to negotiating on them later. So I am cautiously hopeful for the future of Iraq.

I do believe that a continued American security presence in Iraq, in particular the Air Force, will be essential for long past the current withdrawal date of December 31, 2011. I expect to see elections in Iraq early next year. They may not be in January. They may be in February or March. That's okay. I believe that the first thing the new government will do is reopen Status of Forces Agreement negotiations, because what the Iraqis should be concerned about in 2012, and increasingly are, is the fact that they will not be sovereign over their own airspace. The best thing we have going for us in Iraq is its neighbor Iran. So I see a long-term security relationship between the United States and Iraq for the rest of the next decade.

Peter Bergen:
Civilians are still four times more likely to be killed in Iraq today than in Afghanistan. Last year there were 9,000 civilian deaths in Iraq, which has a smaller population, compared to about 2,000 Afghan civilians killed.

Question (*from the audience*):
It seems as though those who think that Afghanistan is important are losing control of the narrative in Congress, with the administration, and with the American public. It also seems that the Taliban is controlling much of the narrative in Afghanistan about whether they are winning or losing, and that those two things are related. I am interested in this as a theoretical question, but I am also interested in how the authority and intelligence of all these people can leveraged to start turning that situation around.

John Nagl:
I think that is the right question. I was very pleased to see the op-ed piece in yesterday's *New York Times* laying out what the president needs to say in the address to the nation that I expect he will give in the next several weeks. I think it is true that we have in some ways lost control of the narrative, but I do not think it is irretrievable. I think we can get it back and I think that this president can get it back. There are a number of factors in our favor. The biggest is that the people of Afghanistan have been ruled by the Taliban before, and they do not particularly want to go that route again. Increasingly I think that the key leaders on the Hill understand many of the key parts of the problem. Senator Carl Levin, chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, came back from his last trip to Afghanistan two months ago convinced that we do need to build an Afghan National Army of 250,000. That is incredibly helpful. Rep. Ike Skelton, chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, is a very strong supporter of General McChrystal and of an expanded Afghan National Army. Public support in the United States for an increased commitment to Afghanistan, although tottering on the edge at 50/50, is not deep. Only about two percent of the American people think that Afghanistan is the most

important thing happening in the world today. So I believe that this is a case where clear presidential leadership backing up a very capable chain of command in the field can buy that team in the field 12 to 18 months to demonstrate progress. Then it is up to them.

Peter Bergen:
The Afghans are the world's greatest fighters but they have the world's worst army. So if Senator Levin is talking about a 250,000 man army, how do you get there? Or even halfway there?

John Nagl:
Let me push back against you Peter, which I do with some trepidation. The Afghans have the world's worst police force, I'll agree with that. The Afghan army, which I have worked with, will fight. They are not particularly literate but they are the most respected institution in Afghanistan. So if we are going to build an Afghan state, the only pillar that it makes sense to build it on is the Afghan National Army. This is a mission that we have all but criminally neglected over the past eight years. We still had just 50 percent of the American advisers that we said were necessary for the Afghan army in country in August of this year. We have not put the resources into building the army that it deserves. I believe that this is good raw material for fighting, and I draw a comparison with the Iraqis. In my last job on active duty in the Army, I worked to train the training teams that supported both the Iraqi and the Afghan militaries. The Iraqis are very literate and very smart, but not natural fighters. You had to teach them to fight. The Afghans are not particularly literate but natural fighters.

Conrad Crane:
At more of an operational level, there is one thing that we have learned in Afghanistan the hard way: Who controls the ground controls the message. In so much of Afghanistan we tried to fight with long-range precision strikes and with Special Operations raids where people hit and left. Something happens in this part of the world called the "solatia effect," which is basically that the dominant economic activity in some areas is collecting solatia payments for people who are hurt in combat. If you are not there immediately to see what the results of these strikes are, then by the time anybody shows up the whole village is in slings and everyone there has been wounded, and they are all waiting for solatia payments. The Taliban has also been very skillful at arraying all kinds of atrocities as soon as these things happen.

Craig Charney has done some polls in Afghanistan that show how important security is. People's attitudes about the performance of both the Afghan government and NATO forces greatly depend upon two things: who they think is causing civilian causalities, which is shaped very much by these poststrike scenarios that are set up, and whether they actually see boots on the ground in their area. You cannot fight these wars from 20,000 feet, and we have learned that the hard way. I know General McChrystal has tried to adjust to that. So there are some things in the information arena we could do a lot better to help control the narrative that comes out of any kind of combat actions that we do.

Judy Miller (*from the audience*):
We have read much about a revised strategy being contemplated of securing 10 cities and leaving the countryside. How do you evaluate that proposition?

Question (*from the audience*):
Dr. Davidson, assuming that President Obama decides to deploy 34,000 to 40,000 troops to Afghanistan in the near future, what do you as

a planner think the consequences would be for readiness?

Kevin Sheehan (*from the audience*):
Could you please say a little bit about the internal institutional trade-offs for the Army and perhaps the Marine Corps of a relatively greater emphasis on irregular war and counterinsurgency compared to conventional capability? I assume that there is no free lunch here, and that greater time, resources, and efforts to the one will result in a degrading of the capabilities in the other and the acceptance of greater risk.

Question (*from the audience*):
What roles do you see for the UN and NATO?

Janine Davidson:
The Department of Defense is doing a Quadrennial Defense Review right now. I think the report will be due out in February, so I cannot really comment on exactly how it will end up. But the secretary has made it a point to say that the department needs to balance itself, and not just on conventional and irregular types of missions but also for the present and for the future. So he is very focused on succeeding in the current fight, whatever that takes, and then also balancing for what we will need for the future. The department is working really hard on that process.

To the Afghanistan point, it is still being determined. What the department has is a global force management process that stands ready to support whatever the president's decision is.

Conrad Crane:
Regarding the 10 cities approach, in some ways you can see that as a variation of the old oil spot strategy, as long as you are planning to spread out from there. I know from working with the Pakistanis that it bothers them to think that we are going to withdraw back to the cities, because that cedes a whole lot of ground that then can be used to do things not only in Afghanistan but also in Pakistan. When you talk to Pakistanis, they say that if you fix Afghanistan then things will be okay. When you talk to the Afghans, they say that if you fix Pakistan then things will be okay. Obviously the answer is both. Eventually you have got to go back out and control the countryside again or you are conceding base areas to your enemy.

Regarding the trade-offs, General George Casey is convinced that if he gets 18 months between deployments, he can maintain both skill sets. He actually has a plan to do that. There is a dilemma if you talk about creating specialized forces – let's say you have two constabulary divisions to do stabilization for instance. Once they have completed their deployment, who goes in for the next rotation? You never have enough specialized units, so you have to have the general-purpose forces. You have to be able to do it all. Again, General Casey is convinced that with 18 months – which would be six months downtime when they get back, three months to do a full-scale conventional deployment, and then nine months to get ready to go back to COIN – he can maintain the skill set for the force.

On the roles of NATO and the UN, NATO is now trying to come up with their own counterinsurgency doctrine very much like ours. I have listened to them and actually helped monitor some of their discussions. Hopefully, that will create some kind of uniformity, but as David Kilcullen and others have written, your enemy flows to your weak spots. So NATO has a role, but we just have to incorporate them better and create some uniformity.

The UN obviously brings legitimacy. They have a role to play, but they have to be protected and there are also many other security concerns that come with them as well.

John Nagl:
On the question of balance, although you cannot have enough specialized units to do everything, you can have some specialized units to be the first to flow in either at the high end or the low end, and then you can swing the rest of the force in two different directions. Our friend Andrew Krepinevich has written very well about this subject at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments.

Assuming the president were to send let's say 35,000 additional U.S. forces, that would probably consist of four or five brigades and then a whole lot of enablers. The single biggest thing we need more of in Afghanistan is actually helicopters, and so there would be a lot of support in addition to those brigades.

I am concerned with the long-term health of the Army. We are seeing many strains on it. We have decided this year to increase the size of the Army by about 22,000, and we may need further increases in the size of the Army if we increase in Afghanistan.

Regarding NATO, the French are an integrated part of NATO again – that is a fantastic thing for the security of the world. The French are doing some pretty good fighting now. They have improved. The Canadians have done extraordinarily well, and the British are taking Afghanistan enormously seriously. So this is a learning process. The American military has made the turn first and turned farthest. The civilian agencies of the U.S. government and our NATO allies and friends around the globe are trailing behind. We have come a long way, but we have a long way to go. Discussions like this help.

Adam Silverman:
Part of the issue with the UN has to do with institutional constraints that are left over from its creation post – World War II and a tremendous amount of institutional constraints that were the result of Cold War politics between the United States and the Soviet Union in regard to staffing the Secretariat and some of the other units within the United Nations. So what we see is that the UN is unable to help out – either fortunately or unfortunately, depending on your view of the UN at any given time regarding any given situation. The result is that they tend to be used as a sort of cover. In some cases you can get substantive expertise, but you may not get numbers in terms of assistance because of the institutional constraints.

Montgomery McFate:
We have talked a lot on this panel about the provision of security to the population and its importance as part of a counterinsurgency strategy. I think we – not just this panel but the government of the United States – are working under an unexamined strategic assumption here, which is that the increase of American forces into Afghanistan is going to provide security to the Afghan population. This is a model that comes to us from Iraq, where troops were pushed out to the joint security stations and combat outposts in remote areas. The question is, would this actually work in Afghanistan? You see towns and villages that are safe during the day, but the Taliban come at night. They leave night letters. They cut down the cell phone towers. So you are talking about putting a permanent presence in remote rural areas. Is there really the tolerance in the United States for the level of casualties that that would involve? Is this an acceptable level of violence? Could we sustain this? Because the more people you put out there, the more targets you create, and that raises a question of national will and policy objectives.

Lessons from the Past: Counterinsurgency throughout History

Panelists:
Thomas Johnson, W. Patrick Lang, Michael Sheehan, Martin Stanton

Moderator:
Stephen Holmes

Michael Sheehan and Stephen Holmes.
Photo by Dan Creighton.

Stephen Holmes:
Dr. Johnson, would you please begin the conversation?

Thomas Johnson:
What I would like to do this morning is compare Vietnam and Afghanistan. I believe the two conflicts are remarkably similar at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. Many of my comments this morning are based on an article that my colleague Chris Mason and I published, "Refighting the Last War: Afghanistan and the Vietnam Template," in the November/December issue of *Military Review* at Fort Leavenworth. I am pleased that they published it because, as you will see, I am very critical of the Big Army. I think most historians today would agree that the conflict in Vietnam was lost because of the failure on two deadly intersecting axes: the inability to establish the legitimacy of the government, which the rural population preferred as an alternative to the National Liberation Front, enough to risk their own lives for, and the failure of American troops to protect and isolate them from the insurgents by pursuing basically a war of attrition instead. I believe that the same fatal axes of failure loom before the United States now in Afghanistan, that time is running out, and that it might be already too late. In fact, I think there are eerie similarities at the structural, political, and military levels that the United States is engaged in that are almost an exact political and military reenactment of Vietnam. I find this lack of awareness of the repetition of events deeply disturbing.

There are some superficial and structural issues that I would like to discuss before the more important military and political issues. Both wars obviously are on an Asian landmass thousands of miles from the United States, which requires superefficient logistics lines. Unlike Vietnam, Afghanistan is landlocked, and I do not think enough attention has been paid to the strain going through the Khyber Pass. We are now sending much more through the Bolan Pass down in the south. Eighty percent of the population in both countries was and is rural, with national literacy hovering around 10 percent – in the rural Pashtun areas of Afghanistan, maybe one percent for females and 5 percent for males. Both countries were racked (and this is very important) by decades of European imperial aggression – by the French in the case of Vietnam, and by the Soviet Union in the case of Afghanistan. Both improbably won their David-versus-Goliath wars against the invaders that resulted basically in a north/south civil war afterward, but what is important here is that they produced genera-

tions of experienced and highly skilled fighters and combat commanders. The last superficial point that I will mention is that both countries have spectacularly inhospitable and impassible terrain and few roads, limiting the value of U.S. superiority in motor vehicles and making artillery immobile in many respects

On the political side, South Vietnam had and Afghanistan has a regime that is viewed as illegitimate by the vast majority of the population. This is important because studies on counterinsurgencies suggest that they are probably going to fail without a stable political partner viewed by the population as being legitimate. Many people have recently talked about legitimacy, but I think that we have it wrong relative to Afghanistan. Max Weber, the father of modern sociology, spoke about three basic dynamics that are related to regime legitimacy. He talked about traditional, legalistic or rational, and religious causes. For millennia in Afghanistan – or the area that Afghanistan makes up – legitimacy was based on patriarchal and dynastic dynamics, as well as religious. The United States and the flawed Bonn process thought that we could paint a coat of democracy on Afghanistan in a short time. I believe that one of the reasons that President Karzai is illegitimate is because he was elected. Democracy is not a form of legitimacy in Afghanistan. Just as I could not declare myself king and be viewed as legitimate in the United States, where dynasty is not a form of legitimacy, I think the same holds true for democratic elections and the president in Afghanistan. I think that we have underestimated that.

"I think there are eerie similarities at the structural, political, and military levels that the United States is engaged in that are almost an exact political and military reenactment of Vietnam. I find this lack of awareness of the repetition of events deeply disturbing."

Thomas Johnson

As to the enemy, there are also very close comparisons between the two conflicts. In both cases, I think we have vastly misunderstood the enemy. In Vietnam, the United States insisted on casting the war as a fight against the spread of communism, but the Vietnamese were not fighting for communism. The North Vietnamese army and the Vietcong were motivated by the pervasive narrative of nationalism and reunification. In Afghanistan, similarly, the enemy has created a pervasive national discourse, in this case a religious jihad. Senior U.S. and NATO officials, however, continue to misread the fundamental narrative of the enemy. They are determined to wage a secular campaign against an enemy fighting a religious war.

I think this is very important relative to notions of using money to peel off the Taliban and of actually being able to negotiate. In my opinion, the Taliban represent true believers in the sense of Eric Hoffer's book *The True Believer*, written in the the 1950s. I think the Taliban foot soldier of 2007 is very different from the foot soldier of 2009. I have tremendous respect for my friend David Kilcullen, but I do not believe that the majority of foot soldiers in the south – most of my research is in Kandahar and Helmand – are accidental guerillas. I think that in most instances they are committed jihadists.

In the cases of both Vietnam and Afghanistan, poorly equipped guerillas lived and hid among the people. I constantly get messages from my students in Helmand,

Marines who are upset that they are not meeting the Taliban in face-to-face conflict, and haven't been for a couple of months, because the Taliban melted into the population, much as the Vietcong did. Both insurgencies were and are ethnically cohesive and exclusive. In both cases, the insurgents enjoy a sanctuary behind a long and rugged border that cannot be closed. Neither the Vietcong nor the Taliban were or are popular. Support for either to be the national rulers was and is probably below 15 percent, if not even lower. Foreign support for the insurgents/jihadists is also similar. North Vietnam received money, weapons, and support from the Soviet Union. The Taliban receives it from the Pakistani army, the ISI, and wealthy Saudis.

I would like to talk a little about our military strategy and the comparisons between the two conflicts, because I think this is where the rubber really hits the road. The failure of American troops to protect the people and isolate them from the insurgents is true in both instances. Up until four months ago, body counts were still one of the official metrics in Afghanistan. General McChrystal stopped that upon coming to command, but body counts, I believe, are still in the institutional memory of the Big Army. I think that the Big Army likes to fight an attrition warfare and is not very good at fighting static campaigns. The implied strategy of attrition via clearing operations is virtually identical in my mind to that pursued in Vietnam. Instead of clear, hold, and build, what we have done in Afghanistan is clear, return to Forward Operating Base; clear, return to FOB; clear, return to FOB. Counterinsurgents cannot take a taxi to their job. They have to be living and operating where the Taliban are operating, 24/7. I think that we need many more things like the CAP program that we had in Vietnam and parts of the CORDS program. But clearing operations and compound searches are not necessarily the way to go. The purpose is the same, but to find easily replaced weapons or to clear a tiny, arbitrarily chosen patch of worthless ground for a short period and then turn it over to an indigenous security force who cannot hold it and then going to do it again somewhere else is almost like the movie *Groundhog Day*.

> **"In regard to establishing a large footprint with U.S. forces in Afghanistan, I would caution everyone that the bigger the footprint is and the more evident it is to the American people, the shorter their patience gets in terms of how much it costs and how much blood is shed on both sides. Eventually you get to a situation in which the public decides that we're through over there and you are ordered to withdraw."**
>
> *W. Patrick Lang*

Another comparison between Vietnam and Afghanistan that we have not quite understood is that in both instances we are fighting and prosecuting the war at the provincial level. The province in Vietnam was meaningless and the province in Afghanistan is meaningless. All of Afghan identity bubbles up from the district and subdistrict levels. We have not quite understood that.

I am very concerned about the 10 city strategy because it is basically a mirror image of what the Soviets did. This is a rural insurgency. The Soviets controlled 20 percent of

Thomas Johnson. *Photo by Dan Creighton.*

the population too, controlling the provincial capitals in the urban areas, but they did not control the most important aspect of the country during their time, which was obviously in the hinterlands and the rural areas.

In both countries, I believe that we have been heavy-handed and in many respects culturally offensive. The U.S. and NATO troop behavior with indiscriminate use of fire support has turned rural villages into enemy recruiting centers. Collateral damage in Afghanistan means something because of the culture. We understand and the Afghans understand that collateral damage will take place, but when you kill an Afghan innocent, especially a woman or a child, and you do not own up to it, you lose that village forever.

It is critically important, and I disagree vehemently with John Nagl on this point, that, just like in Vietnam, we have overestimated the size of the indigenous Afghan armies. If you ask the Pentagon what the size of the Afghan National Army is, they will say that there have been 92,000 troops trained and equipped since 2002. That does not take into account the reenlistment rate, AWOL figures, and a number of different instances. When Senator John Kerry came back to the United States a few weeks ago, he mentioned a figure of 50,000 troops, and he is correct. The Afghan National Army, which is a professional force, has about 32,000 combat troops. That's it. Trying to Afghanize this war is absurd – thinking that we can have 120,000 soldiers in the ANA by the end of 2010 or 250,000 in three, four, or five years is delusional. The Center for Army Lessons Learned at Fort Leavenworth a couple of years ago briefed senior Army leadership and suggested that they could never have much more than a 50,000-person army because the salaries alone would exceed the Afghan budget. So the Pentagon continues to put forth true but irrelevant figures of 90,000 ANAs. To paraphrase John Paul Vann's statement on Vietnam, we haven't been in Afghanistan for eight years. We have been in Afghanistan one year eight times.

I would like to end with a quote from my current paper on the comparisons of Vietnam and Afghanistan. Let me read it. "In 1983 Arnold Isaacs summarized the reasons for failure in Vietnam in his history of the final years of the war as follows." I quote from *Isaacs's Without Honor: Defeat in Vietnam and Cambodia*:

> From start to finish American leaders remained catastrophically ignorant of Vietnamese history, culture, values, motives and abilities. Misperceiving both its enemy and its ally, and imprisoned in the myopic conviction that sheer military force could somehow overcome adverse political circumstances, Washington stumbled from one failure to the next in the continuing delusion that success was always just ahead. This ignorance and false hope were mated, in successive administrations, with bureaucratic circumstances that inhibited admission of error and made it always seem safer to keep repeating the same mistakes, rather than risk the unknown perils of a different policy.

I believe that one could substitute the word "Afghan" for "Vietnamese" in Isaacs's assessment and apply it with exactly equal precision to the United States efforts in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2005. The current dual-prong strategy of nation building from the nonexistent top down and a default war of attrition is leading us down the same tragic path.

W. Patrick Lang:
I am not a scholar; I think of myself as a sort of time traveler. I started in this counterinsurgency business in 1964. The Army, probably despairing of making a real infantry officer out of me, sent me to the Special Warfare School at Fort Bragg where I studied counterinsurgency under such people as Bernard Fall, Roger Trinquier, and others. I also took the Special Forces Officer course there, which is an interesting trip out in the woods for five months. I heard an awful lot during that period of time about what counterinsurgency was supposed to be. I remember seeing Bernard Fall write on a blackboard that counterinsurgency equals political reform plus economic development plus counterguerilla operations. That kind of sums it all up, doesn't it?

This was a very active doctrine in the United States. It was not popular with the Big Army, which wanted to fight armored battles in Europe against the Russians if it ever came to that, but there was a small band of enthusiasts who had taken it up. Most of them were in Special Forces, some were in Psychological Operations, and others were contract civilians. They were sent across the world during the Kennedy period and immediately after during the Johnson period to implement this doctrine against what was called at that time "revolutionary warfare." The colonial powers had all experienced a surge of enthusiasm among their former subject peoples for independence after World War II. These movements often had communist or extreme left-wing leadership, so it became all mixed up for us with the idea of the Cold War, and so we decided to participate in these things everywhere.

I was in one such outfit in South America, the 8th Special Forces Group. We had varying degrees of success in little countries all over South America applying the rule that Bernard Fall had written on the blackboard. We generally found that if the job was not so big as to intrude itself on the consciousness of the American public, did not cost too much money, and did not get too many of us killed, you could do something with it. There were always problems because, when it came to things like political reform, the elites did not want to give up their power, and when it came to economic development, the *latifundistas* did not want to give up their land. So there was only so much you could do with it, but you could achieve some success.

Then we got to the big one in Vietnam. I was in Vietnam for two years and 10 months. I was variously in Special Forces, Military Intelligence, and an outfit called MACV/SOG (Military Assistance Command Vietnam, Studies and Observations Group), which was really a derring-do outfit. The war that I remember is not exactly the same war that I often hear people talk about. When I first got there in early 1968 during the second phase of the Tet Offensive, I was assigned to go and meet John Paul Vann, who was mentioned a few minutes ago. I ended up participating in his organization of the III Corps Tactical Zone into one giant counterinsurgency operation with the acronym CORDS, for Civil Operations Revolutionary Development Support. It provided advisers for every conceivable aspect of the Vietnamese government and civic society life at the national, provincial, district, and often the town level. We had advisers for things such as how to run a boy scout troop and how to make water buffaloes give more milk.

There had been a lot of emphasis on counterinsurgency in the early days of the Vietnam War, but then the North Vietnamese brought their major-force units into the country in 1965. President Johnson basically had a choice, which was to either bring our main-force units to fight them or leave. So that went on for two or three years, and counterinsurgency took a back seat. Then, in 1967, people reckoned that they had the situation sufficiently under control to reemphasize counterinsurgency. So, for the next three or four years, while Nixon concentrated on withdrawing American forces in that awful thing called Vietnamization – which I understand that we hope to do in Afghanistan, withdrawing one step at a time – this counterinsurgency activity was going on all over the country. CORDS had 10,000 people in it, including 7,500 Americans and 2,500 others, including Filipinos, Australians, and others. It was the biggest counterinsurgency effort in history. It had lots of money, and a tremendous amount of time was spent training all these people, including the military advisers at the county level, in languages and all of the other kinds of things that they needed to. So, by the time we got all our troops out and there was a cease-fire with the North Vietnamese, the situation hung in the balance.

It stayed that way for two years until some hiccup on the world scene caused the U.S. Congress to defund the war by law, and they said that we could never again spend any money in South Vietnam. Well, the North Vietnamese were not stupid and they had a fine army. So after a year or so of thinking about it they decided that they would use their army. They went over to the offensive and conquered the country in a conventional campaign. Anyone old enough who cannot remember seeing North Vietnamese tanks in the streets of Saigon does not have a very good memory.

In regard to establishing a large footprint with U.S. forces in Afghanistan, I would caution everyone that the bigger the footprint is and the more evident it is to the American people, the shorter their patience gets in terms of how much it costs and how much blood is shed on both sides. Eventually you get to a situation in which the public decides that we're through over there and you are ordered to withdraw. So I would be careful. Maybe smaller is better, as in the Montgomery McFate approach – having highly skilled teams of people who really know what they are doing, small numbers of soldiers, and a subtle and sophisticated approach to dealing with these very different societies, rather than a great big troop presence all over the country.

Michael Sheehan:
The next few minutes are going to be difficult for me. I spent the better part of my military career involved in counterinsurgency – as a Special Forces adviser like Pat Lang in Latin

> **"The question that the McChrystal report answers is how to win an insurgency. That is not the question. The question goes back to the initial purpose of our being in Afghanistan – to prevent another strategic terrorist attack within our borders. In that regard, we have been *enormously successful* for the past eight years."**
>
> *Michael Sheehan*

America, in the Philippines, studying it as a cadet at West Point through two graduate degrees, and as a policy guy in the White House in the late 1980s, where I advocated that the Army try to understand "irregular warfare," which is the term I used. The term they used was "low-intensity conflict" because they did not consider irregular warfare to be a part of their mission. Low-intensity conflict was a sub-mission that included insurgency, counterinsurgency, foreign internal defense, and a host of other things that they had to do for politicians every once in a while but wouldn't distract them from their primary mission of fighting and winning the nation's wars. "Wars" at that time meant conventional wars – wars fought by the Army doctrine at the time, the air-land battle. I spent a lot of time battling that issue and imperiling my military career, getting into trouble with the senior Pentagon officers while I was on the White House Staff. I was trying to implement the president's policy and the policy of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, which was to try to force this issue of Special Operations and low-intensity conflict onto a reluctant military.

Now, however, as I closely read and reread the McChrystal report and the Army's counterinsurgency doctrine, I have a deepening conclusion that both of these documents are drastically, tragically flawed.

As a cadet at West Point, I wrote a paper about the food crisis in South Asia. I had concluded that we needed to grow more food because people were starving. My professor told me that I had asked the wrong question by assuming that the problem was caused by a lack of food rather than being an issue of distribution. My paper never recovered and I got a bad grade on it, but I learned from it that if you ask the wrong question, you are never going to get to the right answer. I would like to begin my comments by discussing the wrong questions and the wrong assumptions

W. Patrick Lang and Martin Stanton.
Photo by Dan Creighton.

of the McChrystal report. Then I will circle back to discuss the Army's counterinsurgency doctrine and a terrible misreading of the history of insurgency and counterinsurgency.

The question that the McChrystal report answers is how to win an insurgency. That is not the question. The question goes back to the initial purpose of our being in Afghanistan – to prevent another strategic terrorist attack within our borders. In that regard, we have been *enormously successful* for the past eight years. It is hard for people to get their heads around how successful we have been, because the success of that policy is not just about an insurgency in eastern Afghanistan. It is about a global strategy to debilitate the strategic capability of al Qaeda. The first question they should have asked is why we have we been successful since September 2001 – and to try to build upon that counterterrorism success.

Another assumption of report is that you have to have stability in order to achieve your counterterrorism objective. I am not sure that's been tested. There is no stability in Somalia. There is no stability in Yemen. There is no stability in western Pakistan, and there really has not been any stability in most of Afghanistan even since we threw out the Taliban. Nevertheless, for eight years, we have been successful in debilitating al Qaeda's strategic reach. Does al Qaeda have capability? Yes, of

course, in pockets. Their strategic capability has been debilitated extraordinarily because we have done many things right. So the study should have first looked at that. Instead, we went off on a tangent about how to win a counterinsurgency in Afghanistan. I think that may even be irrelevant.

Also, there is a misreading of insurgency history. It is very easy in troubled countries, which is most of the world, to start and sustain an insurgency. But it is an entirely different thing to win, which is really hard. As strong as the Taliban are, the prospects of their winning are miniscule – almost zero. They have no support. When I was beating the drum about the Taliban in 1998 and 1999 when I was the ambassador for counterterrorism at the State Department, they were recognized by the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. They were supported by Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. That will not happen again. Even if they were to take charge again, we kicked them out in six weeks in 2001 with 400 people of the U.S. Air Force and a ragtag Northern Alliance. Do we really need to reinvent Afghanistan in order to achieve the counterterrorism objectives that sent us there in the first place?

Another question that General McChrystal should have asked himself was how we can envision a strategy across the border in Pakistan that has no U.S. permanent troops on the ground. We have a strategy for that, which is working for our purpose. Our purpose is not to make western Pakistan a beautiful place but to debilitate al Qaeda's strategic reach from there. It has been working for eight years. They have none. That doesn't mean they never will, but let's think about what we need to do. The report envisions a strategy that includes no U.S. soldiers on the Pakistan side of that amorphous border but requires an enormous American military footprint on the Afghanistan side.

Another question that they did not ask themselves in the report was the extent to which your presence, the strategy that you are dictating, and the soldiers you have on the ground contribute to the problem you are trying to solve.

> **"We are having a real problem as a nation developing strategic leaders who can look at something, see it for what it is, and make the kinds of decisions in terms of commitment of resources, time, and national prestige that will bring us to success on a clear objective. Ambiguity in these things is just killing us."**
>
> *Martin Stanton*

They also misread the difference between different types of warfare – conventional battle, the air–land battle that the Army is very comfortable with; an occupation force; counterinsurgency forces; and counterterrorism forces. It is an occupation in Afghanistan. When the U.S. military is providing the primary security throughout the country, it is an occupation. No matter how much counterinsurgency doctrine you sprinkle on top of it, no matter how many Ph.Ds and sociologists you train in the Army, no matter how many clinics you build and roads you pave, it is still an occupation strategy, and it has been for eight years. That occupation is, in my view, contributing to the problem they are trying to solve. It is a never-ending loop that they have put themselves in. I do not know what the solution is at this point. I have reread the McChrystal report 10 times in the past week.

Every time I read it, I find problems with every paragraph in it.

Regarding the counterinsurgency manual, it is great in many respects, but it misses the most fundamental point. If you were to switch everything it says about what the *U.S. military* should do to what the *host country* should do, with the U.S. military footprint as close to zero as possible in order to achieve success, then you would have a manual that might be useful.

When I was in El Salvador as an adviser, there were two U.S. military advisers for each of the six zones that represented the whole country – 12 guys in the field for the entire Army. It would have been the wrong answer for me to have a Ranger platoon in my zone rather than letting the Salvadorans fight their war. After I went to the Philippines in 1987, while the Philippine army was floundering against the communists, I came back with a recommendation. I said that the worst thing we could do would be to introduce U.S. forces. Even though our forces would be better, even if our forces built roads, fixed schools, and handed out Meals Ready-to-Eat to children, our presence would unify the opposition and cause us deeper problems than it would solve.

I think we need to dramatically reconsider our entire strategy in Afghanistan, starting with the original reason for our being there, and a counterinsurgency doctrine that seems to give the Big Army a mission. In actuality, counterinsurgency is done by stepping back and allowing the host country to do its job.

Martin Stanton:

I am like the Forrest Gump of the past 20 years of U.S. military foreign policy because I have participated in all of it at a planning level. I would like to talk about something that was mentioned earlier – the idea that the COIN strategy has fundamentally changed what we are doing. The manual and all the good work that has been done since 2007 has been excellent and has codified some best practices within the Army and the military in general. I would not try to detract from its importance, but I want to dispel the notion it may engender that previously people were just lockstep and did not really know what to do.

I will give you an example from my personal experience. I was part of the first Army battalion into Somalia. That was at the height of the time period in which were still preparing to fight the nonexistent Soviets, as John Nagl referred to earlier. We were still feeling good about Desert Storm, which I had also participated in. Desert Storm was the last truly neat war, but we will never see the like of it again. Within a week of our being in Somalia, we were given control of Humanitarian Sector Marka. We had an infantry battalion minus one company, so we had a little less than 500 guys all told for an area the size of Connecticut.

> **"[T]he thought that we could draw down while the enemy is in their present state and not expect them to further encroach or further expand their power in Afghanistan is just not realistic."**
>
> *Martin Stanton*

We were there to facilitate humanitarian relief, but people really did not need that much humanitarian relief because the lower Shabele Valley looked much like Ohio. There were cornfields, banana plantations, and crops everywhere. We were taking truckloads of relief rice to refugee camps through an hour's

worth of cornfields. Finally, Sean Naylor, the reporter who was with us, asked why we were doing it. Kirk Haschack, who was a little quicker on the draw than I was, said, "Well, hell, I don't know Shawn, maybe they don't eat corn." That made the papers and we both got a talking to. But the point is that we were thrown in without a lot of guidance, and so we wondered what to do. It came down literally to three of us – myself the operations officer, the executive officer, and the battalion commander – sitting with a butcher paper chart in a building without a roof just brainstorming about what we should do. We came up with suppress banditry, keep the roads open, get commerce going again, reinstate the traditional elder leadership, and facilitate the non-governmental organization projects. There were a few other things too, but that was the gist of it. We just kind of figured that out on our own.

The point I am trying to make is that that's what happened in Iraq and Afghanistan before 2007. Units that were there would take a look at what was around them and figure out what to do. It was not systemic nor was it stratified in a clear plan that came down from on high, but I would tell you to have some faith in the general smarts and inventiveness of subordinate tactical units because they will surprise you with how good and how quick they can be. Much of the material that made its way into the manual came from the bottom up as lessons learned from the guys on the cutting edge. So, the fact that we did not have it before was not quite as big a deal in terms of our failures as perhaps some of you may have been led to believe. We have had failures in these campaigns, monumental failures, but they were not really at a tactical level, because at a tactical level the bottom line is that the kids kind of figured it out.

But where have we failed? I will give you another personal example, an anecdote of where we failed. I was assigned as the senior civil military operations officer to Army Central Command (ARCENT) to be part of the staff that planned the invasion of Iraq. I had no background. I was just thrown into it. We were going to invade this country and basically take it down. The last time we did this was World War II. Every other time, we were working with a host nation that existed on the ground. So I got the green book, *Eclipse: The Occupation of Germany*. I started reading through it and taking notes. I called in on my planning staff, and they showed me the first draft of what they had already worked on. I was looking for things like military government, zones of occupation, and terms of reference for working with civil authorities. I went down the list of the things that I had read about and I did not see any of them. And these were smart kids. So I brought them all in and asked them what was going on. They told me that they had been told not to use the terms I had written down because this was not going to be an occupation; it was going to be a liberation.

I asked them who had told them that, and they said the planners at U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), all of whom were my friends. If you get old enough in the Army, it becomes a pretty tight little pyramid. So I called them up. John Agoglia, whom I had known since we were captains, told me that it had come down from the Office of the Secretary of Defense. I asked him what we were doing, and he told me to do the best I could and to plan for basically higher-level tactical civil affairs. That is basically refugee control, of which there weren't any to speak of in the invasion.

The next question was what was going to come afterward, who the phase four guys were going to be. I was told not to worry about that, that the phase four guys were going to be the ORHA (Office of Reconstruction and

Humanitarian Assistance). We met the guys who were going to be working phase four at National Defense University three weeks before Line of Departure, three weeks before we actually got started. I was the senior representative of the Army's civil-military affairs and the senior planner, and that was the first time I met them. To give you some perspective from the green book, the guys who were going to be the military government of Bavaria knew who they were in 1943. They were going to school to learn about Bavaria a year before D-Day. They knew what the power infrastructure was, how the mail worked – just soup to nuts. It was all set up. And we were just meeting each other three weeks before LD.

> **"We can do this right, although time is running out drastically. It is not a question of the number of troops; it is a question of how the troops are being utilized."**
>
> *Thomas Johnson*

The point I am trying to make is that when you have strategic leadership that is operating off of those kinds of delusions (I just cannot find another word for it) as to what is going to be happening, the fact of whether you have a COIN manual or not is the least of your problems.

The problem is that it is not just one administration. I wish that you could just turn the rock over and point to Donald Rumsfeld and Dick Cheney and have it all go away, but it is something that has been growing for decades. We are having a real problem as a nation developing strategic leaders who can look at something, see it for what it is, and make the kinds of decisions in terms of commitment of resources, time, and national prestige that will bring us to success on a clear objective. Ambiguity in these things is just killing us. It just runs all the way downhill. We did not do the proper planning because we did not have a good idea as to what we were there for, so we did not do the proper interagency coordination, and so we did not get the proper people lined up to do what we wanted to do in country. Then when we got there and we owned it, we just tried to wing it, and nothing good will come of it.

I wish that I could tell you that we got there and I was as successful as I was as a battalion S3 in Somalia. I longed for those days. Being the civil-military guy and working with the ORHA, the transition to the Office of the Coalition Provisional Authority (OCPA), setting up an Iraqi interim government immediately, going to elections after that – it was just so fast, so ill thought out.

As an alternate history, think about what would have happened had we had gone into Iraq with the same force as with Desert Storm. We went to Iraq in 2003 with basically four divisions, only one of which was a heavy division. What if we had deployed the Desert Storm force package under the understanding that we were going to take down that country and occupy it for five years? What if we had declared to the Iraqis that after five years with an interim government working side by side as a junior partner to the international coalition there would be elections, there would be a parade, that the international guys would leave and the Iraqis could go forth and do well? What if we had made this investment at the beginning, both to ourselves and to the Iraqis? We kept changing the goalposts on them. They did not really know what to think.

As to the Afghans – what's going on this year? Are the Americans saying the same thing as last year? Maybe not. What do they

think? That is one of the key problems. We just do not want to make the investment to do these things. We have to start demanding of our strategic leaders that they do the planning and that they think of the second- and third-order effects. You have great executors, but if you are beginning with assumptions that just are not particularly true, no good will come of it.

We confuse everybody around us in the international community. We confuse the enemy. We confuse our friends. I'll give you a perfect example. I work quite a bit with the Pakistanis. They are led by classically trained generals who are more lockstep than the Soviets were and who are very rigorous in their thinking. They and their leadership looked across the border into Afghanistan and saw us sitting there with sometimes less than two brigades, squirreling around, and we would look them in the eye and tell them that we are serious about fixing Afghanistan. They know that Afghanistan cannot be fixed with two brigades. So until we commit the forces to do something, until we start acting a little bit more rationally along those lines, we cannot expect people to take us seriously. It is just not going to happen.

Stephen Holmes:
I would like to start with a set of questions about lessons from the past concerning the civilian side of counterinsurgency. What can we learn from past experiences about the requests that General McChrystal was making for civilian help? He says in his report that the Afghan government is not connected to Afghan society and that he is going to bring over from Washington the civilian experts who know how to connect government with society. Have such individuals ever existed and if so when? Who are the experts who know how to turn two-handed corruption into one-handed corruption in a combat zone? What is our experience of building, as John Nagl said earlier this morning, the rule of law under such circumstances, or anywhere? Are there examples in our history of our ever having done that successfully that we could learn from?

Thomas Johnson:
I would like to talk about the civilians. Let me read something from my most recent publication, in *Military Review*:

> In Vietnam, there were hundreds of Foreign Service officers deployed in country at any given time after 1968. In southern Afghanistan today, there are less than 20. Six hundred to 800 Pashto-speaking State and U.S. Agency for International Development Foreign Service officers distributed among the 200 district reconstruction teams would be commensurate with the level of effort required. In eight years since the start of Operation Enduring Freedom, only 13 foreign service officers have been trained to speak Pashto, and only two of them are apparently in Afghanistan today, a pathetic counterinsurgency effort by the State Department by any reasonable standard.

W. Patrick Lang:
I mentioned CORDS before – that is absolutely right about the hundreds of Foreign Service officers. Some of them were people like Richard Holbrooke as junior officers, but there was a huge number of other people who were hired specifically as Foreign Service reserve officers for specific jobs under contract for a wide variety of governmental and commercial functions. It was just an enormous task. I have read General McChrystal's estimate as well. You cannot just say what it is that we are going to have. You have to figure out how you are going to generate that force, how you are going to maintain it, and how you

are going to continue to have replacements for the people you send over there so that there will be some next year and the year after that. It is a huge undertaking and I do not see anybody actually doing that.

Martin Stanton:
Regarding the number of Foreign Service officers, it comes back to the excellent question that Janine Davidson asked earlier – What do you want them to do? Would their function be something that you need a Foreign Service officer to do, or do you merely need a sentient life form? Do you need someone with authority over monies, which is where many of the Foreign Service requirements come from? If you are trying to grow them inside the Foreign Service, that is a very thin pipeline – it takes a long time and you are probably not going to get there from here. But if you are just looking for a body, you can hire a body, sprinkle fairy dust on them, and make them a temporary Foreign Service officer, and that might work better.

Michael Sheehan:
I think it is a really bad idea to even think about that approach. This has to be an Afghan solution. As I said earlier, and I could go on indefinitely about this, I would stick to the adage that less is more in counterinsurgency. Less American, more Afghan. The more Americans you put in, the more probable that you foul it up and displace Afghans who are eventually going to have to figure out a way to move forward themselves.

EXCERPTS FROM THE QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Question (*from the audience*):
Is it not deeply misleading to think that through notions such as the Human Terrain System we can produce the social scientific knowledge that can somehow be operationalized to generate legitimacy? This seems like something beyond anything we have ever been able to achieve with social science.

Thomas Johnson:
I think the real tragedy of Afghanistan is that there is a political solution but we keep ignoring it. NYU's Barnett Rubin and I have argued about this for many years, but I think that we have to reconstruct the traditional village elder system that existed before the Soviet invasion in 1979. Kabul has always been a symbolic regime. In fact, when you try to extend the reach of the central government, it is the *thing* of insurgencies rather than a *cure* of insurgencies. So I think that we have been 180 degrees wrong with our macro approach. What we have to do is reestablish the traditional legitimacy of the village system, which I recognize is going to be very difficult.

Lastly, you don't rebuild the walls when the roof is on fire. Obviously, this isn't going to last for long, but right now trying to build a Jeffersonian democracy in Afghanistan is absolutely absurd.

Michael Sheehan:
With all due respect, when I hear you say that we are going to reconstitute a tribal village system in Afghanistan, to me this is absolute insanity. I spent 10 months in Mogadishu with many of the experts. One thing I learned about experts is that the more they learn about a society, the more they know that they do not understand it at all. So the idea that we are going to have smart people, even if they speak

a little bit of the language, go out in these remote areas and reconstitute what are going to be legitimate local governments is ridiculous. It has to be Afghan.

Ken Silverstein (*from the audience*):
Ambassador Sheehan, if you are right that we have had a great deal of success in debilitating the enemy's strategic capabilities, what is the exit strategy? Can we walk away without consequences? Can we just say enough is enough? What happens then?

Michael Sheehan:
I am a fairly conservative person, so I would not recommend doing anything dramatic in Afghanistan right away, but I would certainly move toward downsizing in a very steady way. I would keep enough force structure there and enough American assistance to prop up the Afghan government, but I think that can be done with a fairly minimal presence. Both sides of the equation are Afghan. We and all of our allies are going to support them, and we are the largest, strongest country on the planet. The objective is not to reinvent Afghanistan – it is just to hold it together. We are not going to go in and reinvent Somalia. We are not going to go in and reinvent Yemen or the tribal areas of Pakistan, and I do not think we need to reinvent Afghanistan either.

W. Patrick Lang:
I have had an ongoing argument with John Nagl about whether or not there can actually be a true endgame in Afghanistan. In my view, if you follow the large COIN footprint model, eventually you reach the point that I mentioned earlier, where you leave altogether and you leave a sweltering mess behind you. But in order to manage the counterterrorist threat, it may be necessary to have some small, highly specialized American presence in country for quite a long time. He says that that's the big disadvantage to my approach, but it is an imperfect world.

Martin Stanton:
These ideas about not having U.S. forces there, not sending more, drawing down U.S. forces, or that we are part of the problem all deal with a flatlining enemy. The enemy is not flatlining in Afghanistan. The enemy is growing in numbers and capabilities. You might disagree with the concept of introducing more U.S. troops, but introducing more U.S. troops even in a surge situation is more of a stabilization measure while we ostensibly grow the Afghan army, its capabilities, and the capabilities of their government than it is a war-winning measure. It is a measure to keep us from *losing*. That is the theory behind it. You can agree with it or disagree with it, and there are smart people here on both sides, but the thought that we could draw down while the enemy is in their present state and not expect them to further encroach or further expand their power in Afghanistan is just not realistic.

Adam Silverman (*from the audience*):
Afghanistan seems to be the place where the notion of the modern nation–state, the Westphalian state, goes to die. It is really not workable because of the society, the history, and all of dynamics that we have been talking about this morning. At the same time, one of the arguments about why Afghanistan was hospitable to groups like the Taliban or al Qaeda relates to the idea of a failed state. So if you cannot build a state, and you do not want to leave a failed state, where do you go from here?

Thomas Johnson:
I think you are right that we have to think outside the box of the Treaty of Westphalia. I think that the problem in Afghanistan is not a quantitative manpower problem; it is a qualita-

tive manpower problem. I do not think that we need 40,000 more troops. I think that we need to use the troops that are in country right now efficiently. Let me give you an example. Things have changed, but when I was a cultural adviser at a Forward Operating Base Salerno in Khost in 2007, less than five percent of the people ever left the base. That is the problem in Afghanistan. What we need to do is work with the Afghans to reconstruct the traditional system. How do we do that? I wrote an article in *The Atlantic* in October 2008 called "All Counterinsurgency Is Local." I talked about setting up 200 district reconstruction teams. We have the answer. The answer is Provincial Reconstruction Teams, but they are a grain of sand on the beach because we have one PRT for every 1.2 million Pasthuns.

We have to move the PRT concept down to the district level. It would consist of about 100 U.S. or international personnel complemented with 100 Afghan soldiers in concentric circles living at the village level rather than in a combat outpost on a hill. They might be complimented with maybe 25 members of the Afghan National Police and development specialists.

We can do this right, although time is running out drastically. It is not a question of the number of troops; it is a question of how the troops are being utilized.

Michael Sheehan:
Our entire counterinsurgency mindset, which is taking over the U.S. military and the U.S. government thinking in Afghanistan, is based on the premise that you cannot have a failed state or else al Qaeda will be strategically attacking us. That premise should be tested. I do not think it holds up to close scrutiny at all, and it is a gross misunderstanding of the nature of al Qaeda and how it functions globally. Yes, sanctuary matters. From 1998 to 2000, I beat the drum about the sanctuary of impunity that we allowed al Qaeda to enjoy in Afghanistan. We cannot allow that to happen, but that does not mean you have to occupy and change a country to deny them that. We are proving that that's the case in western Pakistan. We are not occupying western Pakistan. We never will because we can't. I wish that we couldn't in Afghanistan either, because we would find another way to prevent al Qaeda from having that capability. We need to figure out a strategy in Afghanistan like in western Pakistan where we do not have tens of thousands of conventional forces occupying the country in order to achieve our basic objective. Al Qaeda is a global organization – its base matters, but there are many other parts of it that matter as well in order for it to conduct an attack in the United States.

Let me say one thing about the Whac-a-Mole strategy. The problem with the analogy is that when you hit the Whac-a-Mole, it pops up somewhere else. We are hitting the moles and killing them in western Pakistan so they cannot pop up again. We can keep doing that, and it is working.

That is really my fundamental point – that the notion that you have to fix failed states in order to defeat strategic al Qaeda is flawed.

W. Patrick Lang:
It is not just failed states. It is failed countries, failed national entities. The idea that we can repair these societies and by improving their situation in life change their behavior and their attitude toward things is an enormous task. It is too expensive. It is much better to do what you and Professor Johnson suggest, which is to work with the local tribal entities and people like that in order to effect what you want, which is to reduce the terrorist threat to the United States.

David Phillips (*from the audience*):
Colonel Stanton, you talked about a failure of strategic leadership. In Iraq, wasn't it really a failure of political leadership?

I was a part of something called the Future of Iraq Project. We spent many millions of dollars. We uncovered lots of problems that the United States would encounter when we got into Iraq. So my question is, Is this a technical problem or is it really a failure of political leadership?

Martin Stanton:
Well, in our country, political leadership is strategic leadership.

When you look at the 1990s and at the decisions being made now, the problem is deeper than any of the personalities involved. Look at the people whom we have been putting into elected office, and at the decisions they have made about the world and why. This is the problem for America. Your military will do just about anything but stand up on its hind legs and bark, but when you have strategic leadership with crippling delusions about the way the world is or about the ability of our military power to create effects on the ground, we are just not going to get there from here. Our failures are failures of policy, and our policymakers are elected.

I am trying to get my head around how we educate our policymakers. How do we make these people better? They are beholden to constituencies that elected them. Too many of the elected leaders that we have now, and have had previously, have neither the background nor frankly the proclivity to learn what is really happening. It is a deep problem for the United States, and from my study of history it is probably the worst it has ever been.

W. Patrick Lang:
That is projected into the Army as well, because this kind of willful ignorance of foreigners and in many ways a lack of sympathy for them is reflected in the Special Operations force. When I went into the Green Berets in the early 1960s, it was a band of characters who were devoted to interacting and living with foreigners, and learning to deal with them on their terms. It included people with many language skills and there were many foreigners by birth in the ranks. Now the system has been twisted around so that what you have is increasingly a bunch of counterterrorist commandos. Those people do not work too well with the tribal people that Dr. Johnson was talking about. We need to do something about that.

Thomas Johnson:
I think that we have to stop mirror-imaging onto the other societies of the world. We continually get into trouble with that. What is good for us is not necessarily good for the rest of the world, and I think that has to be reflected in our strategy, operations, and tactics.

I also think that we have to stop wishful thinking. Just because we want to wish a reality doesn't make a reality. That is what I am concerned that we are doing in Afghanistan.

Michael Sheehan:
I think the Army should be very careful about blaming civilian politicians for its failures. When the Army wins, it is very good at taking credit for victory. They deserve the victories they win on the battlefield. When it loses, it is quick to blame bad intelligence or a bad policy framework. Unfortunately, it is not so simple in either case. Our national policies are created by civilian leaders in conjunction with the military leadership. The military has an obligation to understand the business that it's in and to give good advice to its political leadership to try to formulate the most effective policies it can to achieve our national objectives.

Assessing Afghanistan

Panelists:
Lt. Gen. David Barno, U.S. Army (ret.); C. Christine Fair; David Kilcullen; Joanna Nathan; Nir Rosen

Moderator:
Steven Simon

David Kilcullen; Lt. Gen. David Barno, U.S. Army (ret.); Nir Rosen. *Photo by Dan Creighton.*

Steven Simon:
I would like this panel to assess Afghanistan here and now as a baseline for understanding how the United States and others might go forward. We are not going to talk about all the analogies that have preoccupied us so far today – Iraq, Somalia, and other places. We will probably get a *Rashomon*-like picture of the place, which we will have to assemble in the course of our discussion into something like a coherent understanding of Afghanistan and, therefore, of the possibilities and constraints of making progress there, including as the United States, as a member of a coalition, and as a partner with the Afghan government in trying to straighten things out.

Lt. Gen. David Barno, U.S. Army (ret.):
I was the commander in Afghanistan from October 2003 until May 2005. My time coincided with that of Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad. We arrived within a few weeks of each other, and we made some fairly dramatic changes pointing toward a unified effort between the embassy and the military there. We left within a few weeks of each other 19 months later, which says more about our personnel systems than our priorities. Today I want to talk a bit about the broader picture, maybe the strategic picture, of Afghanistan. I would note up front that as you look around this panel, as well as at the earlier panels, it is unfortunate that we do not have any Afghan representation. The perspective of the Afghans themselves is crucial to this discussion, and we can only imperfectly approximate it based on the experiences of the panel members today. Their perspective on much of what we hear today might be quite a bit different, and we have to keep that in mind.

The other thing that I would like to talk about is the regional perspective and how Afghanistan fits into a broader context, particularly in South Asia, with regard to long-term U.S. policy objectives. As I listened to Michael Sheehan earlier, I noted that he is very critical of General McChrystal because General McChrystal is so focused on counterinsurgency in Afghanistan, but that is the charter that he has been given. When I was there, I was responsible for four countries: all of Afghanistan, all of Pakistan except Kashmir, and parts of Tajikistan and

Uzbekistan. General McChrystal has one country and one country only – Afghanistan – so that drives him to an operational focus and below, not a strategic focus on the region. General David Petraeus has that broader responsibility, on the military side at least.

At the beginning of some of the articles that I have written, I talk about a Sun Tzu quote that I think is apropos to this discussion: "Strategy without tactics is the longest road to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat." Much of our effort in Afghanistan, even to this day, has been hampered by a lack of strategy and an excessive focus on tactics. Much of the debate in Washington and in the country right now is about tactics. It is about how many soldiers and Marines to send to Afghanistan, about counterinsurgency "strategy" but really about the tactics – certainly nothing above the operational level. But the strategy, which includes the policy objectives, is open to question and needs to be refined a bit.

"The heads of state have to be able to talk clearly about what the importance of this mission is, what the costs of failure are, and what can be achieved. That has been muddled and uncertain, certainly over the past year. Unless that changes, there will be simply no way to defeat the Taliban strategic objective of letting the sand run out of the hourglass."

Gen. Barno

In an interview the other day, President Obama, for the first time I think, used a term that is part of my focus as well: What is the *endgame* for the United States in the region, and not just in Afghanistan? What is our goal set for what we want the region to look like if we are successful in achieving our policy objectives? We have to be able to clearly answer that question, and we have to devise our approach based upon an understanding of what that endgame is going to be. We have muddied the water quite a bit, in part by focusing on Afghanistan alone without considering the Afghanistan/Pakistan/India dimension, all three of which are closely related to each other. We have also muddied the water by confusing the idea of our goal as being exit rather than success, delivering on the policy objectives that the president articulated on March 21st and has not yet recalibrated. When we begin to talk about exit as being our goal, that becomes our strategy, and it undercuts our ability to actually achieve our stated objectives. We have to be cautious about that.

After leaving Afghanistan in 2005, one of my greatest concerns was about a lack of confidence in American staying power that I perceived while travelling around the region. My concern about that is far greater today than it was then. The question I heard most often from Afghans during my time there was, "You Americans are not going to abandon us again, are you?" They have a very keen sense of the history that we (in their view) left them behind lock, stock, and barrel after the defeat of the Soviets and that (in their view again) much of their trouble over the last 15 years or so, including the rise of the Taliban, came from the U.S. decision to leave. They are very leery of seeing that occur again.

By the same token, the dilemma that our uncertainty has posed in Pakistan is that much of their national security decision-making rests, I am convinced, on the question of what the decision will look like the day after the

U.S. is gone. This again gets to the issue of what our regional set of goals and objectives is and how our policy in Afghanistan, which is part of the broader context, fits and supports those goals and objectives.

> **"It is not Afghanistan's failure that makes Pakistan nasty; it is the fact that Pakistan is truly nasty that makes Afghanistan doomed to fail."**
>
> *C. Christine Fair*

To talk more specifically about Afghanistan, I think we have four major challenges at this point and looking ahead for the next 12 months. They are fairly simple but will be very complex to address. The first is to defeat the Taliban strategy. We are fighting an active enemy that has a robust strategy. I have a great deal of respect for their strategic thinking, having fought them for 19 months there. In my judgment, they have a simple strategy that in American terms would be described as running out the clock. If this were a football game, this would be the fourth quarter, they believe they are ahead on the scoreboard, they are controlling the football, and they are simply going to run out the clock. They are fighting a strategic insurgency aimed against the popular will in the United States, North America, Europe, and our NATO allies. They are convinced that they simply have to let the sand run out of the hourglass. We have to think through what it is going to take to defeat that.

Secondly, in the wake of the recent fragmented and problematic Afghan election, we have to work hard with President Karzai to rebuild trust between his government and his people in the next 12 months. That will not be our task directly, but the trust and confidence of the Afghan people not only in their national government, which is distant from the average Afghan, but also in their local government is going to be crucial to any ability to achieve success and to rebuild some sense of legitimacy in the country.

The third challenge we have – and I am concerned about where it stands today, given the events of the past two weeks – is to achieve true unity of effort in Afghanistan. We have been crippled for almost our entire time there by having a fragmented approach. We have had fragmentation in the military effort, in many ways induced by bringing NATO into the fight in 2006 with 41 – now 43 – countries involved in the military enterprise. We have fragmentation and disunity between the military and civil efforts, most recently showcased earlier this month by the leaked cable from Ambassador Karl Eikenberry that was absolutely at cross-purposes to the approach General McChrystal was suggesting. So clearly the two most senior Americans currently in country fundamentally disagree about the road ahead. We have a great deal of disunity between the international effort and the Afghans, on both the security side and the development side. We cannot achieve any of our objectives unless we heal these rifts, and the most important place for that to occur is at the local level, where it impacts ordinary Afghans.

The final challenge, which I think connects the others, is for President Obama, Prime Minister Gordon Brown, Chancellor Angela Merkel, and President Nicolas Sarkozy to reframe the narrative of why we are in Afghanistan to their populations at home. The heads of state have to be able to talk clearly about what the importance of this mission is, what the costs of failure are, and what can be achieved. That has been muddled and uncertain, certainly over the past year. Unless that changes, there will be simply no way to defeat the Taliban strategic objective of letting the sand run out of the hourglass.

This points out what has to occur in the next several months. The fundamental question for the United States is whether we stay or go. How do we frame that? There is a fork in the road. As my friend Ashley Tellis at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace likes to say, one path is to "invest and endure." That involves looking at a long-term strategic partnership to help this region become stabilized, not only so that there are no more 9/11s but also to prevent a nuclear war on the subcontinent between some of the other players, which in my judgment is a very real prospect. That path takes us to a long-term investment. It does not lead to 100,000 troops for 25 years, but nor does it lead down a road where we are no longer present as a significant influence in the region, letting it drift along on its own. The other path, which is tempting but wrong, is to declare success and leave. We may camouflage it with other terminology, but that is the stark choice we have right now.

> **"[C]orruption leads to bad government behavior, which leads to popular rage and disillusionment, which empowers the Taliban who push the poppy, which creates the cash that drives the corruption. That is the cycle that we are trying to deal with in Afghanistan."**
>
> *David Kilcullen*

The signals that we are sending to the people in the region are ambiguous. Neither our friends nor our enemies are clear as to whether we are committed to a long-term effort to help stabilize the region. That does nothing but undercut our ultimate objectives. There are some stark choices in front of us. The costs of failure are significant (as outlined in a couple of good pieces this week, including one by Steve Coll). This has to be explained to the people of the nations supporting Afghanistan with their treasure and with their blood.

C. Christine Fair:

The fraudulent August 2009 elections in Afghanistan have really thrown into light – certainly in the United States – a deep divide about what we are doing in Afghanistan, what our objectives are, what the costs of winning might be, what the costs of losing might be, and even the definitions of winning and losing. I think that the justification that we are there because of 9/11 is simply not adequate, and that many Americans share this confusion. I certainly agree with General Barno that the leadership of the various countries involved in Afghanistan have not articulated why we are there, and so I am going to turn this around on its head a little bit.

I am frustrated that the discussion about what to do in Afghanistan has largely turned on how many troops to send or not. I believe we focus on this because it is the only lever that we can actually control. We cannot persuade our NATO allies to pick up the fight and get rid of their caveats. We cannot make our own civilian system deliver aid better. We cannot produce diplomats or USAID officers overnight. While we talk about corruption in Afghanistan, no one addresses the fact that the way we do aid is deeply corrupt. There is no transparency in how money is spent at Provincial Reconstruction Teams. So we can howl at Karzai all we want about being corrupt, about being a be-caped klepto-narcocrat, but we do not put transparency into our own system. That being said, it is easy to talk about troops because everything else is so difficult.

Yet corruption with the Karzai government is absolutely important. It is not simply platitudes; we are not simply talking about what legitimacy may or may not mean. Let me give an example of why corruption matters. One of the most elemental things that we have been trying to do with various degrees of success is build the Afghan National Security Forces. One of my favorite programs to discuss is called Focused District Development (FDD). Tom Johnson and I agree that it is the district and subdistrict that matter. Where I think we disagree is about what we can do at that level, especially with corrupt, problematic Afghan partners. The whole notion of FDD is that the police, which exist at the district level, are deeply corrupt. We all know that. (That is actually how Taliban have sold themselves – that they can deal with corruption of the police and other government officials quite effectively). In FDD, we pull all the police, who are illiterate and barely policemen to begin with by any definition, out of the district. We give them eight weeks of training. You could already question whether that will be adequate, and then you have to consider the fact that our police mentor billets are filled at about one in three. After we hose them off, we put them right back in the same district with the same corrupt district governor and the same corrupt chief of police who is likely involved in timber smuggling, gem smuggling, narcotics trafficking, or smuggling young boys to the United Arab Emirates.

Even if we had the best-configured program – and I am not going to say that the FDD is – we cannot succeed with it absent a government in Afghanistan that is committed to weeding out corruption and other issues, not only at the national level but at the subnational level where much of this matters. And everyone is surprised by police recidivism.

I have come to the conclusion that counterinsurgency is a fabulous goal, but I do not think it can be won if winning means setting up the kind of government that we have all talked about – not because it isn't a good idea but because I do not believe we have the military or civilian capabilities required, and certainly not with this Afghan government.

We have to be fair in taking responsibility. Karzai did not come up because he was the best man around; he came up because he was manipulable. We have not given him control of his own country. He does not control what troops do, where they go, or what kind of operations they conduct, and he does not control the budget. International donors do not give money through the Ministry of Finance. They do not want to give money to the government because they rightly fear that it is corrupt. But there is a fundamental problem; we hold him accountable for not being sovereign but we actually do not enable him to ever be sovereign.

There was a time when I thought we should go big or go home, but I no longer believe that. I think we have made a concatenation of errors and now have to come up with a Plan B. Plan B is not trying to refashion Plan A and make it sound better. It is time for a Plan B because the region has changed. It is not the same Taliban that was there on September 10th. This is a different Taliban, and the regional dynamics are different. In my old days as a physical chemist, I learned that when you observe something, you change it. What we have seen happening in Pakistan as a consequence of 9/11 has changed the militant terrain in the region, setting off a cascade whereby many of the goons who were once all on ISI's leash aren't anymore, and there are dangerous consequences of that.

I am dismayed that there are people saying that we have to send more troops to Afghanistan because if Afghanistan continues to go to hell in a handbasket, then Pakistan is going to go to hell in an even bigger handbas-

Steven Simon and David Kilcullen.
Photo by Dan Creighton.

ket. I am going to argue that Pakistan is already a hell in a hand basket and that the causality is actually the reverse: It is not Afghanistan's failure that makes Pakistan nasty; it is the fact that Pakistan is truly nasty that makes Afghanistan doomed to fail. So we have this puzzle that makes me as a taxpayer want to jump up and down and holler.

The Department of Defense now wants to create an Afghan National Security Force of 400,000. This is risible. However you want to cast it, unless you make poppy a biofuel, it cannot pay for these security forces. All facetiousness aside, how in the world are they going to pay? This is the biggest rentier state that Afghanistan has ever been, period. It cannot pay for itself. This is not remotely sustainable, and how ironic is it? Why do we have to have a 400,000-member Afghan National Security Force? It is because its neighbor insists upon supporting the Afghan Taliban.

By the way, I do not believe there is anything we can do. Pakistan is a self-licking ice cream cone. Whether we stay or go, it benefits. If we stay, Pakistan continues to get billions of dollars a year in overt and covert funding. If we leave, it continues to support the Taliban and get money from the Saudis. Pakistan wins no matter what we do. It is ironic that we are talking about putting more troops into Afghanistan, which means that we need the Pakistanis more, when, in fact, we should be thinking about ways of diminishing our footprint in Afghanistan to secure our true national security, which is not by making Afghanistan the Switzerland of South Asia. Rather, we need to think about how we can diminish our footprint in Afghanistan so that we can create space to compel Pakistan. If we were to get the Pakistanis to diminish their support for the Afghan Taliban, we wouldn't need a 400,000-member Afghan National Security Force.

I would also argue that Pakistan represents more intense national security threats than Afghanistan ever could. Whether it is the number of al Qaeda operatives, the number of international terrorism cells linked to Pakistan, or nuclear proliferation, these are all happening in Pakistan. The policy community tends to stovepipe these things. What I think is rarely appreciated is that these things happen in Pakistan because they are deeply interrelated. If you look at Pakistan's policy of proxy warfare, which began in 1947, the first thing that it did as an independent state did was raise a tribal lashkar from Waziristan to go into Kashmir to affect the ways in which Kashmir would end up, be it with India or with Pakistan. From 1947 onward, they continued to maintain this covert jihad. I am not going to dispute their reasons – the Pakistanis in origin had a fairly good claim to make. The irony is that we continue to focus our efforts on Afghanistan, making it increasingly difficult to put our attention and resources on Pakistan.

I have come to believe essentially that six decades of giving money to the Pakistanis has not helped create a more stable Pakistan. It has created a more difficult Pakistan in terms of its lack of constitutionalism. In fact, the United States has largely subsidized the lack of constitutionalism in Pakistan. The more we have to put resources into Afghanistan, the

more difficult we make it to deal with the most important security threat in the region, Pakistan. For those of you who doubt what I am talking about, consider its security competition with India. Let's remember that the biggest movement of military forces happened in 2001, when Pakistan-backed militants targeted the Indian parliament in December. We now know that both countries did many things vis-à-vis nuclear escalation that were quite scary. So while we are thinking about the Taliban and what they may or may not be doing, we have its neighbor to the east, which is investing ever more resources into the only tool it has to prosecute its foreign and domestic policies – militancy.

Those militant groups actually cause you and I more problems than the Taliban ever could. We have a diaspora. Militancy is supply and demand, conditioned upon radicalizing abroad. There are only a certain number of places you can go to become a militant. Where are those militant finishing schools? They are not in Afghanistan; they are in Pakistan.

Steven Simon:
Dr. Kilcullen, in your book *Accidental Guerilla*, you show how counterinsurgency works on a retail basis. The book also has an exhaustive roster of the things that the United States and presumably other outside actors would need to do to get it right, but with the implication that it could be gotten right in some sense. That is very different from what we have just heard from Dr. Fair. Could you square them?

David Kilcullen:
I don't know if I can square them, but I have seen the war in Afghanistan develop in ways that I fundamentally agree with everyone who has spoken today. I think the debate about Afghanistan strategy has gone down a bit of a

Joanna Nathan and C. Christine Fair.
Photo by Dan Creighton.

rabbit hole in terms of two false dichotomies, one between counterterrorism or counterinsurgency and the other between more troops or less troops. I would like to suggest that what we are doing in Afghanistan now is not a counterinsurgency, if what you mean by counterinsurgency is what we wrote about in the counterinsurgency field manual, FM 3-24. Instead of thinking about it in terms of the manual, we need to think about two things that we are not hearing much about: leverage and posture.

It is not an FM 3-24 counterinsurgency. The paradigm that FM 3-24 puts forward is the idea that there is a weak and ineffective state threatened by an internal armed challenger and not connected to its own population. The appropriate response, according to the manual, is for us to strengthen that state and connect it more effectively to its population. Our security operations are all designed to enable that to happen, basically pushing back the armed internal challenger so that we can do the work of strengthening the government and connecting it to the population.

That is not the situation in Afghanistan. We do have an armed internal challenger, but we have a government that is riddled with corrupt and oppressive officials and institutions and that is exploiting and abusing its own people. So if your strategy is to strengthen the

government and connect it more effectively to its population, the better you do at executing that strategy, the worse things are going to get.

So if it isn't FM 3-24, then what is it? We are looking at a stabilization operation based on a vicious cycle of five interlinked elements. Because this is a cycle, you could start anywhere, but I am going to start with the issue of corruption. There is an absolute tsunami of elicit cash washing through the Afghan government structure at every level from top to bottom. That corruption is so ingrained that Afghanistan is now supposedly the second-most corrupt country in the world after Somalia (and if you recognize that Somalia does not even have a functioning government, it is the most corrupt place on earth). That corruption is the first big issue, and we have talked about a number of examples already.

The corruption drives the second big issue, which is bad government behavior. I am not talking about bad governance; I am talking about bad government behavior – exploiting the population, abusing people. Afghan police are raping hundreds of young Pashtun boys in the Pashtun parts of the country where they are operating because that is what you do when you go into these areas, occupy someone, and treat them as a subhuman species. Many of these people do not come from the areas where they are working. We won't even talk about what is happening on the financial side in terms of exploiting and extracting resources from the population. So bad government behavior is the second big issue.

> **"The corruption we hear about today is not *despite* our best efforts; it is *because* of the way we engage."**
>
> *Joanna Nathan*

The third issue, popular rage and disillusionment with the Afghan government and the international community, is driven by that bad government behavior. I would elaborate slightly on General Barno's description of the Taliban strategy. That strategy has three steps: discredit, exhaust, inherit. They have succeeded with step one. They have discredited the Afghan government and the international effort in the eyes of Afghans. The next step is exhaustion, and then inheriting the wreckage as we pull back. So that bad government behavior drives the popular rage and discontent, creating space for and empowering the Taliban insurgency.

The Taliban insurgency is not just accidental and it is not just generated by popular rage on the part of people who hate the government. It comes from a number of other things as well, but what the rage and disillusionment do is create political space that allows the insurgency to eat into the fabric of Afghan society and take further hold.

The Taliban promote the poppy cultivation. Taliban officials and Taliban technical and agricultural advisers go out on the ground and help the Afghan farmer figure out how to adopt the world's best cash crop, the poppy. There is absolutely no doubt that from an economic and agricultural standpoint, the poppy is just unbeatable. It is a winter crop. It does not compete with food crops. You can get three to four crops a year from the same piece of ground. It basically grows on concrete. You do not need any fertilizer, which is expensive. You do not need a huge amount of water. It takes a lot of labor, which is a good thing if you are an Afghan farmer because it means you give jobs to your family. The customer will pay you in full, up front, and pick it up from the farm gate, so you have no risk and no cost associated with getting it to market. Poppy is Taliban CERP – the

Taliban use the poppy the same way that we use the Commander's Emergency Response Program. We use CERP to win populations to our side; that is what they use the poppy for. The poppy generates the tsunami of cash that drives the corruption and closes the circle.

So corruption leads to bad government behavior, which leads to popular rage and disillusionment, which empowers the Taliban who push the poppy, which creates the cash that drives the corruption. That is the cycle that we are trying to deal with in Afghanistan. You won't find that in FM 3-24. It is not that kind of situation. It is a stabilization operation.

"Once you get down to the rifle squad, COIN does not make any sense. It is hard for them to maintain the greater strategic picture in their minds – they just don't want to die. They are being asked to be Wyatt Earp and Mother Teresa at the same time."

Nir Rosen

To be fair, most classical counterinsurgency operations were not FM 3-24 operations either. If you look at Vietnam, it was not a counterinsurgency. It had a counterinsurgency in it, but it also had a positional war on the Demilitarized Zone; it had a conventional war against the North Vietnamese army. There was an air war over North Vietnam itself. There was a maritime component. There was a regional dimension. It was just as complex as the war we are fighting now. It was not a pure counterinsurgency either.

So how to address this cycle? We need to look at leverage and posture. Leverage is the critical issue and Dr. Fair already talked about this a bit. We need to arrest the cycle of instability. There are two ways that can be done that I can see. One is to put in enough troops and resources to control the environment, to call the shots, to start to stabilize things, and then to suggest to the Afghan government that it is time to get on board with the effort or get out of the way. That is basically what we did in Iraq during the surge.

The second option is to convincingly demonstrate to the Afghan government that we are leaving, that they have screwed the pooch, and that they really need to take certain key steps in order to avoid their own destruction. I call that the 12x14 solution, because what I suggest you do is get a 12x14 glossy photograph of President Najibullah hanging from a lamppost outside the presidential palace in 1996 when the Taliban took Kabul. You frame it in a nice gilt frame, give it to President Karzai, and say, "This is going to be you. It might take one year. It might take two years, but it is going to be you. If you want to avoid that, there is a list of things that you might want to consider doing." That is the other way to do it. I think that looking at this as a search for leverage is much better than thinking about how many tactical units we are going to put in.

The other thing is posture. We know from much study and research exactly how these types of conflicts end, and, again, it is not what you read about in FM 3-24. The evidence from the ground is not necessarily aligned with the COIN manual. We know that in most cases where these conflicts actually end, it is through a process of bottom-up peace building and the formation of legitimate and effective local governance structures that are aligned with a secure civil society that feels safe enough to put the weapons down and to engage in nonarmed or nonviolent

political discourse rather than using violence to work out its political problems. We know that it usually involves a process of bottom-up rule-of-law mediation and dispute resolution mechanisms at the local level. We know there is usually an element of reconciliation with reconcilable elements of the enemy and there is always an element of destruction, violence against the irreconcilable elements. Last but certainly not least, there is the reform of central government institutions, and provincial government institutions in this case, and the accountability of local officials.

There is a database called the Correlates of War maintained at Indiana University. It has been run continuously since 1963 and identifies 411 wars worldwide since 1816. Of those, 17 percent have been conventional state-on-state wars. The other 83 percent have been insurgencies, and this is the type of environment that we find ourselves in now. So we need to ask ourselves what posture – what aid posture, what development posture, what diplomatic posture, what military posture – is most conducive to creating those outcomes. That is the debate we need to be having, and we need to be thinking about Afghan posture, U.S. posture, coalition posture, and about Afghanistan and Pakistan. That is the question: What posture is most conducive to that result, and how do we use that to generate the leverage we need to break the cycle of instability?

Steven Simon:
I hope we come back to the leverage question because, from my perspective, Karzai is a classic free rider. It is difficult to envisage the leverage that works on a free rider, particularly one in his rather enviable position.

David Kilcullen:
We pay him $200,000 a month to look after his household. We protect him and keep him alive.

Steven Simon:
That is just one of his free rider benefits, but it is not insignificant.

Joanna Nathan:
It has been a little bit strange emerging from five years in the forgotten war to the harsh light of a U.S. debate. The war is forgotten no longer. Basically nothing about this has been very surprising. It goes back to the structures that were put in place post-2001. The same regional structures were left in place as brought the Taliban to power in the 1990s. Within Afghanistan, abusive power holders, many of them the very same figures, were put back in power. I think we have to be very clear about that. They were the people we chose. They were not traditional leaders. They were not well-loved Afghan figures nor were they the powerful people at the time. They were they people we chose. It was a strategic decision, which has resulted in what we see today.

> **"I was in D.C. in 2001, and I do not think that anyone understood that the Northern Alliance was – and is – viewed by Pakistan as an Indian proxy."**
>
> *C. Christine Fair*

I am glad that we agree that a counterinsurgency has not been fought. I am more familiar with the south, where there certainly has not been one, but I often have been amazed at a narrative that the east is won through some counterinsurgency strategies there. I was down in Gardez, a two hours' drive from Kabul, just before I left Afghanistan. I used to be able to drive right

along that road to Khost in 2005. A civilian would not think about doing that today. I had to wait six days until I found a UN convoy to return with. That used to be a day trip, but I would no longer drive that road by myself.

I remember sitting in Kandahar and Lashkar Gah in 2006, when I did the first report on the insurgency there, with my pile of canonical counterinsurgency books to read and being puzzled about what was being done. Operation Mountain Thrust (which is still my favorite name of an operation) was sweeping through the south as the Americans' parting gift to the British, while the books say not to do large-scale sweeps if you are not going to stay afterward.

I rarely embedded with the military, but on that trip I was invited to see all of the positive things happening at the British Provincial Reconstruction Team. The reconstruction mission was just not reconstruction anymore. That was the week when they all were drawn out and spread out in platoon houses around the province – again, something classic counterinsurgency theory tells you not to do. Because I was on the PRT the week those decisions were made, I know that the civilians on the PRT told the military not to get spread out and distracted with actions that could not be backed up. But they decided to go anyway. They were told at one stage that it would take 48 hours. Years later we are still seeing that. This points to a lack of strategic planning throughout.

The political and development sides have been seen as a sort of backpack that the military puts on and pulls off once they are done. You always hear complaints: We won this area. Where were the civilians to set up the schools and dig the wells? Counterinsurgency has to be the other way around, with the civilians making decisions about where they can have effect and how the military can assist or even restrain themselves and keep away. It is driven entirely the opposite way – the military goes in and then asks where the civilians and government are to back them up.

Similarly, there is no comprehensive plan about whom to engage, kill, and isolate in the insurgency, so people would be working with conflicting directions about who should be talked with and who should be killed.

I disagree with Tom Johnson. I do not think it is a largely ideological movement. They often use religious vocabulary, but I think that as a certain spiral of violence got going, basically everyone piled in. A large number of local grievances drive what is not a very ideological movement. The Canadians were running around the districts outside of Kandahar sweeping through in what could be described as the "shaving your legs" theory of counterinsurgency. It is just going to grow back stubblier and uglier. I couldn't find any of this in any books, and it seemed to take a long time to relearn. It was very depressing and points to the lack of unity of effort and strategic overview that General Barno referred to earlier.

I agree that legitimacy is absolutely crucial. I do want to challenge a few points that were made this morning, though. This is certainly not a failure of democracy. Such was the commitment to democracy that in 2005 they sold the election equipment to make up the money, without considering all the other elections they were supposed to have, such as district elections, let alone the fact that there might be another election in 2009. No planning was done. You then had a hastily arranged, expensive election. It was clear early on that it was going to be fraudulent because it was thrown together so quickly. In the intervening years, very little has been done to back these institutions. I emphasize that the people who we backed, who we chose, were not democrats. We did not work through institutions. It was much quicker and easier basically to hand out suitcases full of cash. The corrup-

tion we hear about today is not *despite* our best efforts; it is *because* of the way we engage.

There is a fantastic article in the December 2009 issue of *Harper's* about a commander in Spin Boldak, Abdul Rizak, who is backed by American and Canadian forces. He is the biggest drug dealer in the area and everybody knows it. This is what we are associated with there. I also encourage everyone to read *Opium Season*, a young American contractor's account of working in Helmand for a year. A USAID project hired the house of the known local drug dealer for thousands of dollars to run their alternative livelihoods program from. This happens throughout the country. It is blatant, and we have no leverage as long as we continue to operate like this. The leadership simply shrug us off and think that we are not serious. The people think we are hypocrites, and it drives the disillusionment.

"Afghanistan is a house on fire. We have to either have enough firefighters to put out the fire or get out of the house."

David Kilcullen

We do not tackle our "allies" there. Too often a good Afghan is seen as an Afghan who does what he is told. I think it is a priority to engage more with the Afghan government. As General Barno noted, we do not have any Afghan voices here today, and I think if we are going to have consistent and sustainable planning, it means drawing in the Afghan leadership and tying down the constant rotation of foreigners. Currently, what we encourage is donor shopping: Each ministry goes out and sees what it can get from an individual donor during that particular rotation.

We do not have basic, agreed-upon threat analysis, roles, and responsibilities for the Afghan National Security Forces laid out in black and white. My understanding is that the last national internal security strategy delivered by the National Security Council in Afghanistan was in 2006. The last threat assessment was in 2005. So we are operating in an ad hoc vacuum. For me, the crucial position in the new cabinet needs to be the national security adviser. We need to get the National Security Council there actually acting as a council with an agreed strategy across all the security forces to then interact with international plans, rather than expecting either to drag them along or to have them change their minds every few months.

One final, controversial thing I want to throw into the mix is that I am a bit puzzled by the emphasis on development in counterinsurgency. To me, the priorities are security, governance, and just being left alone to get on with their own business, which helps build their own businesses. I do not think we need to go out and give lots of things. I am not talking about development in all of Afghanistan, which is very different, but I simply do not understand trying to do large infrastructure projects in a war zone. It is more expensive. We destroy security-sector reform, hiring militias to guard the development, and we achieve very little. They become magnets for the insurgents. If this is about *things*, if people are rising up because they want more development, why is Bamiyan not up in flames? It is the poorest part of the country and also the most peaceful. Helmand, one of the most violent areas of the country, grows by far the most poppy. If it were a country by itself, it would grow the most poppy in the world. It would also be the fifth-largest recipient of USAID aid. Why do we set up perverse incentives, which in many ways fuel the war economy?

Nir Rosen:
I apologize, but I am going to take the conversation back to Iraq for a minute because so much of this is based on the context of Iraq, even if we have talked about Vietnam. There was a silly profile of General McChrystal in the *New York Times Magazine* last month with some of his revelations – for example, that if you have infinite time and resources and a plan, then anything is possible, and that the Americans have turned the tide of the Iraq insurgency. If the latter is true, then why is Iraq so much deadlier than Afghanistan, as Peter Bergen referred to earlier? Why do so many more Iraqi civilians continue to be killed compared to Afghans? Maybe we are only counting U.S. lives when we consider Iraq to be a victory. It is claimed in the article that the drone war in Pakistan was successful even if controversial, so why does the insurgency only get stronger and more entrenched there? You would think that a successful campaign, killing 11 of 20 al Qaeda leaders, would have a positive effect, but it has had the opposite – they are worse off there. General McChrystal defends his claim that his secret hunters and killers destroyed al Qaeda in Iraq, but even his greatest success, killing Abu Musab al Zarqawi in 2006, did nothing to halt the violence or weaken the organization. This trope of using Iraq as a baseline is really annoying. The article described current-day Iraq as keeping the peace, but that is a gross misrepresentation of the daily car bombs and assassinations. It is just not Americans being killed, and perhaps not open militia warfare, but it is still a very nasty place. So if General McChrystal wants to turn Afghanistan into Iraq, it might be worth considering whether Iraq is an appropriate end state.

The civil war in Iraq started in 2004, not in 2006 as John Nagl said earlier. Afghanistan is not in a civil war between its ethnic groups or sects the way Iraq was, although it will be, at least between Tajiks and Pashtuns, pretty soon. But it was the Shia scorched-earth treatment of Sunnis that broke the back of the insurgency in Iraq. The concrete walls that the Americans built around Baghdad neighborhoods allowed Shia forces to control them and cut them off from their depth in Anbar Province, where reinforcements were battling a civil war in the Sunni community. The inter-Shia fighting that followed spelled the end of a Shia block that could go after Sunnis, while Shia and Sunni militia abuses of their own populations meant that they lost the support of their people as well.

You cannot build walls around thousands of remote Afghan villages. You cannot punish the entire Pashtun population the way that Sunnis were punished in Iraq, which drove them to sue for peace. So it is wrong to use Iraq as a frame of reference. The Sunni Awakening in Iraq was not the result of bribes, nor was it the result of Americans persuading Sunni tribal leaders of anything. Sunni leaders began to realize even in 2006 that they had lost the war. In their minds, they had a choice between an American occupation and an Iranian one because, to them, all Shias were Iranian. They chose the American occupation, hoping they could battle the so-called Iranian one.

The surge came at just the right time. If it had come a year earlier, it would have met with much more resistance. But it was not just an increase in troops; it was a change in what the Americans did. Some of the best practices, in Baghdad at least, involved conducting a census – walling off an area in the city, knowing who lives there and what they do for a living. The soldiers really got to know the people in the neighborhoods that they were controlling. These walled-off communities were oppressive, and they were bad for local markets, but they meant that the Americans and the Iraqi security forces could control who

went in and out and prevent militias or arms from getting in. Community outposts – living among the people – meant that the Americans were always there and they began to recognize people and know who belonged and who did not. The increased American troop density of the surge allowed them to control the areas they had walled off in ways that they had not been able to before. Suddenly it felt as if the Americans were occupying Iraq again, which would have been a negative thing up until then, but in a way it helped to reduce the violence. American officers with experience of several tours in Iraq also had the flexibility to cut deals with the local actors for the first time, perhaps with the so-called bad guys of 2003 and 2004.

The surge was meant to lead to political settlement, but that never happened, even if violence did go down. But that does not really have to happen. There does not have to be a reconciliation. The Sunni militias miscalculated in a way. They thought they would be better positioned to fight the Shias – the "Iranians" – if they struck a deal with the Americans. Instead, the Americans abandoned the Sunnis and the Shias emasculated their militias. But for the most part, their original motivation was ideological, not financial. They had been wanting this accommodation with the Americans for a long time and had basically failed until then.

The idea was that these Sunni militias would be hired into the government. That never happened, so some people view the surge as a failure as a result, but it does not really have to happen. The more Prime Minister Nuri al Maliki becomes like Saddam Hussein, the more popular he is, and there is nothing the Sunni militias can do because their identities are known. They no longer have the ability to swim among the people because so many Sunnis have been expelled.

So, basically, the Sunnis lost and the Shias won, and there can never be a civil war in Iraq again. No group remains that can challenge the Iraqi government, even though that government is corrupt, sectarian, and brutal. This is your victory in Iraq, at the price of millions of displaced people, hundreds of thousands of dead, and a much more unstable region.

It is also wrong to romanticize the extent to which the Americans protected the population in their population-centric counterinsurgency during the surge. Air strikes alone killed more than 250 civilians in Iraq in 2006, before the surge. During the surge, in 2007, more than 940 civilians were killed in air strikes, while 400 were killed in 2008. So, many more civilians are being killed by Americans during a surge, just in air strikes alone. There was also a lot of use of artillery – so-called terrain denial – even in populated areas. So I do not think the population often felt very protected during this population-centric COIN.

The Americans are making their big surge eight years into the war in Afghanistan. The obsession with the south led Logar and Wardak Provinces right at Kabul's backdoor to fall into Taliban hands. With only 60,000 Afghan soldiers or whatever the figure is, it is going to take too long to increase the size of the army. There are never going to be enough foreign troops to remain in villages to control them the way the Americans could control neighborhoods in Baghdad. So the Americans are going to be like firemen, responding to different crises but never achieving the density to get to know the community.

The Taliban own the night, undermining whatever the Americans accomplish during the day. You can strike deals during the day but they will send a letter, they will knock on the door – they do not even need Kalashnikovs to undermine your activities, and they are wise enough to avoid direct encounters with the Americans. They can continue to place improvised explosive devices, which neutralize the

troops. In fact, it is not even the IEDs but the threat of an IED that cause it to take maybe an entire day to travel a handful of kilometers while people walk in front of you, sweeping the road. The Taliban are long gone by the time you get there.

Even though General McChrystal's assessment identified the biggest challenges the Americans face as political, social, and economic, his solution was to send more troops. The military is trying to make everything look like a nail, and they keep on wanting to apply the hammer. The generals are saying that they are going to fight this war not by focusing on the enemy but by helping the people, but they are not doing that. They are not taking the steps to protect the people. They are inevitably going to set up large bases again. Instead of relying on civilian experts, the government is defaulting to the military whenever they want to do something, and they wind up using the military even for things that are not military. They did not even find enough civilians to staff the requirements in Iraq.

COIN is more than a code of action; it is a mentality calling on an occupying army to prioritize securing the population rather than killing the enemy, but that has not really trickled down to the ground level. Once you get down to the rifle squad, COIN does not make any sense. It is hard for them to maintain the greater strategic picture in their minds – they just don't want to die. They are being asked to be Wyatt Earp and Mother Teresa at the same time. They pay lip service to COIN. They talk about going into villages to do that "COIN shit" and then go back, but to do COIN, the Americans have to leave their bases and learn the people and the villages. You cannot just go in for a few hours, call a council with the elders, and make sure you get back to the base in time for hamburgers at the chow hall. COIN is dangerous, and the military is very risk averse, it seems. They have changed the language being used by the defense establishment, but it is the same old-school Army thinking. I think that they are just incapable institutionally of doing COIN.

Afghans are still viewed as "hajjis" by the military, by the average soldier. Alternative viewpoints are not really considered. Journalists are viewed as the enemy. Various pundits, so-called instant experts, will travel with the military. They do not really see Afghanistan. They do not really see Iraq. They think they have been there, but when you are with the military, there are going to be people who won't talk to you because you are with the guys with the guns. They are not going to be sincere with you. People won't relate to you in the same way. The military has a lot of trouble seeing things from other people's perspectives. In fact, the greatest advantage the Taliban have is that they do not have to rely on PowerPoint, which makes it impossible for people in the military to deal with these complex environments and complex ways of thinking.

EXCERPTS FROM THE QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Question (*from the audience*):
Guerilla forces have a record of evolving. Is that true of the Taliban as well?

Gen. Barno:
Today's Taliban is not yesterday's Taliban. The Taliban that we were facing in 2003, 2004, and 2005 was extraordinarily different from today. This is a version 2.0 or 3.0. One of the major differences is that by about the spring of 2006, the Taliban made a major escalation from having very limited capabilities before then.

In 2004, we ran an Afghan election in every district in every province without any

serious opposition from the Taliban, remarkably enough. About 18 months later, in the spring of 2006, there was a huge resistance to the British in Helmand, and you could see all the curves go high and right at that point.

What was the driver behind the Taliban suddenly having that capability that they simply did not have a year or 18 months before? We dropped 82 bombs in Afghanistan in 2004. Three years later, my successors facing a different Taliban dropped 3,500 bombs in one year. So there was a huge sea change in terms of the enemy's capability. I think I would just leave it at that. Today there is a much different, stronger, and more capable Taliban that is intent on winning, and we have to adjust to that fact.

David Kilcullen:
The question uses a biological metaphor, so I will too. Insurgents evolve, in the sense that insurgency kills generation after generation of insurgents, and the generations that replace them have some kind of adaptive characteristics that allow them to survive better. We saw that in Iraq and Afghanistan. It is very common. So the Taliban that we are dealing with today is more like a hospital superbug than anything else. It has been exposed to a variety of antibiotics that have made it drug resistant.

We have seen the insurgency expand and absorb successively three major increases in U.S. forces since 2005. That is one of the considerations that I am not sure is being considered in the White House but certainly should be – that the Taliban have demonstrated the ability to absorb increases of up to about 25,000 troops at a time, and it just makes them stronger. So you have to decide either not to keep doing small increases like that or to jump over their ability to evolve, which gets back to this dichotomy: Either do not put any more in or put in enough that they cannot adapt effectively. I would argue that not putting any more in is tantamount to getting out, so we might as well get out if we are going to do that.

Steven Simon:
Kinetic Darwinism – I like that concept.

Nir Rosen:
I think that our presence is part of the problem. In May 2006, there were riots in Kabul after a road accident with American forces. The Americans shot at the crowd, and it revealed an underlying anger that can explode at any moment. In September 2009, a British plane dropped a box of leaflets that failed to open. It landed on a girl who was probably illiterate and couldn't read the leaflets anyway, but it killed her. There is more and more hostility to our presence there. I would like to read from a folk poem. Folk poetry throughout Pashtun areas is increasingly antioccupation. This is a *ghazal* by a female poet called Zerlakhta Hafeez:

> Oh Afghanistan, You are my love.
> You are my soul. You are my body.
> They want peace while having guns in their hands.
> That's why all the children are dying for you, Afghanistan.
> Your children are dying for you because they want you
> to be sovereign, to be independent like they did before.
> Pashtuns from both sides of the black line [meaning the border with Pakistan]
> call you their home, oh Afghanistan, so they fight for it.

I think the population is just turning more and more against the presence there.

Peter Bergen (*from the audience*):
I would like to follow up on on General

Barno's comments a few minutes ago. Why did the Taliban come back at such great strength in 2005 and 2006? There may be three reasons. One is that they may have sensed the NATO takeover as an opportunity; second, they copycatted or learned directly from the Iraqi insurgency; and third, they simply had enough time to regroup. There may be another reason, but obviously the critical question is: Why did they come back?

Gen. Barno:
I think that is open to some speculation. I think that all three of your points are pretty accurate, but I would add a fourth. I do not know it to be true, but there are some who believe that it was a contributing factor. There is a perception that we signaled by the end of 2005 that we were on our way out of Afghanistan. During the summer of 2005 we announced very publicly that we were turning the effort over to NATO, which we viewed as ostensibly an alliance capable of doing this. In the region, that was viewed as the U.S. divesting itself of Afghanistan, which, in fact, was part of our rationale as well. Then, in December of that year, we announced that we were going to withdraw 2,500 combat troops from Afghanistan. I think that was widely viewed as our moving for the exits. I think that both our friends and adversaries recalculated their game plans based upon that, and the Taliban once again became clearly a possible weapon system in some of those game plans. So I think there is a distinct difference between what we saw in the Taliban through 2005 and what we saw in 2006 and since. I think much of it had to do with those announcements.

C. Christine Fair:
There is a regional dimension that I do not think was appreciated in 2001, which gets back to Joanna Nathan's point about the creeps who we brought back, laundered, and gave legitimacy to. These were the guys associated with the Northern Alliance. I was in D.C. in 2001, and I do not think that anyone understood that the Northern Alliance was – and is – viewed by Pakistan as an Indian proxy. During the days of the Taliban, it was the Indians through their base in Tajikistan, along with the Iranians, the Russians, and all of the other folks from the various "– stans" in the world, who sustained the Northern Alliance.

So, when we brought the Northern Alliance back and broke every single promise that we had made to Pervez Musharraf, the Pakistanis understood two things: that the Americans had handed the keys to the Indians through their proxy the Northern Alliance, and that, as General Barno referred to, we had signaled our willingness to depart. When we signaled our willingness to depart, the Pakistanis understood that the Americans – and certainly NATO – were going home and had basically left Afghanistan in the hands of the Northern Alliance. From a game-theoretic point of view, the Pakistanis arguably understood that the value of the Taliban is much more important. While the U-turn on the U-turn had already begun before 2005, I think there is a strong argument that the concatenation of events really shaped Pakistan's cost–benefit calculus, and – voilà – the Taliban came back in 2005, having recuperated from the various amenities they enjoyed in the tribal areas of Pakistan.

Joanna Nathan:
I think that the big leaps we see have to do with strategic momentum, because it is not hugely ideological. It is a franchise that expands when people feel the strategic momentum behind them and that there are rewards for piling in, rather than through any ideological appeal as such.

David Kilcullen:
I would like to offer a countervailing view to the idea that the big driver of Taliban expansion during the 2005–2006 time frame was failure to engage properly, failure for us to put enough in. There is another view that you often hear from Pashtuns in the south, which is that the expansion of NATO to cover the whole country during the same time frame created the insurgency. I am not saying that that's necessarily right or wrong. If you look at the timing of the insurgency expansion combined with the timing of the NATO expansion, the violence came after the NATO expansion in some places and in other places preceded it. So there is no clear causality that you can identify from the field evidence, but it is certainly a perception that many Afghans have in the south – that the insurgency is here because NATO is here; that if NATO went away again, the insurgency would go away. I think the second part is probably not true, but the first part is certainly what many people are saying.

Question (*from the audience*):
How would you assess the United States' human intelligence gathering capabilities in western Pakistan?

Gen. Barno:
I spoke to some of our senior intel folks over the past week, and that was part of our discussion. They expressed to me, interestingly enough, that they felt that their capabilities in that area are very good right now, in large measure because of the amount of presence they have in the border areas of eastern and southern Afghanistan that allows them access remotely into the adjacent areas inside of Pakistan. In part because of the amount of U.S. military presence, because of the amount of intelligence presence that that enables, they have a very good reach and very good intelligence assets today that they certainly did not have 10 years ago in Afghanistan. They were concerned that if they lost that access, their ability to execute a counterterrorist program throughout the region would be significantly impacted.

John McLaughlin (*from the audience*):
We finally appear to be approaching decision time on Afghanistan, with the news reports this morning that the president will make some announcement after Thanksgiving. What would you be pleased to hear as his key point?

Steven Simon:
We are running short on time, so please keep your answers to 25 words or less.

Gen. Barno:
I would start by saying a long-term commitment to a partnership with our friends in the region.

Nir Rosen:
Recognition that if your goal is to fight al Qaeda, then you are dealing with the symptoms instead of the causes. If you stop killing Muslims, if you stop supporting the Israelis in Palestine, if you stop supporting dictatorships, you will remove all of the causes that anybody would have to attack the U.S. Al Qaeda just would not have recruits; there would be no motivation to attack the Americans. This whole Afghanistan thing is a diversion and the real solution is so much easier, but it requires a whole revolution in how the U.S. does its foreign policy.

David Kilcullen:
I would be very happy to hear any kind of firm decision or any kind of commitment by the president to actually pay attention to the problem. Afghanistan is a house on fire. We have to either have enough firefighters to put out the fire or get out of the house.

What Lies Ahead

Panelists:
Peter Bergen, Roger Cressey, Steve Fondacaro, Ken Silverstein, Steven Simon

Moderator:
Karen J. Greenberg

Steve Fondacaro and Peter Bergen. *Photo by Dan Creighton.*

Karen J. Greenberg:
This panel, I hope, will convey the idea that there is a way to think through these problems that can give some constructive strategies for going forward. It is going to look at how to think about what we have heard today and how to imagine what lies ahead.

From my point of view, the reason that we have these conferences is to help us think through impasses that seem so intractable, or about which viewpoints seem so entrenched, that we as the public give up and prefer to think about other things. In this case, what is really nice about today is seeing that all of you care enough to trudge through the many layers of dilemma that we are facing in Afghanistan.

Peter Bergen:
On March 27th, President Obama gave a speech outlining the new strategy in Afghanistan. Essentially, he sold it as a counterterrorism strategy directed at al Qaeda, but when he read the speech it was really about a larger counterinsurgency strategy. As a matter of politics, that might have been a pretty smart way to sell nation building in Afghanistan, as basically all about al Qaeda. But it is open to the criticism that if al Qaeda isn't so threatening, then why are we in Afghanistan at all? There are five or six other things he could have said, which he may well say in the speech after Thanksgiving, because there are other values about why we are in Afghanistan that are about more than just al Qaeda.

The first is that the return of the Taliban in Afghanistan would be a strategic failure for the United States, leaving aside the question of al Qaeda. It would also be a massive moral disaster for the people of Afghanistan. We have overthrown their government. We have some sort of an obligation to create some form of stable state that follows. It does not have to be like Belgium and the Afghans aren't expecting Belgium, but they are expecting relative security and relative prosperity.

There is also the question of regional security, which the previous panel talked about. Afghanistan and Pakistan are interlocked and an insecure Afghanistan leads to a more insecure Pakistan, and vice versa. Something that is often forgotten in this discussion about Afghanistan is that it was not just al Qaeda that was headquartered there before 9/11. Every single serious Muslim insurgent movement, from Indonesia to Egypt to Jordan, was based in Afghanistan. So it is not just about

the return of al Qaeda; it is also about the Taliban harboring other major Muslim insurgent movements.

Finally, Afghanistan was the first war where Article V, NATO's collective right to self-defense, was invoked. We have a real coalition, and the future of NATO to some degree is being decided in Afghanistan. While we can talk about national caveats, you go to war with the coalition you have, and at least we have a coalition in Afghanistan. We had a sort of pretend one in Iraq, which was basically comprised of the British and perhaps the Polish, whereas in Afghanistan there are 42 countries involved, including Muslim countries. In small numbers, the Jordanians have a presence there, and also the Qataris. So there are other values about what we are doing in Afghanistan more than a simple question of the return of al Qaeda.

> **"[T]he return of the Taliban in Afghanistan would be a strategic failure for the United States, leaving aside the question of al Qaeda. It would also be a massive moral disaster for the people of Afghanistan. We have overthrown their government. We have some sort of an obligation to create some form of stable state that follows."**
>
> *Peter Bergen*

Having said that, there are six common objections about why we are going to fail in Afghanistan, essentially, that I want to quickly try and dispose of. One is the graveyard of empires, which should be retired to the graveyard of clichés. Every single empire that has ever decided to go into Afghanistan has won a victory. The question is sustaining it, whether you are talking about Alexander the Great or the Soviets, but we are not the Soviets. The Soviets killed a million Afghans, at least. They made five million Afghans homeless. They inflicted a totalitarian total war on the population. They were hated. They faced a countrywide insurgency. At any given moment on the battlefield in Afghanistan, according to Mark Urban, who has really written the best history of the early Afghan war, there were 175,000 to 250,000 Afghans fighting. Today the Taliban, by contrast, is only about 20,000 full-time fighters, if you are being generous. Dr. Kilcullen has suggested maybe even 40,000, if you add in part-time farmers. But the point is that there is a relatively small insurgency compared to what the Soviets faced.

Another common objection is that Afghanistan is not a nation-state. Actually, that is complete nonsense. The first modern Afghan state was the Durrani Empire of 1747, so Afghanistan has been a nation longer than the United States has. The problem is not a lack of nationhood. Afghans have that. It has always been a weak central state. That is not really even a problem; it is just the way that Afghanistan has been organized, and trying to create something else probably does not make a great deal of sense.

Another objection is that Afghanistan is just too violent. This is ridiculous. We have already discussed how Iraq remains more violent than Afghanistan, but that is not because Iraq is so violent (although it remains so to some degree). It is because Afghanistan is relatively nonviolent. You were more likely to be murdered in the United States in 1991 than you are to be killed in the war today in Afghanistan. Because that may seem like a shocking statistic, I will give you more detail. Twenty-four thousand Americans were mur-

dered in 1991, in a U.S. population of 260 million at the time. Last year about 2,000-plus Afghans died in the war, and the population is around 30 million. Just do the math. So it is actually more dangerous to come to New York City than to go to Afghanistan today.

Another is the "antibody" argument, which is also ridiculous. Sixty-three percent of Afghans in a recent poll had a favorable view not just of the United States but of the U.S. military. There are probably parts of the Upper West Side of Manhattan that do not have such a favorable view of the U.S. military. So it is not that we are the antibody; they just want us to produce what we keep saying we are going to, which is relative security and some measure of prosperity.

> **"Can you defeat the Taliban? My belief is that the answer is no. You can't defeat the Taliban, not today, not the way we would traditionally describe it. We are headed towards striking a deal with the Taliban at some point."**
>
> *Roger Cressey*

The final thing, which may be the most controversial point that I am going to make, is that the idea that the Karzai government is illegitimate is fairly nonsensical when you look at the other countries that surround Afghanistan. Pakistan has had four military dictatorships in the last six decades. Uzbekistan is a place where the dictator boils people alive as a sort of forensic technique. Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Iran – this is the neighborhood in which Karzai just received 49 percent of the vote. That is the real number he got. So, Karzai remains, despite all the criticism we have given, a somewhat legitimate leader. So those are the objections.

To turn to the positives, there are millions of Afghan children in schools – including many girls, of course, who were not there under the Taliban. I was in Afghanistan under the Taliban. It was one of the most depressing places in the world. The World Bank stopped tracking Afghanistan's GDP because it was zero. There was nothing to track. The Taliban basically destroyed the economy and turned the whole thing into a sort of police state, and a rather unpleasant one. One in six Afghans had a cell phone. They did not have a phone system under the Taliban. GDP growth has been something like seven percent in most years since the fall of the Taliban, coming from a pretty low base obviously.

Four million refugees have returned. This is a very important number because refugees do not return to places which they don't think have a future. In Iraq, the war created four million refugees. Almost none of those refugees have returned today – maybe 200,000 – whereas in Afghanistan we have had a massive refugee return.

Then there is polling data. One very common polling question is, "What's your view of the future?" For obvious reasons, at the end of the Bush administration's second term, when Americans were asked, "Do you think your life is going to get better?" – only 17 percent said yes. When you polled Afghans at roughly the same time, 40 percent said yes, and we know the problems that have gone on in Afghanistan. Why do they have a positive view of the future? It is because their bar is low. They have had a totalitarian invasion, followed by a warlord-led civil war, followed by the Taliban. As a combination, that is pretty bad. So Afghans who have either lived through this or have a sense of it think today

that things are still getting better.

This brings me to Pakistan. This is a skunk at the garden party to some degree, but again there are some reasons for optimism. The Pakistani Taliban have made the biggest strategic error possible, which is attacking where they live. The center of gravity in the war on terror is what the Pakistani population thinks, because this is where al Qaeda and the Taliban are headquartered. If they think that Osama bin Laden is a Robin Hood figure and that the Taliban are just a great bunch of guys, you have a problem. That was basically the view after 9/11, but that is changing. Support for suicide bombing in Pakistan has dropped from 33 percent to 5 percent in the last several years. Support for bin Laden is dropping; support for the Taliban is cratering.

When Pakistan went into Waziristan in 2004-05, it was seen by the Pakistani population as doing the American bidding in the war on terror, and it was really a sort of performance-art operation that did not succeed in doing very much. Pakistan's operation in Waziristan right now is very serious because they are doing it for their own reasons. I think that our interests and theirs have not been more closely aligned since the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in 1979. It is far from a perfect alignment – it never will be. They are probably never going to hunt down Mullah Omar, but the enemy of the perfect is not the reasonably okay. What we are seeing in Pakistan is the reasonably okay. The Swat operation was also serious. We are beginning to see some serious change in support in Pakistan.

Critics of a larger sustained operation in Afghanistan have to answer one simple question: What is the alternative? History suggests two alternatives. One is doing nothing and the other is basically doing what we are doing but in a less serious way. That would be great if we had not already done both of those. In 1989, we closed our embassy in Afghanistan. We zeroed our aid to one of the poorest countries in the world and into that vacuum stepped the Taliban, and then they brought with them al Qaeda. In 2001, because of an ideological aversion to nation building, the Bush administration did the least-resourced nation-building effort the United States has been engaged in since World War II. There were 6,000 American soldiers in Afghanistan in 2003 – the size of a police force in a city like Houston, in a country the size of Texas – and you get what you pay for. The Taliban came back, this time morphed together ideologically and tactically with al Qaeda, at least at the leadership level. So we have already done the two other options.

Roger Cressey:

I would like to make a couple of points about my experience with the government, touching a little bit on some of the points made earlier today, and then talk about four critical questions about what lies ahead. I have no clue what lies ahead, and anybody in the government who says they do is lying.

I went to Somalia in 1993 when I was 27 and still full of ideological support and excitement. I met Michael Sheehan at the airport in Mogadishu. I was still in the State Department, seconded to the UN, and Mike was on his way out. He had a briefcase for me, and he said "Welcome, Rog. You're going to need this." I opened it up, and there was a .45 in it. I asked him why he was giving me a loaded .45, and he said, "Welcome to Somalia, baby. This is the way it is." So there is a whole generation of young twenty-somethings in the State Department, the Pentagon, and elsewhere who want to serve their countries overseas, who go into these countries and have simply no clue what they are getting themselves into. Some of the stories that we've heard today about what is going on in Afghanistan show that this is still alive and well.

Much of what was has been talked about today is what we called "complex contingency operations" in the old school of the 1990s. I was involved in political-military planning for Haiti, Somalia, and the Balkans. When I hear about what is going on today, when I hear the criticisms of interagency working together, I swear it is *Groundhog Day*. In some respects nothing has changed. In 2006 or 2007, General Petraeus gave a PowerPoint presentation about the requirement and objective of interagency cooperation. If you were to change the dates and the countries, it would be the same PowerPoint that I was doing in the early 1990s. What I am trying to tell you is that the government will never fix itself on this issue of proper cooperation. It will always fall short for a variety of reasons. They are all well–intentioned, good people, but it will never work the way we want it to. We get together and say, "My God, we need to do a better job, look at what's happening in Afghanistan," but it is not going to change. So accept that, factor it into your planning in terms of what lies ahead, and figure out how to work around it, because it is absolutely going to be critical.

In the movie *Volunteers*, from the 1980s, John Candy plays a member of the Peace Corps going somewhere in Asia to build a bridge, someone who thinks of himself as a great American who wants to go and do the right thing. Tom Hanks plays a Yale dropout on the run from the law who hops on the plane before it leaves. He wakes up the next day and asks himself what he's doing there. There is a combination of both types of people right now in Afghanistan – those who want to do the right thing and many who are wondering what they are doing there. Each group has a direct impact and effect on the population that we are trying to influence. We need to think about that in terms of how we actually achieve progress on a day-to-day tactical basis.

Roger Cressey and Ken Silverstein.
Photo by Dan Creighton.

We have talked a bit about counterterrorism and counterinsurgency. In regard to Afghanistan, my view is that they are separate problems but they are related. Eliminating one does not mean you solve the other, but you can't say that they are combined and that there is no difference between them. Most of what we are doing in Afghanistan and probably in Pakistan, which I think is more germane, is tactical, near-term, urgent counterterrorism missions. Everything we are doing is aimed at trying to stop the next plot, the ability of what remains of al Qaeda to project power against U.S. interests either in the region or in the United States. We are in counterinsurgency, and this is where the strategic, long-term challenge lies for us. There is an inherent conflict and friction between our counterterrorism policy and our counterinsurgency policy. I think that we still have not figured out a right way to address that.

To General Barno's point about the Obama administration's review, the review is critical for the reasons that have been talked about, which have nothing to do with the troops and have everything to do with the strategy. What strategy are you looking to put in place? What are your objectives? What is your end state? What are the milestones that you are trying to establish in order to meet that end state? After answering those questions, you can come up

with a force posture and other elements of American power to implement that strategy. So I would like to see the president lay that out in his speech. If he does, then we can have a debate as a country about whether or not it is worth investing the blood, treasure, and resources to achieve that end state.

I would like to give you four "what ifs" about what lies ahead. The first one is, What is al Qaeda's capability right now? I think this is a central question because, regarding Mike Sheehan's point earlier, we have had tremendous success beating them over the past eight years. The core al Qaeda simply is not as capable as it once was. That is a fabulous success from our Intelligence Community, our military, and all elements of national power. But we received a wake-up call in 2006 through the Heathrow planes plot, which fell short, thank God, for a variety of reasons. I believe that shook the counterterrorism community into addressing that there is still a strategic threat emanating from Pakistan regarding the core al Qaeda capability, and we need to get serious about it at the next level. Much of what we have been doing over the course of the past three years has been aimed at eliminating the ability of al Qaeda to try something like the Heathrow plot. What they were looking to do was take down 10 or a dozen planes over the Atlantic and kill as many people as were killed on 9/11. The intent is still there. The capability is the fundamental question, although clearly it is not as strong as it used to be.

> **"We are trying to stabilize a very complex population, dealing with many problems that lead them to use violence as a means of conflict resolution. How do I do that? … What is the insight that tells me how to change how my unit operates on the ground at the soldier level, the squad level, the platoon level, and the company level in order to achieve this operational outcome?"**
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> *Steve Fondacaro*

It comes down to two issues from a counterterrorism perspective: Can al Qaeda's core still project power? If they can, then we have to come up with a strategy consistent with eliminating and defeating that capability while we are doing everything else in Afghanistan. Can they still plan, train, and operate? What do we need to do tactically to ensure that they do not have the capability to put together one of these plots again? If the answer is that they can't – that all they have left is bin Laden, Ayman al Zawahri, and a few others howling at the moon, sending out random videotapes and audiotapes, saying, "We told you so. See, the Americans are still at war with Islam," but that they can't do anything else – that is a different problem and a different strategy is required to deal with it.

Or is the issue not of the core but of what I call, in sports parlance, the "unrestricted free agents"? Is Najibullah Zazi the face of the future when it comes to counterterrorism? It is still important from a Pakistani perspective because he went to Pakistan. He ended up hanging out with the wrong people who taught him things, and then he tried to come back here and do something about it. Our greatest strategic advantage with the unrestricted free agents is that most of them are stupid and inept, but that is not going to continue. Sooner or later a couple of these clowns are going to get it right, and the point to remember about

9/11 and the summer leading up to it is that everything broke al Qaeda's way. Nothing broke our way. It is entirely likely that could happen again, so we need to keep that in mind.

The second issue going forward is, Can you defeat the Taliban? My belief is that the answer is no. You can't defeat the Taliban, not today, not the way we would traditionally describe it. We are headed towards striking a deal with the Taliban at some point. They are a viable part of the political process in Afghan society. We are foolish if we think we can eliminate that completely, so we are going to have to come up with an approach in this new strategy that recognizes that in the right way. I do not know what that right way is, but the Taliban is here, it will be here for a long time, and we should be realistic about what we can do against it.

This leads to a secondary question: Is the Taliban a counterterrorism problem? The answer is no, unless the Taliban are going to provide a sanctuary for al Qaeda, the remnants of al Qaeda, or the follow-on to al Qaeda in order to do in the future what they did in the 1990s. There is an assumption in Washington that if the Taliban were to come back into power, they would follow the exact same playbook that they did in the 1990s. I do not think that is necessarily the case. I think there is a debate within the Taliban, and that some of the Taliban leadership think that providing the safe haven to al Qaeda was incredibly stupid and should never be done again if they were to take power again. So I think we should have a debate about that. What is the counterterrorism component regarding the Taliban?

The next issue is, What are the wild cards? There are always wild cards. There are always unintended consequences of our actions. What if there is another al Qaeda attack from Pakistan? Let's say, for the sake of argument, that a couple hundred Americans are killed either inside the United States or elsewhere around the world and that we can trace that attack back to what is left of the safe haven in Pakistan. What does the Obama administration do? They go in big and they go in heavy. If there are dozens, if not hundreds, of Americans lying dead, then it is the obligation of any president, Republican or Democrat, to respond in a big way. Now that sets in motion a series of events that we quickly lose control of, and we have a series of unintended consequences that plays right into the hands of either what's left of al Qaeda or those elements in Pakistani society that want to have a fundamental change in the political environment there, to put it lightly.

What if Karzai goes away? I don't mean politically; I mean in a puff of smoke. Some would argue that that would be one of the best things to happen to Afghan political society. But do we have a strategy for dealing with that? I can guarantee you that the Taliban and others are going to be gunning for him, and they only have to get lucky once to take him down.

What about Congress? We have not talked enough about Congress here, but if Congress decides to assert itself in this process, that will complicate the administration's ability to execute on its strategy. If you don't think Afghanistan, Pakistan, and al Qaeda are watching what is going on in Washington, then you are fooling yourself.

Finally, what is the priority? Is it Afghanistan or is it Pakistan? Some would say that you can't separate the two, that they are inextricably linked for all the reasons that we have talked about. When I was still in the Pentagon doing the Quadrennial Defense Review, and others in government have done this before, we categorized American interests into three groups: humanitarian, important, and vital. The humanitarian category is made up of those things we do because we can,

because we are a great country, and we want to help people. So we go in and help victims of the tsunami. We go into Somalia. We do a variety of things. The important interests are those that are in between – important enough to deploy military forces and maybe do a few other things but without rising to the third level. Then there is vital, which is that we must be prepared to fight and die in defense of a vital national security interest.

> **"We do not have a cohesive foreign policy elite anymore in the way that we did during the Cold War. That is hurting us, and it is hurting us very badly."**
>
> *Steven Simon*

It is pretty obvious that Pakistan is a vital national security interest now. What does that mean in terms of the commitment of U.S. forces, U.S. government expertise, and leverage? Is Afghanistan a vital national security interest? If the Taliban were to come back to power but there was no al Qaeda and no ability to project terrorism plots inside the United States, would that be a vital national interest for the United States? No. So I think that trying to understand where these countries rank on our importance scale is critical.

The reality of counterterrorism is that our policy is driven by body bags. This has been true for years. When a half dozen people die, we all think that is unfortunate, but we lose dozens, if not hundreds, a year in military accidents. That is the price to pay for being a global superpower. When you start to kill hundreds and thousands, then the U.S. government takes a different approach. That is the difference between our doing nothing after the attack on the USS *Cole* and doing what we did post-9/11. It is a body bag-driven approach. So what lies ahead in terms of counterterrorism related to Afghanistan and Pakistan, whether by counterterrorism or through a counterinsurgency implementation strategy, is also going to be a function of how many Americans are killed.

We are a government beset by attention deficit disorder. We look near term. Our government is still structured to do near-term priorities only. So when we talk about near-term tactical versus long-term strategic, the bureaucracy as it is now structured cannot do strategic. It simply can't. We will swing from one priority to the other and leave people hanging in the lurch. That is why the Afghans and the Pakistanis have a much longer memory than we do, and that is why they are worried about what our long-term commitment is.

The final point I'll make goes back to a morbid joke that was made right before the onset of our intervention in Haiti. We joked that the objective of the intervention, which was a humanitarian intervention, was to bring Haiti *into* the Third World. So if you look at all the challenges in Afghanistan right now, what is our objective? Are we trying to bring Afghanistan into the Third World or are we trying to do something greater? Answering that question part and parcel will answer the question of what lies ahead.

Steve Fondacaro:
I am an operator. I bring an operator's viewpoint to share with you as we take a look at what lies ahead in terms of counterinsurgency and counterterrorism in general as it applies to what we are facing right now in Iraq and Afghanistan. I have been directing the Human Terrain System program for three years. I bring my observations and the observations of those operators out there at the brigade, division, and three- and four-star levels who I have been dealing with in both countries for

the past three years.

The first observation I have is that we have to understand the problem before we start implementing solutions. This is driven by a number of different things. I will share with you a viewpoint from most of the operators and the commanders out there, which is that they find themselves having to take a test that they have done no coursework for. That does not work in an academic environment and it is not working for them out there. They are highly competent, very smart, intelligent, kinetic operators. They are designed to do exactly what we design them for, primarily as conventional organizers, deployers who force their way into a directed theater of operations under civilian leadership and kill what is in front of them. What has stymied and frustrated them is the fact that this approach, which they are focused on, which is in their comfort zone, and which is their expertise, has not led to a positive solution in the area that they are deployed in.

What this focuses on is simply understanding the operational, sociocultural relevance of the population in terms of what they are required to do. It all boils down to something we call the "so what?" What does a great brief by Dr. McFate on the tribes of Diyala mean to me as a brigade commander on the ground? What does that information tell me to do or to change in the behavior of my unit in order to have the positive effects upon the population that I am supposed to be achieving here in the stabilization phase? We are not in a maneuver warfare situation in which we are moving fluidly from Paris to Berchtesgaden anymore. We are trying to stabilize a very complex population, dealing with many problems that lead them to use violence as a means of conflict resolution. How do I do that? How do I implement that? How do I stabilize that? What is the insight that tells me how to change how my unit operates on the ground at the soldier level, the squad level, the platoon level, and the company level in order to achieve this operational outcome?

We have not done that work for our soldiers. They have been thrust into this and they have been learning it as they go. What we try to do in our approach is jump-start that learning process with our social scientists at the lowest level, not at the four-star level where we have put them before as senior advisers whose input is supposed to trickle down and help soldiers do better what they are supposed to do at the bottom. I do not know of any other cases, but I have been on the bottom end of that model for the past 30 years. In my own experience it has never worked and will never work. So we have turned that model on its head. We try to provide that understanding for the commanders *at their level* to help them understand the problem first in order to devise what they can do in their own sphere to make the problem better. What faces us, at least at this level here, is helping our government, our institutions, understand what that problem is before committing ourselves in one way or another in order to achieve a measurable outcome. This is the part we have not done.

Fundamental to that is doing the research on the ground that tells us about the history of the target population or nation that we are focused on, that helps us understand what the underpinnings of conflict are amongst the multitude of groups that are out there. Some of those conflicts go back hundreds of years, some of them are very recent. Some of them are political, some of them are criminal. Some of them are socioethnic. Some of them are racial. There is no one out there to help the commanders on the ground understand the nuances of how that applies to their missions on the ground.

Part and parcel of this is understanding ourselves as well as we understand the populations we are dealing with – understanding our

own culture, understanding the cultural differences between our institutions, including the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and USAID. We have heard a number of different explanations throughout the day of the systemic difficulties we have in getting those entities to work together in a collective strategy that achieves an outcome. This is part of *our* culture. This is part of our understanding what our capabilities and limitations are, and task-organizing ourselves before we commit ourselves to a particular problem.

From our standpoint, what drives this in many cases is that we have much too much money accompanied by much too little research and thinking. We jump to the solutions, throwing a thousand solutions at the problem, rather than doing the thinking that leads toward an organized, logical, scientific, intellectual approach to the problem. The people at the bottom end are dealing with the effects. You have heard a number of those issues talked about today, in particular about soldiers out there simply trying to stay alive. In many cases, we have them talking to us about how they feel as if their main mission is to troll for IEDs, hopefully make it back to the FOB, count one more day off the list, and return.

Another thing that feeds this is our unit rotation policy. Instead of being there eight years, we are there eight different times, one year at a time. Research, we think, followed by intellectual capacity, which we have, is what has to drive us in the future. This is a diagnostic that our future enemies throughout this century are observing carefully and learning from. They are understanding the weaknesses in our nation's ability to formulate and implement foreign policy in a coherent way. It is incumbent upon us all to try and get this message in the form of reform before we commit ourselves to things like this or future crises. We have the capability now to do the research and identify those problems that have the potential to become crises like this in all the other areas of the world where we are not committed right now. Wouldn't it make sense for us to devote our energy there so that we can identify the potential crises and diffuse and eliminate them before they become something that requires us to implement massive numbers of troops and incredible amounts of national treasure at the cost of a tremendous amount of worldwide credibility with our allies?

Steven Simon:
So many interesting, even profound, things have been said today that I am going to confine myself to just a few observations about the future of counterinsurgency and maybe with a little bit of a connection to Afghanistan and Pakistan. These are random observations, just in the interstices of what other people have said.

Looking to the future, I think that it will be interesting to see how the counterinsurgency effort – to the extent we are really doing one, which the previous panel called into question – influences force structure and doctrine down the road. Right now we are at a crossroads, with some advocating that U.S. force structure, doctrine training, and so forth need to be shaped much more in the direction of counterinsurgency. Others, like General Casey, take exception to these COINadistas and look back perhaps sentimentally to the vision of enormous tank battles on the plains of Europe. I think we are going to wind up with something in between, and it will be important that the debate about force structure track actual developments in the field as against these more theoretical constructs.

One thing that struck me – and I am not a military man – is the way in which firepower has developed on the other guy's side, not just on our side. The development of weaponry,

particularly the precision of weaponry available to insurgents, means that they do not need the kinds of supply lines, huge stockpiles, and so forth that might have been necessary at another point in time to fight the United States in battle. That has made insurgents in some – although not all – contexts a formidable enemy, as, for example, the Israelis found out battling Hezbollah in southern Lebanon in the summer of 2006. We would be wise to think twice before diverting our force structure and doctrine in one direction or another. We are at risk of doing that, of adopting one of these binary choices, because of the way in which senior officers have emerged from the crucible of the Iraqi and Afghan insurgencies.

"For better or for worse, USAID used to actually develop and implement its projects, but now it is simply taking money and passing it on through to corporations, nonprofit groups, and consultants who are charged with carrying out the development projects."

Ken Silverstein

Another thing that hit me from today's discussion was the truly engrossing fact that there weren't really any good analogies or precedents that would help us understand what is going on in Afghanistan. That raises the question of how we prepare for the next one, if preparing for the next one is learning from the ones that have come before. I think this is going to be a continuing challenge in dealing with the insurgencies that do arise.

A third thing – and this has been tacitly referred to in a number of different ways – is the problem of confusion over war aims. This is how countries lose wars, and lately the United States has had a very difficult time stemming or controlling a kind of entropic process in the development of its war aims. We saw this in Iraq. The United States had two war aims. One was essentially a coup d'état: to get into Iraq, get rid of Saddam, and get out – a sort of British model of sending the troops back to the barracks, the civil servants back to their ministries, and finding a couple of generals or somebody suitable to take charge. Then there was another, far more expansive war aim of reforming, essentially re-engineering, Iraqi society and politics that went on to create a lot of trouble for us, and as Nir Rosen pointed out, a lot of trouble for Iraqis themselves. So, this war-aims issue needs to be tackled.

That leads to a number of other collateral problems. One is the way in which the media garbles issues that arise. There is one issue that is very much on my mind now, and we have talked about it in today's sessions – corruption and legitimacy. One of the reasons – maybe the principal reason – that our poor beleaguered president has not been able to come out with a strategy on Afghanistan is because of the way in which the elections played out and the subsequent publicity given to the issue of legitimacy and corruption. What is curious about this is that the concern comes from the counterinsurgency literature. It has been a leitmotif of counterinsurgency theoreticians. It has been absorbed by the media, which have then turned it into something probably much bigger than it should be, particularly in the case of Afghanistan, where an imported notion of legitimacy is probably misplaced. That in turn has hemmed in the flexibility that the president has in promulgating a strategy to deal with the problem over the longer term.

There is a second issue that I think is counterproductive in the discourse, but which

has come up again and again today. General Barno, David Kilcullen, and Peter Bergen basically gave us a choice – General Barno called it a "stark choice" – saying that it is either go all the way or get out. This not only corrupts discourse but hamstrings policymakers. It is inconsistent with, if it does not absolutely contradict, the way in which democracies do things. We have got to get a grip on this.

That is related to a third issue in this kind of subcategory that I am advancing here, which is the polarization of the debate about foreign policy – a problem, in a sense, made possible by the collapse of our foreign policy elite. We do not have a cohesive foreign policy elite anymore in the way that we did during the Cold War. That is hurting us, and it is hurting us very badly. It is hard for me to imagine one of the great avatars of U.S. foreign and defense policy during that period, when there was a substantial unanimity of view on a bipartisan scale, saying, "We've only got two options – nuke them or surrender." When I was in government, one of the jokes was that all memos, at least at the State Department or the White House, had three options: nuke them, surrender, or my option. Where is the "my option" in this scenario? The fact is that governments have to satisfice because there are so many constraints on them. The notion that there is an either/or here also corrupts the discourse and makes it harder to deal with the problem.

While we are on the subject of the way democracies do things, Jeffrey Record, a scholar at the Army War College, picked up on a fascinating book by Omer Bartov, an Israeli scientist, on Nazi military activity in Russia. He basically says that with certain kinds of insurgencies, the only way you beat them is with barbarism. It seems to me that this would be all the more true in an evolving situation where the other guy's firepower is increasing. Democracies don't do barbarism – or, let me put it this way, when democracies do barbarism, there is a backlash. Barbarism is not sustainable, so we need to bear that in mind.

A few points just to wrap up. Because of our failure to organize ourselves properly to do these kinds of things, which is a tributary of a bigger problem – that we do not have a unified national security budget – we will never be able to do them right.

We are always going to have the problem of casualty tolerance. The reason I raise that, even though it is kind of a cliché, is because it is an important corollary to my point earlier about the demise of a foreign policy consensus. Some very careful studies by the RAND Corporation showed that casualty tolerance was dependent on three things. One was a sense that victory could be achieved in some meaningful frame of time, but also that there was an elite consensus on that point – that Congress, the executive branch, the media, and the punditocracy all kind of agreed that this was something worth doing; that the stakes were high and there were good prospects for success in a meaningful amount of time. When those conditions were met, casualty tolerance was extremely high, and I will give you an example. In 1990, the Chicago Council on Foreign Relations did a very interesting poll where they asked respondents, "How many causalities should we be willing to accept in a war in Iraq?" I saw that poll at the time, and I was shocked to see that respondents said that they would tolerate 40,000 casualties in Operation Desert Storm. Of course, in light of the RAND analysis, this is the kind of thing you would expect, because there was a wall-to-wall consensus on the stakes, the prospect for success, and so forth. With the collapse of the foreign policy elite, we will never see that again. And with people sitting on these panels saying "we go all the

way or we get out," and not putting forward really any kind of constructive third ways, I think we are really doomed in that respect.

Ken Silverstein:
I would like to talk a little bit about USAID's program in Afghanistan. Before doing that, I want to make a couple of random observations from listening to people talk today that I think are relevant to USAID's role and, I think, gross failures in Afghanistan.

> **"Mullah Omar is not Henry Kissinger. We have already run this particular videotape, which was after 9/11. He was prepared to lose absolutely everything on a point of principle. So why would he suddenly turn into a sort of foreign policy realist now?"**
>
> *Peter Bergen*

The first concerns the road-building project in Afghanistan that Montgomery McFate mentioned. I think it is a fair point. However, it is difficult to listen to stories about corruption in Afghanistan without looking in the mirror, which we frequently fail to do.

Another story, which may seem completely off topic, concerns the Amazon rain forest. I have never been to Afghanistan and I make no claims to expertise. I write about Washington for the most part, so I know a lot about Washington. I did live in Brazil for five years some time ago. I remember always finding it strange, either while in Brazil or visiting the United States during that time, to read newspaper stories or hear people talking about stopping the burning of the Amazon, how this worldwide treasure must be preserved. Absolutely, we need to preserve the Amazon, but there is just one problem, which is that there are a couple million poor people who live there and they are going to burn part of it. You cannot preserve the Amazon unless you expect people to not eat. When I hear the public debate about Afghanistan, and frequently the political debate, certainly among members of Congress, I get the same sense that people do not have the foggiest idea of what they are talking about. They have no idea of what Afghanistan looks like. Again, I do not claim any level of expertise, but I think I can be a bit more sophisticated than much of the debate I hear in Congress. It's another world – Americans talking about the Amazon as if you could preserve it to go floating down the river having a wine and cheese party. It is just not going to work, and I think that the debate on Afghanistan is just as frequently out of touch as the sort of conversation I used to hear about Brazil – and still do.

All of that is relevant to a discussion of the way USAID has performed in Afghanistan. It is not just Afghanistan. USAID has performed relatively abysmally in most parts of the world. It really does not have a track record of great success, but in Afghanistan it is much more important now because the stakes are so high. When the United States led the invasion of Afghanistan, President Bush talked about how we weren't going to walk away, we were going to rebuild the country, and it would never again be a safe haven for terrorism. We had to have not just a military solution but there was a long-term development strategy that we needed in Afghanistan so that that wouldn't happen. So USAID had an important role. It was supposed to implement a good chunk of this development program. Its role there is extremely important.

In critiquing USAID, I would also point out not only that it has not performed well in other parts of the world, but also that my cri-

tique is not time-bound. We are not just talking about now or the past five years. Going back through most of its history, it has performed very poorly.

One of the reasons that it is worth examining is because we tend to look at USAID as a charity organization. It is, after all, the Agency for International Development. But, of course, its goals and methods and plans are all inextricably linked with U.S. foreign policy. So the real goal is to back American foreign policy, which may clash with local needs. I wrote a piece about this in the September 2009 issue of *Harper's*. The title was initially going to be "Charity Begins at Home," because so much of the money that is allocated by USAID for development projects in Afghanistan and elsewhere ends up in the pockets of American companies, and frequently American companies that are well connected, that have political connections through the traditional means – campaign donations, their lobbyists. Many of the companies that have received USAID grants are headed by former USAID officials. So when you talk about fixing USAID, which the Obama administration is talking about, it is complex and difficult because you are trying to fix Washington in a way. It is a small part of a much bigger problem. It is easier said than done.

"If we are not winning decisively on the battlefield, and yet we cannot figure out a way to create a cessation of hostilities in order to change the dynamic in the country, then it gets really complicated."

Roger Cressey

The other important thing about how USAID has been transformed in the past 15 or 20 years is that it has really just become pretty much a pass-through for taxpayer money to private entities. For better or for worse, USAID used to actually develop and implement its projects, but now it is simply taking money and passing it on through to corporations, nonprofit groups, and consultants who are charged with carrying out the development projects. USAID, because its budget has been cut very badly, no longer has the staff or personnel to even monitor the money that is going out. So there is little oversight or accountability in terms of these projects. That, I think, accounts for many of the failures.

Nobody really knows exactly how much of AID's money ends up in America instead of in the intended recipient country. It is difficult to measure but it certainly has to be more than 50 percent, and I have seen estimates as high as 80 percent. Instead of going to Afghan companies for these projects, much of it has gone to American companies, so you have very little local impact from much of the money that is spent over there. As I mentioned earlier, the money that is distributed is often appropriated on the basis of connections and access, as much of the federal budget is, including the defense budget. You see problems time and again where you cannot see where there is any reason for the allocation of funds other than political connections of the recipients.

There is a line item in many of these projects called "technical assistance," which is basically a bureaucratic code word for "fat consulting contracts." Enormous sums of money have been diverted into the pockets of consultants, often at a rate of up to $1,000 a day. Some of these contracts include salary, benefits, housing, and R&R. Some are as valuable as half a million dollars a year for the consultants hired.

If you look at many of the AID programs

in Afghanistan, it is clear that there was very little local consultation. Many times the companies were formed simply as a vehicle to receive U.S. government contract money and, hence, you have boondoggles of this sort that have plagued the reconstruction.

QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

Joanna Nathan (*from the audience*):
My question is for Roger Cressey. I said earlier that I do not think that the vast majority who are now joining are ideological, but I think there is a hard-core ideological center to the Taliban with no sign of Taliban-light. They behead people. They disembowel people. They feel they have the strategic momentum. We always seem to be talking about doing a deal, that it would be quick and easy. I cannot understand why *they* would want to do a deal. I do not see what is in it for them, and I have not seen any sign that they ever abide by deals, from what we have seen in the past, both within Afghanistan in Musa Qala and across the border in Waziristan.

Roger Cressey:
There is a long history of American governments striking deals with people and those deals never being fulfilled, and then we move on to another deal. What I was trying to get at is that I just do not think strategically that we are in a place that this administration is going to make a decision to go in and defeat the Taliban in the way that the popular media has been discussing this issue. I simply don't see it. When I talk to military experts, current active duty or retired, they do not believe that the footprint being discussed right now, that we'll be there for the next several years, will accomplish that.

To Steve Simon's point, there is going to be a middle option, but I do not know what it is yet. I just believe there is going to be a point when there is a recognition that there is some element of the Taliban leadership (and I understand that it is not homogeneous; there are multiple elements of it) that the United States or others is going to start to have a dialogue with.

Peter Bergen:
In principle, it is very desirable to do those deals, but there are basically six problems. Al Qaeda and the Taliban at the leadership level have morphed together ideologically and tactically. The Taliban today is very different from what it was pre-9/11. Secondly, Mullah Omar has taken every opportunity to reject a deal. Thirdly, the Mecca process, where there has been some dealings with people within the Taliban and members of the Afghan government, does not represent anybody involved in the actual insurgency. Fourthly, as Joanna Nathan pointed out, we have already seen what the Pakistani Taliban did with their peace deals. They used it as an opportunity to expand. The Taliban also feels that they are not losing, or maybe winning, so why do a deal now when they can get a better deal later? Finally, Mullah Omar is not Henry Kissinger. We have already run this particular videotape, which was after 9/11. He was prepared to lose absolutely everything on a point of principle. So why would he suddenly turn into a sort of foreign policy realist now?

This is unfortunate for our strategy because we are not going to win militarily against the Taliban. But the reconciliation is clearly going to be problematic. By the way, *we* are not reconciling with the Taliban. At the end of the day, it is the Afghan government that has to reconcile. We are not even really a party to the negotiations. We can maybe facilitate by handing them some battlefield defeats. So it is tough.

Roger Cressey:
Believe me, I am not an advocate for this. I am not saying we should cut a deal right now. I have seen part of this movie play out before when I was in the government in different areas of the world, and I can guarantee that there will come a point when we are going to try and find someone to make a deal with. To all the points that you guys just made, you are absolutely right. That leads to the next question: Then what? "Then what" becomes really complicated. If we are not winning decisively on the battlefield, and yet we cannot figure out a way to create a cessation of hostilities in order to change the dynamic in the country, then it gets really complicated.

Question (*from the audience*):
There seems to be a problem in COIN right now, which is the inability to conceive of leaving. It does not seem likely that we are going to leave Iraq, and it is unlikely that we will be out of Afghanistan in five to 10 years if we dig in. Roger Cressey made the point earlier that there will be pressure or simply a decision to go in hard if there is a terrorist attack in New York or elsewhere involving Americans, in which case we may be in a third place. Are we committing as a democracy to long-term social and political rehabilitation of everywhere? Or is it only in areas where there is a direct threat or perhaps a less-direct connection to a cleric who has some sort of safe haven or something that we describe that way? Where does *this* democracy draw the line?

Steven Simon:
First, we are getting out of Iraq. I think that is guaranteed. If I had to hazard a guess, I would say we'll be leaving Afghanistan under somewhat similar circumstances and conditions because support for a long-standing commitment will erode. It is already not in good shape, precisely because of the cracks in elite consensus. In this case, not only are Congress and the executive branch at odds, but the uniformed military is at odds with the White House and the White House is at odds with itself. There are prominent people in the White House framework, like the vice president, attempting to stake out a position on Afghanistan that is unlike the president's – presumably not so unlike the president's as to appear disloyal but enough to make it appear as though he is his own man and putting forward a different vision of how to work this. Then there is the really turbocharged public debate informed by all these weird issues like legitimacy and corruption that I talked about earlier. With those kinds of cracks in the foundation, it is difficult to see a large troop commitment lasting all that much longer. But in this case, as in the case of Iraq, "all that much longer" is measured in years – probably three years or something like that, maybe a bit longer. I do not think that that we are going to be there forever.

I also do not think, for reasons that I sort of explained earlier, that we are going to be going into every other country where there is a radical cleric, not so long as we have Predators and Reapers that fire Hellfire missiles. That is going to be, I would expect, the countermeasure of choice in the coming years, as it has been since Abu Ali al Harithi was killed in Yemen by one of those missiles.

Roger Cressey:
The bottom line is that we are not going to go heavy into every country, but any administration will always respond militarily to a significant terrorism event. Say it is al Shabaab in Somalia. We'll do a variety of what we have done in the past – a combination of off-shore assets, assets in the air, cruise missiles, Special Forces, and maybe we will come in afterward and do humanitarian missions just for old time's sake.

Con Caughlin (*from the audience*):
I think one of the key issues here is just how much will there is within the Taliban to fight. I sense that there is a growing tiredness within the Taliban leadership to maintain this conflict. Does the panel have any sense of how much longer the Taliban are prepared to fight?

Peter Bergen:
Michael Semple, who has spent more time talking to the Taliban than anybody else in the world, points out to them that the past eight years have basically been a total failure in terms of their stated goals. The Taliban has yet to really take a significant town, let alone a city. Cearly they are trying to run out the clock, as General Barno said. But I think you raise a very good point, and it is a point that Semple has tried to make in the process of trying to get these guys to the negotiating table, which is be realistic. The black flag of the Taliban is not going to be flying over Kabul. The Taliban cannot do a Tet Offensive on Kabul in a million years. It is never going to happen. The counterargument is that they have done their own kind of offensive on Kandahar, which was without tanks rolling into the streets, but just by a process of subversion they have taken over much of Kandahar city.

That is not a very good answer, but I want to say one thing about a way out of this that we have not talked about today. It goes to some things that I think Steve Simon was saying. A status of forces agreement with the Afghan government would be a pretty smart way to begin to end many of the problems that we have there. It would show that we are not going to be there forever, but in a way that is agreed upon. We are going to be out of Iraq as a result of the SOFA. One of the great things about the SOFA is that it had real time limits in it. We would always have found a reason not to go out of the Iraqi cities. They always would have been too violent, but we have withdrawn from the Iraqi cities. That sent a huge message to the Iraqi people that we were no longer the occupiers. So I think a status of forces agreement with Afghanistan, now that we have essentially another five years of President Karzai, is something the Obama administration should be thinking about carefully as a way to withdraw in a way that makes sense for all involved.

Karen J. Greenberg:
But there are reasons not to have such an agreement, right?

Peter Bergen:
It is a sovereign country. We have status of forces agreements with dozens of other countries. I do not know what the objections would be.

Karen J. Greenberg:
One of the objections is the detention effort. There are a number of things that we need to get our own arms around before we go forward, and it would drastically alter how we did that. It may be just a matter of time, but there are some issues, and that would be just one of them.

Question (*from the audience*):
In possibly that third option that Mr. Simon alluded to, do we see Iran or Saudi Arabia as some type of stabilizing nation in something we do in Afghanistan?

Steven Simon:
No.

Peter Bergen:
I am going to completely disagree with Steve Simon. According to Jim Dobbins, it was the Iranians who first suggested having elections in Afghanistan. That is something the Americans had not even thought about, and

they played, I think, a basically nonspoiler role. They could have played a spoiler role and they haven't. The Saudis could play an immensely important role, and they have tried to with the Mecca process. If the Taliban is essentially a religious movement (I think it is more ideological, perhaps, than Joanna Nathan does), at the end of the day the Saudis have an immense amount of influence over the ideological component, and they are probably the only group of people that can facilitate these kinds of agreements. Obviously, the United States is not the right forum, but Saudi Arabia probably is.

Steven Simon:
To borrow David Kilcullen's colorful language, Iran was the pooch that was screwed. Their involvement in the way that they involved themselves very constructively in 2002 is not coming back in the foreseeable future.

Peter Bergen:
Right.

Karen J. Greenberg:
I have no intention of trying to summarize what was said today, but I do want to comment on one persistent theme that I think you need to make when you are in a university setting. There has been tremendous frustration at the military, diplomatic, and law-enforcement levels since the beginning of this serious encounter with al Qaeda about the lack of knowledge the United States has about its enemies and about the context in which those enemies identify themselves, thrive, are supported, and are countered. We have grown immensely in our knowledge. It may not be perfect; we may all be part of General McChrystal's bastion of people who do not know enough about where we are, who do not know languages, and so on. But after being here today, I do not think that is so much the case. I think that the United States – not only the United States, but the United States – has a vast supply of knowledge resources and of capable individuals who can think about these issues, and the facts, and the ideas. One wonderful thing that did not come up today was accusations that a particular fact or a particular interpretation was a result of politics rather than reality.

So whether you are optimistic or pessimistic, we have grown immensely even from a little more than a year ago when Ambassador Holbrooke was here just prior to the election. We had a conference on Afghanistan that he began, and that had four panels that were similarly constituted with very bright people – some of whom are back today, many of whom joined Petraeus's team, and some of whom advise Holbrooke. The consistent theme of the day was that Afghanistan is not a place that we know how to manage our thoughts about and, as a result, maybe we shouldn't be there. But the real issue was a tremendous amount of controversy about what we even thought and how we thought about it. That is not really here today in the same way.

So I am going to end on an optimistic note by saying that, at least if nothing else, we have a baseline and I think that it is growing. It is part of the democratic experience to think that with more knowledge you find the right – and if not the right, then at least the constructive – solution.

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