



Center for a  
New American  
Security

## **AFGHANISTAN PRESS BRIEFING**

### **FEATURED SPEAKERS:**

**VIKRAM SINGH, FELLOW, CENTER FOR A  
NEW AMERICAN SECURITY**

**NATHANIEL FICK, FELLOW, CENTER FOR A  
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MR. PRICE FLOYD: We're going to go ahead and get started. Folks may come late. Feel free to get up and to replenish drinks or food, if you need to. This is on the record so feel free to fire away. The idea is that Nate Fick, who's right here to my left, and Vikram Singh, to his left, will give short opening remarks and then open it up for questions from you all. And then let's have a dialogue back and forth.

I'm Price Floyd, the director of external relations here at the Center for a New American Security. This is Shannon O'Reilly, the deputy director, and Nicole DeMarco over there, who just started with us, and she's doing great.

If you guys have any questions about any event at CNAS, let us know. We'll be glad to help you in the future. Make sure you give us your information, so then we can invite you to all future events as well.

And without further ado, I'll turn it over to Nate and Vikram, and they can decide who goes first.

MR. NATHANIEL FICK: All right – first decision; slow on the draw. My name is Nate Fick. As we were just saying briefly, I joined CNAS in June. Before that, I was a Marine. I served in Afghanistan in 2001 and 2002, in Iraq in '03. I got out, went to grad school, and I went back to Afghanistan in 2007 as a civilian instructor at the Counter-insurgency Academy. So this was my third trip over a period of five years, six years. And as we were saying – and I'm beginning to get a sense of the trend lines and seeing parts of the country.

So I'll just give you a quick thumbnail sketch of our itinerary and some of what we saw and the conditions under which we saw it, and then hear a couple of the key themes, and Vikram has a couple as well.

The defining feature of this trip that made it really interesting for us was that we were just embedded enough to have military, air and the DOD support that we needed in order to get access to places, but not so much support that we were embedded in the bubble where we got the formal briefs and nothing else. So we spent, all told, about a week in Kabul, and we were able to meet with everyone from the boy selling naan on the street to the second vice president, a handful of cabinet ministers, military officers –

MR. SINGH: NDS.

MR. FICK: Right, NDS –

MR. SINGH: Intelligence guys.

MR. FICK: – and a whole handful of officials from the aid community, the UN, the Asian Development Bank, and the U.S. government as well. Outside Kabul, we traveled overland up through Parwan and Kapisa and up into the Panjshir. We also went overland out through Nangarhar to Jalalabad, and out to Torkham to the border, the border post.

And then we also traveled down south, Kandahar, Paktika and Ghazni. We spent time in Ghazni with the agricultural development team – or the agro-business development team, depending on who you ask – and with the 1st of the 506th that has had responsibility for Ghazni and was in the process of turning it over to the Poles.

The primary observation – I guess I have two that I would share just to kick things off, and then Vikram will share a couple as well. One is that there's a consensus building around the need to send two or three more brigades to Afghanistan and it seems to me that that is a second-order question. The first-order question is what are we trying to do in Afghanistan?

And we talked with plenty of senior officials who echoed our observation that there doesn't seem to be a strategic end state that every player agrees upon. We have the rhetoric of a representative Afghanistan at peace with itself and its neighbors – that's not what I mean. And until we have a defined strategic end state, it's very hard to come up with the intermediate objectives we need to get there, and until we have the intermediate objectives, it's hard to figure out how to resource to meet them.

So I would suggest that two or three additional brigades begs the question of to do what? Is this a counter-terrorism mission, or is this a holistic state-building mission, or is it something in between?

The second observation is the absolute fundamental nature of the question of government legitimacy. And time and again, every prominent Afghan official we spoke with, or private citizen – former officials as well – voiced a real concern at the declining – not so much the declining popularity, although that's a problem, but the declining legitimacy of the current government in Afghanistan and they point to three reasons for this. One is corruption, endemic corruption at every level, and I do mean every level. We sat with the vice president, who looked us in the eye, on the record, and said this government is corrupt from top to bottom.

The second is sheltering warlords. You can ask any Afghan and they can – there's broad consensus around two or three or four prominent warlords who are living freely in Kabul. There was an incident with Dostum several months ago standing on the roof of his house yelling at the ANP down in the street that they would never take him alive, and the government backed down.

Q: And they didn't.

MR. FICK: Right. That's right. (Laughs.)

Q: And they beat them up.

MR. FICK: And collusion with narco-traffickers that was brought to popular attention in the New York Times magazine a couple of months ago. So the problem here is that when the bulk of the Afghan people – when the mass of the Afghan people begin feeling that their own government is fundamentally illegitimate, what does it do to our

credibility and our legitimacy as a coalition when we're the ones supporting that government?

And before I segue here to Vikram, we do have a lever of action here because there's an Afghan election in 2009, and that gets to the importance of the timing, not only of the attention on the broader issue, but also the report that we'll be looking at.

MR. SINGH: I would just add to the legitimacy question, should you ask any member of the coalition right now, what's your job, their job is to enhance the capacity of the government of Afghanistan. And so what became very evident to us from the Afghans we talked to is that if they're enhancing the capacity of a governor or a provincial council or a president, or anyone who is seen by the bulk of the population as corrupt, criminal, illegitimate, violent, brutal, oppressive, there's something very problematic with that mission statement.

So the idea that we're extending government control needs to be – I hate to use the word nuanced – but it needs to be nuanced to include the idea that we're extending legitimate government control. And that means we need to start identifying the steps that we can take, given that we have lots of leverage. We provide security, we provide logistics; we provide all the support for most of these entities throughout the country. We need to figure out how we help hold them accountable, and hold them up to standards, and build up their ability to be legitimate, not just capable.

So the idea that we sort of defaulted to supporting and installing warlords as a matter of convenience in 2001 and 2002 – or largely in 2002 – and that we're now sort of stuck in this system of our own creation that is highly dependant on the very people who make Afghanistan kind of non-viable is broadly held, and is, I think, broadly true.

Obviously, the next big issue that was inescapable was Pakistan. And I think that – you know, I'd always known that Afghans tend to blame Pakistan for all their problems, and will quickly tell you that's it's not an Afghan insurgency. It's Pakistani insurgency that's being used to destabilize Afghanistan and these sorts of things. Thank you.

I had no idea of the level of frustration and anger towards Pakistan, and I also had no idea of how convinced the average people are that, after all these years, there must be some sort of grand conspiracy between us and the Pakistanis to maintain instability in Afghanistan. And this perception – not reality – this perception really matters, and our unwillingness to even entertain it and deal with it is undermining our ability to do anything to make the government more legitimate or to achieve our goals in any number of ways.

And the way it came home to me was one tribal elder – we met with the Council of Elders from Uruzgan and the Council of Elders from Kandahar. And a member of the Council of Elders from Uruzgan told me that – he basically said a couple of years ago, half the people in my area – half of my people thought that there was a conspiracy between the United States – that the United States was sort of actually supporting the Taliban and al Qaeda and had some (sinister?) – and he said, now, it's everybody. Now, all of my people think that you're actually – for whatever reasons we don't know, actually supporting the others. So why don't you just give me some weapons and if you're not going to take care of the problem, I'll take care of the problem.

There's an awful lot of Afghans that are getting ready to try to take things into their own hands, which some Americans will think that's an opportunity we should seize. Some Americans will think that puts at risk a lot of our security, our efforts to build a national legitimate security structure, and we can maybe discuss that more later.

I think the idea that there is – one aid worker told us – someone who'd been there for a long time – that there really is what she'd called an invasion by proxy from Afghanistan and from Pakistan, and I think that is kind of a better way to capture it than to look at it just as a simple Afghan insurgency. It's a cross-border insurgency, and the sanctuary and logistics base is in Pakistan primarily and is going across into – it's being projected into Afghanistan. That doesn't mean there's no elements that are local in Afghanistan, but in terms of the ability to do these large-scale attacks, to do sort of coordinated attacks and pre-position goods and people and things like that, the base for that is really in Pakistan.

And then Nate touched briefly on the opportunities. I think the way we're looking at it right now is clearly, there's two things happening on the American side. We have an election happening, and the security situation in Iraq is easing up to a point that people are seriously thinking about, and talking about, what more can be done in Afghanistan. So on our side, there's an opportunity for a change of direction.

On the Afghan side, there's elections coming up that are – I don't think it can be overstated. These are make or break elections. If these elections are illegitimate for security reasons or illegitimate for perception reasons, they're seen to be not legitimate by the Afghan people, it will be very, very hard to recover. So I think that gives us kind of an imperative.

We have – elections are the kind of thing that Americans can focus on and get motivated by, and so while I don't think you should aim your policy around elections, I do think they can be used. And so that means that we're in this moment to use these two events, the election and improving the security situation in Iraq for us, and the elections coming up over there, as the opportunity to try to get things on a better course. That's all I have to say off the bat, and then we can just ask questions.

MR. FLOYD: As folks ask questions, if they can identify themselves for the transcript, we can line up the name and who you work for with your question so it makes sense. If anyone has questions, please feel free to fire away.

Q: Go ahead.

Q: I am Moam Naseem (ph) from VOA. There are rumors that the Kabul regime is trying to postpone the election. Have you heard anything about that?

MR. FICK: The formal line we heard is that – there seemed to be general agreement that postponing it would be problematic, that the constitution obviously allowed – there's a –

MR. SINGH: Window.

MR. FICK: – method for postponing, I believe, four months – if they declare a state of emergency, they can postpone it four months.

Q: Wasn't there a – remember, there was a postponement of the presidential elections in '04.

MR. FICK: Yes.

Q: And it got postponed – and it was supposed in September, October, November, and then it was finally in December, and I think maybe that's what –

MR. FICK: And they haven't picked a date yet. The date will be picked probably in January or February and I guess – I defer to you on this, but I think the window is June to October. It's dictated largely by weather. So maybe they can fudge a bit and they can pick the end of that window and look for an October election.

Q: That's possible.

MR. FICK: But most of the folks we spoke to at UNAMA and also in the Afghan government seem to agree that postponing the election, using the formal constitutional mechanism, was almost an admission of defeat and would weaken their position in the long run.

Q: I'm Siri Nairap (ph). I'm with the Afghan TV Service and a colleague of Naseem's at VOA. And there's – I'm sorry if I missed the top of it and you already addressed this, but Moam has asked for a strategic – I think you touched upon when I was coming in, but do you have any sense when they're talking about a military rethinking of strategy – this side, that side of the border – do you have any sense that there any new ideas that are germinating anywhere that don't just say, we need more muscle to beat back the insurgency, and that, of course, Pakistan must step up to the plate, and these are things we've heard for a very long time.

MR. SINGH: I think, unfortunately, more muscle is the easiest thing, and hence, we know we get two to three more brigades. Nobody will say that that's all we need. I don't think you'll find anyone in the U.S. military who thinks that more muscle alone will somehow resolve everything, whether that's more troops in Afghanistan or more targeted strikes and raids across the border into Pakistan. I don't think anybody sees that as a solution. They see that as something to try to stop the bleeding of the last several months.

I think one of the big fears after this really violent summer and fall is that if Taliban and al Qaeda forces have established themselves across the mountains enough that they might be able to continue fighting through the winter to a degree that hasn't been seen previously, and that that will make things like elections and other things much more difficult. So there's this sort of this thinking of we need to try to stop the hemorrhaging and then let's get our act together and have a broader strategic review.

I think Secretary Gates is in London, or was in London yesterday, and I would imagine that that's connected to Gordon Brown's statement that we're going to have a new

approach for Afghanistan and I don't think they're talking just military. But it's very complicated, obviously, because you have the border. So you've got two countries you're dealing with and then you have this coalition, which is both of the greatest strength and one of the great weaknesses of the operation. We're only one out of 26 countries.

MR. FICK: And Siri, I would just add that the one thing we did say as you were coming in is that we had a sense that there's not a clear sense of what the strategic objective is that we're trying to achieve in Afghanistan. What is it that we're trying to do –

Q: Exactly.

MR. FICK: – not only across the coalition and across the regional governments, but just what is the United States trying to do – I mean, a much simpler question that be still don't seem to have a clear answer to.

Q: But also neither with Pakistan too – I mean, do you see a parallel between the attachment to Karzai and the attachment to Musharraf?

MR. FICK: Oh, of course.

MR. SINGH: We have phrase for it.

MR. FICK: And we have a Bush-Maliki-Karzai – I'm sorry – we have a Maliki-Musharraf-Karzai complex, and this administration has had a very hard time criticizing our anointed allies because it's seen as reflecting poorly on we who installed them in the first place. And that gets back to the critical juncture we have here in the next year with a change of administrations here, an election in Afghanistan, a change of leadership in Pakistan, and this confluence of events that does give us, perhaps, levers we can pull and pivot to a new strategy.

And I would push back a little bit on the sense that there are no new ideas. I personally think that the U.S. government finally on being quoted on the front page of the New York Times after the Indian embassy attacks saying the ISI was complicit, that's a big change.

Q: That was very big.

MR. FICK: That's a big change. So it's incremental, though, right? And putting a commando raid force on the ground in Pakistan was a big change and maybe next, we'll see use of our influence either on President Karzai, or on his challengers, to get some of the hard decisions made that haven't yet been made. I think that each of those is a fairly big change. If we can put them together into an integrated, comprehensive strategy married to a campaign plan, then –

MS. MICHÈLE FLOURNOY: If I could just add – I'm Michèle Flournoy. I'm the president and cofounder of CNAS. My impression of the chairman's effort on Afghanistan is also a desire to develop ideas and options for presentation to a new administration on our side. The sense that a strategy review in Afghanistan is coming is very real, no matter who wins, and the sense that he wants to be ready, having assessed the situation, having options

to put on the table, having ideas to contribute to that dialogue, I think that's the domestic timing. The domestic politics on our side are driving it – not (put?) domestic politics, but a domestic political timeline on our side is driving it, as well as the situation on the ground there.

Q: Gareth Porter, Inter Press Service – apologies for getting here so late. I now have intimate knowledge of most of the parking lots in the area here. (Laughter.) And I found only one that was open, so that's why I'm so late. So I'm sorry I missed the presentations.

But I gather from what you've just said that you do support the new policy of commando raids across the border in Pakistan in the FATA region. And I want to push a little bit on that to explain strategically, if you would, why you think it's a good idea, in the face of some strong arguments, as you know, that were made by the intelligence community, by the State Department and by high-ranking military officers, that this is terrible, that it would be destabilizing. So give me, based on that – I hope what you might have had, in terms of conversations while you were over there, insights into why this was a good idea.

MR. FICK: The fear of destabilizing Pakistan, it sounds a little bit to me like it's a fear of getting wet in the swimming pool. We're already down that road and I think we have to answer, again, the first fundamental question, which is what are we trying to achieve in Afghanistan? And that requires thinking more broadly in the region, and if we are, in fact, doing one of two things – if we are seeking to build enduring institutions of a state in Afghanistan, or if we are serious about a counter-terrorism mission aimed at disabling al Qaeda, then I would suggest we have no choice but to have a military presence in the FATA.

And I think that the commando raids actually offer two advantages over the previous tactics, which were primarily Hellfire strikes from UAVs. One is the ability to collect intelligence; and two is an increased ability to avoid civilian casualties. It's a lot easier to be discriminating when you're talking about people with rifles on the ground than it is when you fire missiles.

Q: But it doesn't seem to have been borne out by the first experience; that is to say that the saving of civilian lives – (inaudible)?

MR. SINGH: I don't think we know that.

MR. FICK: I don't think we know that.

Q: I'm sorry. You're challenging the press coverage of what the result of that raid was?

MR. SINGH (?): Yes.

Q: Can you explain that a bit more?



MR. SINGH: I simply don't – I mean, I do. If you look at the press coverage of that raid, it does cite – you get quotes from people, but I just think that, in general, all of the coverage of civilian casualties in the FATA, in Waziristan, and in remote parts of Afghanistan is weak. It's rare that you have someone on the ground taking pictures, talking to witnesses. It's common that you have someone relaying essentially a claim, often from a Taliban leader, that would say this is what happened. And to think that we've done much better than that – I think Carlotta Gall got out to the site near Herat after 10 or 12 days.

I don't think the U.S. government is doing a very good job of getting to the ground truth in these cases either, but I think the only thing we can know is that we don't really know. I think we can guarantee that a missile which blows up a building is fairly indiscriminate – it will kill whoever's in that building – and that a raid enables more precisely knowing what you're doing. That much I know.

So rather than a judgment of the particular event – for which I don't think we have the facts to make a fair judgment – a judgment on the choice of tactics, I think you can certainly say that you can minimize civilian casualties when you have human eyes on targets rather than relying on surveillance –

Q: But that was the problem in Herat too and – (inaudible).

MR. SINGH: – and that you have intelligence value because you can capture people, documents, computers and things like that.

MR. FICK: And Gareth, let me just take a step back and say that the problem – the tragedy of civilian casualties is of strategic importance in Afghanistan, and we realize that. And during General – the last year of General Barno's tenure in 2005, the U.S. controlled 176 air strikes in Afghanistan. In 2007, the U.S. controlled 3,572 air strikes in Afghanistan. I would suggest that that's moving in the wrong direction. And we – by inevitably killing civilians, we undermine the Karzai government and we do ourselves strategic harm. So I think we agree on that.

Then the question is how to deal with the fact that we haven't – haven't – dismantled al Qaeda and haven't even dismantled the Taliban movement. All we've done is push them across the border into Pakistan and what do we do then? And so cross-border military operations seem to me like a necessary, but not sufficient, part of a broader strategy. And the rest of it has to be, perhaps – and again, this gets back to what is it we're trying to do – I would suggest we need a more holistic strategy for engaging Pakistan and it can't be a military to military relationship that focuses only on their western border.

It has to include dialogue with India and confidence-building measures on their eastern border. It has to include engaging – these aren't ideas that we're formally proposing here, but why not engage the academic elite? Why are we not talking about an American university in Islamabad? Why are we not engaging the business elite and talking about a bilateral investment relationship? There are other things we could be doing to assuage Pakistani paranoia that we're there only to capture or kill bin Laden and then we're gone.

MR. FLOYD: Do you have a follow-up on this –

MR. SINGH: Sure.

MR. FLOYD: – unless somebody else wants to jump in.

MR. SINGH: That will do it.

Q: Can I just ask whether you had conversations on your trip with people who were willing to talk about, in a strategic sense, about the cross-border raids and what they hoped to accomplish? I'm asking this because it's one thing to say, yes, we have to do something about al Qaeda and Taliban in Pakistan, about the safe havens. It's another thing to say that these tactics will have an impact at all.

You're talking about mid-level operatives that you're targeting. Nobody knows where bin Laden is, and the chances of catching him or his high lieutenants are vanishingly small in reality if you understand the tribal nature of this society that you're dealing with. So in light of that, it really raises a much bigger sort of strategic question of what can realistically be accomplished?

MR. SINGH: I think it's a symptom of exactly the strategic problem that Nate has first put forward, that we haven't decided exactly what we're doing and we don't know how we're getting there. What you're seeing right now are a set of reactive things that are a product of not having had a strategy that was in place and a plan that was properly resourced over a long period of time. So the strikes and raids will never constitute a strategy. They may be a part of a strategy, and indeed, in the counter-insurgency, they will be a part of a strategy.

I don't think we're saying – and we wouldn't want to imply to anybody – that increasing strikes and raids across the border somehow constitutes a new strategy or a change in strategy. It is a reactive, tactical decision that is largely based on the sort of dire position we've reached, I would argue, due to the lack of a strategy and a properly resourced plan over many years.

Q: Is it fair to say that this is sort of the mechanism operating the way it only knows how to operate, rather than really a rational response to a situation? In other words, is the military machine essentially doing what it does, rather than –

MR. FICK: First of all, the military machine can't operate across international borders without political authority on both sides of the border.

MR. SINGH: Without political policy.

Q: I'm not suggesting they didn't have political authority, no, but the impetus came obviously from so common and from the – (inaudible).

MR. SINGH: I would say that you could characterize it as frustrating. Anyone who's trying to operate along that border in Afghanistan must be frustrated by the inability to do anything about guys coming in and hitting them and slipping back across the border, and not being able to take any action. I think that is a genuine frustration, and it is a – and this is a strategic challenge, because you're certainly not going to win a counter-insurgency

if you have a 1,000 to 1,600-mile sanctuary all along the area in which you're trying to fight that counter-insurgency. It will not be possible.

So I wouldn't say it's just the military reacting the way the military knows how to react. I would say it's a decision to push back at the tactical level against a series of tactical challenges, and that it is not a change in strategy, and it is not something that could be seen as the cornerstone of a new strategic approach. A new strategy is a very, very different thing.

Q: I guess the question to some extent too becomes, is this the best use of such limited troops that we have on the ground? I think that's the concern that I'm hearing a little bit about out of Afghanistan because you look at the border, and absolutely, that's a counter-insurgency principle in closing the borders, but some would say, well, maybe that's 10th down on our counter-insurgency list right now. And I'm curious as to your sense about it. Is this the best use of our limited troops right now, advancing these brigades coming in?

MR. SINGH: I'm sure you'll want to touch on this too.

MR. FICK: Yes.

MR. SINGH: I would say that Afghanistan has been an economy of force effort, and I believe it will continue to be an economy of force effort – that is to say, I don't think we're going to get close to enough troops to fit any neat and tidy doctrinal prescription of what you should do in this type of situation. And if that's the case, then it seems to me that the employment of forces to enable and empower local forces is much more important than the employment of forces to do things directly themselves.

So I would suggest that you could see – rather than having some U.S. combat and coalition combat forces that are going after bad guys, and then a separate set of forces that are focused on training and equipping and advising, and then some sort of detached individual soldiers and small groups that are sent in as mentors, I would more see the entire effort shifting towards partnership model with the integration of U.S. units into Afghan units, and probably some integration of Afghans into U.S. force structure, in a real sort of –

There's many ways it can be done, and we'll see some probably more experiments with it in Iraq. We've done a better job of it in Iraq by resourcing it more thoroughly. But I would see a shift away from us doing things directly on our own to us doing things much more in a partnership, and that being a very different kind of partnership, one that really pushes U.S. units and Afghan units together.

MR. FICK: If I could offer just two observations – one is that wars like this one I think can best be described the way they're described in our official doctrine on counter-insurgency as mosaic wars. So the best use of force in Bamyan province – the best way of employing forces there is not the best way of employing forces in Paktika. So maybe it is the most effective use of force on the border, but it's not necessarily a template for what we should be doing everywhere.

And I'd point to four principles of counter-insurgency to make up sort of a mental latticework when I try to think about these things. One is that the best weapons don't shoot. Without a doubt, the best weapons don't shoot. If you can have a company of soldiers or a company of road-builders in Afghanistan, I think any sane military commander chooses the company of road-builders every time. It doesn't mean you don't need the company of soldiers, but the best weapons in places like this, in times like this, don't shoot.

The second one gets back to what we were discussing, which is the more force you use, often the less effective you are. And rarely – I can think of only a couple of examples where we didn't use force and we should have, and we can all think of many examples of where we did use force and we shouldn't have.

Third is the more you protect your force, the less effective you are. So look at the outpost in Nuristan where the nine Americans were killed in early July – a tragedy, yes. Does it signal that that's a tactical or operational failure? I would argue no, not at all, that that sort of persistent presence of getting out and living day and night in the same area for long periods of time, getting to know people, building relationships – this is essential. So if we're talking about the best use of force, one general principle for the best use of force is, I think, persistent presence, protecting the population. That's our primary objective. It's not to kill bad guys; it's to protect the population.

And then the fourth principle – going down my list here that I just want to hit – is that tactical success in a vacuum guarantees nothing. And clearly, anyone who's come of age in the U.S. and NATO militaries in the three decades since Vietnam has that lesson down, although our spokespeople sometimes seem to forget it.

Q: I'm curious too just about one other aspect of the cross-border operation and I think you hear also sometimes, well, it can't get a lot worse. You've got these ungoverned territories. They're moving into Afghanistan at will. They're making these raids. What's your – could they take it up a few notches? At minimum now, you've got Pakistan that's obviously not doing a whole lot in the FATA, but doing a little something in the FATA. And you hear people say, well, at least it's another front, that it might be little more than a nuisance, but it's something that kind of keeps them occupied; it's something else that they just have to deal with and it's a –

Is there a downside, as you see it, for these cross-border operations, things – Pakistan getting upset? To what extent can there be consequences there? How much of a problem would they be?

MR. FICK: And I was a Marine. It can always get worse. That strain of pessimism, I think, has to be deeply embedded in your psyche when you're thinking about places like this. It can always get worse. It can get a whole lot worse and it probably will get worse before it gets better. And resource competition in Central Asia, the Talibanization of Uzbekistan, the spread of this ideology to the north and to the west, it can get a lot worse in that respect.

The spread of instability eastward in Pakistan outside the tribal areas, and the true destabilization of the Pakistani government, which hasn't really happened yet in a direct way – the nuclear-armed Pakistani government, may I add – the full inclusion of India in

this conflict in response to Pakistani, I would characterize it as paranoia. Some might call it legitimate concern of encirclement.

Can it get worse? It can get a lot worse, which is why this is going to be a delicate diplomatic dance that's going to require the full attention of the U.S., of NATO, and of the entire region, the states immediately bordering Afghanistan and then the major players as well, India and China and Russia. This is a big problem and we can debate. We could probably go round and round over the wording of whether or not this is the central front.

I don't think that really – that's not the right question. The question is, is this important enough to merit a large portion of our resources and attention? And I think we would suggest that it is and there seems to be some consensus, at least, between the two political candidates here in the U.S. that they would agree.

Q: I just wanted to go back to the cross-border raids and the situation – I'm sorry – Sara Hussein from the Saudi Press Agency.

MS. FLOURNOY (?): I'm sorry?

Q: Sara Hussein from the Saudi Press Agency for purposes of the transcript. You're talking about the strikes or the activities in the FATA region as sort of a tactical development, but not part of the holistic strategy that's needed to take into consideration what's going on in Pakistan.

But I wonder if you think that moving forward with these strikes negates the possibility of developing that holistic policy by increasing resentment in Pakistan, by destabilizing the government and by – you talk about people not really knowing the truth of the civilian casualties, but I would suggest perhaps the inflammatory value of those things is not based necessarily on the facts.

So I mean, is it really strategically beneficial as an overall policy, or in light of the need to develop a holistic policy, to go forward with these tactical or these cross-border strikes before you develop that holistic strategy?

MR. SINGH: I think it puts it at risk. I think it puts the ability to get things done with the Pakistani government. Especially at a critical time when the Pakistani government is in such flux, it increases the difficulty of getting whatever progress we would try to get with the Pakistani government to move forward.

I mean, it's going to be harder for any Pakistani leader to cooperate with the United States while this – well, controversy is about U.S. strikes across the border are distracting their public from the value of partnering with the United States. This is just going to make them politically more difficult.

I don't know that that means – I don't know how you judge whether that is worth it or not worth it. At some level, it puts pressure on them, because they look weak and ineffectual, and it gives them an opportunity to stand up to you and then you can maybe get on a better footing; at some level, it makes it hard for them to talk to you because it's

unpopular domestically. So I don't know how you quite weigh that, but I certainly think it complicates relations with Pakistan.

Q: Did you get a sense from talking to anybody in Afghanistan on the U.S. side what their evaluation is in going ahead with this, how they're weighing – evidently, they must, one assumes, have thought it through and decided this was the right way to go.

MR. FICK: We were there before this raid, even before the meeting on the aircraft carrier.

MR. SINGH: On the aircraft carrier strike. That said, I still stick by my feeling that it's – attacks are – it's the highest U.S. death toll since 2001, and you have guys out there all along that border, and they're saying we need to be able to at least hit back at some minimal level. And so I do think it's still – I still say it's a tactical decision, and I'm sure that strategic ramifications were thought through, but we really haven't had a major change.

The Pakistani tolerance of Hellfire missile strikes into Pakistani territory is not new. That's been going on for a long time with criticism, but not a lot of anger. It's clearly been somewhat accepted. So the raids are the only really new development there.

Q: Do you think those are a good idea – I mean, weighing, again, the positives and the negatives?

MR. SINGH: I wish I – if I knew enough about any particular one, it would be easier to say.

MR. FICK (?): The missile strikes?

Q: Yes, yes, based on what we've been able to learn. We know there was a Post article in the past week or so which reveals for the first time the January 2006 Hellfire missile strike which supposedly (killed?) Musharraf and killed four mid-ranking al Qaeda operatives. It turns out, it did not kill any al Qaeda. It killed a lot of civilians and children.

The template here does not look good in terms of strategic weighing of positives and negatives and you yourself said that more civilians are likely to be killed on balance in a missile strike. The intelligence, apparently, is virtually nonexistent. It's appalling. The level of intelligence that's being used for these things, according to the opponents in the U.S. national security apparatus, is so low that it just doesn't make sense.

MR. FICK: I guess I look at it in terms of alternatives, and again, what are we trying to do? If we're going to remain engaged in Afghanistan, whether in a counter-terrorism capacity or in a state-building capacity, we're spinning our wheels. It's entirely futile unless we also engage the population on the other side of that border. No one recognizes the border but us, and sealing the border is not an option. This is not the western border of Anbar province. This is a 1,600-mile mountainous border that would stretch from Washington, D.C. to Albuquerque and look like Colorado the whole way, and much of the way.

So isolating Afghanistan is not an option and as long as the Quetta Shura and other groups to the north are operating with virtual impunity, training and recruiting and funding and equipping, we have to do something. And what does that something look like? And I think our position is that there's a military component of it that is necessary, but – let me underscore this – not sufficient. And right now, that military component seems to be all we've got. So I'm hesitant to criticize the military component. I would just say that it has to be embedded in a much broader strategy.

MR. FLOYD: Linda had something over here.

Q: Yes, I'm Linda Robinson with the SAIS Merrill Center. I want to tease out some more of your thoughts of the analysis of why the strategy there isn't working. You've mentioned a number of elements with the legitimacy issue of the government – the sanctuary problem, obviously big. The COIN principle is not being observed.

But to I guess go another layer and perhaps add things to that list, to what degree do you think the really now widely acknowledged lack of success of this strategy is due to things like the U.S.-NATO differences, the inadequacies of the Afghan National Army, the fact that this is a 17th century country? And I think the overly focused kill-and-capture approach, which I hear from many, many people that there's just been a contrast to Iraq, a big focus on whacking people to the exclusion of other things.

A related question, Pakistan – to what degree do you guys see this as a governance of the FATA issue, the relationship of the FATA and the tribal border areas to the central government of Pakistan? And what's possible, doable or necessary in that regard?

And then finally, the Taliban – I'd like to know how much active support you believe there is for the Taliban on both sides of the border, and is this primarily a Pashtun insurgency or – I was on the radio yesterday with T.X. Hammes, and he thinks it's gone beyond Pashtun. So any of those issues you want to tackle would be great.

MR. SINGH: Do you want to start? You want me to start?

MR. FICK: Go ahead.

MR. SINGH: I'll take the last one first. I think that on the – there's multiple things going on in the border region, and I would categorize them as follows. There's a Pakistani Taliban – think Batula Massoud (ph) and that. There's an Afghan Taliban and there is al Qaeda and international terrorism. These are the three sort of main components of what's going on here and they have varying degrees of popular support, depending on where you are and who you're dealing with.

So there are tribes on both sides, and clans that are very much a part of Taliban's sphere, and they're supportive of the folks that are ascendant right now, say, on the Pakistani side; and there are tribes and clans that are losers in this order that are not very happy with the Quetta Shura or the Miramshah Shura or the Peshawar, shifts that are happening in the Peshawar which are not as severe yet, from what I understand.

Similarly, on the Afghan side, there's – some people use the phrase, unreconcilable. There are those elements that are Taliban, that are close to al Qaeda, that really support a violent change to challenge the new structure in Afghanistan. And then there's – I don't know what percentage it is, but I would say that most Afghans we talked to basically said that the Taliban are sons of Afghanistan. They're as Afghan as anybody else, and that there's a large percentage of them that are still going to be conservative in their views and have some views that we find abhorrent that would be willing to renounce violence, if shown a political path back into the fabric of Afghan society.

So I think you really have to parse it out. To say that the Taliban are somehow distinct from these areas, I think, is false. They are an indigenous movement; they are an organic development. It has lots of reasons behind it that go back to the Soviet invasion, refugees, long-term displacement in Pakistan, et cetera, et cetera, and lack of education and other infrastructure. And there's a lots of roots to it, but these are authentic, local movements that belong to these places, and they're not 100 percent violent.

So, to me, the key idea there in terms of Taliban is what was described to us by several people as the difference between negotiation and reconciliation. Reconciliation is reaching out to individuals who say, we're willing to lay down arms. We want to come back in. We want to be good members of society and get standing again, and there's been a lot of that. There's a lot of reconciliation. There's lots of avenues in as an individual.

What there hasn't been is negotiation, the recognition that there are different factions amongst what we lump together as Taliban, and that there are groups with whom various deals could be struck and there are bargains to be made, and there is, therefore, a disaggregation of the violent and al Qaeda-supporting Taliban from the ones that could become part of society again.

MR. FICK: Can I address your first question on why we're failing at a more granular level? And I'm going to highlight four things. The first one is that I don't believe we're thinking about the concept of central governance in Afghanistan in the right way. We, through the constitution, have imposed a highly centralized form of government on Afghanistan in a place that doesn't have a history of that form of governance, and there are historical and geographical and cultural reasons why that might not work. And maybe we should think of central government more in terms of being a service provider, of goods that have benefits of scale, things like national security and roads and power and a postal service.

And the actual governing should be done not by provincial and district governors whose loyalty stretches back to Kabul, but rather, by local structures whose loyalty stretches down to their people. Those might be tribal; they might religious; they might be social, but they're not Kabul-facing. So I would highlight that, one, the issue of central governance as one reason.

The second is our failure to provide for the basic needs of people and that cuts across so many issues that we hear a lot about. Electricity – we heard a wonderful anecdote from several people in the U.S. government about Secretary Rumsfeld getting a brief in 2002 about the possibility of repairing Kabul's electrical grid and essentially providing 24-hour electricity to the entire city. He said, sure, that sounds great. What's it cost? The



answer was \$50 million, and that was too much, and so we didn't do it. We've probably spent several multiples of that in quick-impact projects and patch jobs, and Kabul still doesn't have electricity.

Roads are another one. We've been building a lot of roads, but just to underscore the absolute centrality of roads in a place like Afghanistan, one – I mean, everybody knows this, so I will just share one anecdote that I think helps illustrate it from a little different angle. We were talking to police mentor teams who made clear that their officers, their Afghan police officers who get dropped out at these remote ANP positions around the country, there's no electronic funds transferred to these places. There are no ATMs. They get paid by a pay master coming out and peeling bills into their hands and the pay master isn't going to drive on a gravel road because it's too easy to bury an anti-tank mine in the road.

And so they need an American escort, but the Americans are spread thin so they don't provide the escort, and when they don't provide the escort, then the pay master doesn't get out to the ANP, and the ANP don't get paid. But come on, we all know that the police always get paid. It's a question of who's paying them. Either they're getting paid by the government or they're extorting it from the people. So I think that illustrates one of the – it's a nexus between basic needs and security.

Alternative livelihoods is another basic need. We have a counter-terrorism strategy; we have a counter-insurgency strategy; we have a counter-narcotics strategy, but they're not dovetailed. They're not integrated. So when we say eradicate a crop and don't provide the means for an immediate alternative, then we're failing to provide for the basic needs of a subsistence farmer and his family. So that's two: basic needs.

Three is training Afghan National Security forces. We pay it lip service as our main effort, but it's not our main effort. The PMTs, the police mentor teams, are staffed at about a third of their authorized strength, and the embedded training teams with the ANA are staffed at about half. At the pure nitty-gritty tactical level – and (Anna?), you probably ran into this in Ghazni – the kandak, the Afghan Army Kandak is a few kilometers away from the U.S. base, and the ETT that's working out there with the Afghan Army –

Q: What is ETT?

MR. FICK: The embedded training team of advisors that's nominally our main effort. We say that the Afghan Security forces are our exit ticket – and so I'm going to use this phrase tongue-in-cheek – but as they stand up, we – (laughs.)

So these guys are two or three kilometers down the road. They don't have NIPRNET. That's military unclassified e-mail. They don't have SIPRNET, military classified e-mail. They don't have a DSN phone line. They have civilian cell phones – that's it. How are they supposed to get the intelligence they need even to conduct operations? How are they supposed to do the coordination they need to do with their adjacent American maneuver battalion to do operations? This isn't our main effort. We say it is, but it's not.

MR. SINGH: The tactical operations center, of course, is only classified and only has DSN and secure voice over an Internet telephone. So therefore, even if you have an Afghan cell phone or an American cell phone in your pocket, you still can't call into the battalion's operation center. You have to get somebody who's outside of there where they're allowed to have their cell phone, because they can't have their cell phone inside of there. So the disconnect between our training main effort and our military counter-insurgency, counter-narcotics, stabilization – whatever you want to call it – effort is profound.

MR. FICK: And then the fourth additional reason I would give as to why we're failing is the lack of – not only the lack of unity of command, which is essential in any military operation, but even unity of effort, and just a few examples of how perhaps we could change this. For a while, we seemed to have adopted a strategy of badgering, cajoling, embarrassing, pressuring our NATO allies to do things that they lacked either the will, the capacity, or the doctrine to do. And I would suggest that that's not a sustainable strategy, and that, instead, we should be grateful for whatever contributions we get, because after all, NATO invoked Article Five in 2001, and we flipped them the bird. We said, get out of here. And that's a problem.

And now, I would suggest that we should be thankful for whatever support we're getting, and we should employ our allies in ways that play to their comparative advantage and that are sustainable. And maybe that means putting them in the north and the west, and not in the south and the east.

We need to abandon the fiction that the U.S. is 126th of the NATO coalition in Afghanistan because it isn't, in anything but name. And maybe – and I defer to people with a broader vision on this than I have – but maybe it means reestablishing a U.S. three-star headquarters in Kabul, and acknowledging once and for all that then we need to solve the chain-of-command problem now.

Q: So putting McKiernan up in charge of both – (inaudible). Can I just ask a real quick follow-up?

MR. SINGH: Sure. To that, and I have something more on that.

Q: Well, I just wonder if you have run the numbers to figure out if you get the extra brigades and you transition those maneuver battalions into the combined – this idea of having them do the – (inaudible) – job as well, does that get you where you need to go at some level? Nothing's going to be the doctrinal ratio, as you point out, but at some level of adequacy, or is it still –

MR. FICK: This isn't a dodge. I think we need to answer the fundamental question of what it is we're trying to do.

MR. SINGH: Right, because even if my view is right –

Q: Okay. Well, then have you answered? Are we essentially just there to pluck out a few bad apples or are we trying to bring this country a few centuries ahead in time?

MR. FICK: I don't think we have a view of – I have a personal view that we have a national security interest in the latter.

MR. SINGH: And a real state-building mission, I think. We both have a personal view that that's the case. I think if I were asked to write a report on – we haven't written our report. No, we're working on it. When we write our report, I believe we're going to have to say this approach assumes this strategic intent. That does not mean that the United States government and the United States people have been prepared for, and have decided on, that strategic intent. So what we will do will be an assumption. We'll be writing to what we decide is worth writing to.

But in terms of running the numbers, we haven't. I think there's going to be some very interesting things to look at. As you look at us drawing down in Iraq, you're going to start finding some places that might be interesting models for the ratios that are realistic in Afghanistan of population, local security forces and coalition forces.

And if we find models – if we start finding some models of transition that work there, as we shift to what people would call an over-watch position with embedded training and embedded U.S. forces with Iraqi forces, that might help us get to a practical ratio and we have to think about the Afghan forces, but we haven't that through yet.

MR. FICK: And just one more thing on that, Linda. Senator Arthur Vandenberg had a great quote in the late '40s in defending the boldness of the Marshall Plan. He said, it does little good to throw a 15-foot rope to a man drowning 20 feet away. And so I would say that if the United States and our allies are going to embark on this mission in Afghanistan, we have to have a serious national conversation about what that entails and the opportunity costs for us are very real.

Q: The price tag.

MR. FICK: The price tag is huge and we pay the price tag in, what, in healthcare? You could – a whole list of domestic programs, other ways we could spend the money, spend the energy of our principles, spend our political will abroad, employ our military forces. There's a real price tag, and if the country collectively decides through its elected leadership that this isn't a price we're willing to pay, then I would say we're better off not even beginning. I am of the view that the U.S. should fight rarely and we should win when we do.

MR. SINGH: Let me just throw one more thing in there on the NATO piece. I would say that with NATO, we've spoken loudly and carried a small stick. And that is to say that we have blustered and shouted about NATO doing more in things that they're really – probably many of the countries aren't capable of, or don't have the political will at home to do, but then we haven't forced some hard decisions within the actual operations to say, you know what? Maybe country X should not be in this particular spot. Maybe somebody else that's a little bit more prepared should be in this particular spot and maybe we should play to our comparative advantages within our alliance.

People complain about a two-tiered alliance. NATO is a three-tiered alliance. You've got us and the Brits and the sort of high-functioning militaries. You've got some of

the traditional European, old Europe militaries, and you've got the new Europe militaries, "old Europe" in quotation marks, meaning the Eastern European, the recent – the newcomers to the alliance.

To pretend that they're all the same is asinine, and to worry about it becoming a two-tiered alliance, when it's already a three-tiered alliance, is really, I think, just – it's a red herring. So we need to play on the comparative advantages of these forces. Germans might be able to do great things up in Mazar-e-Sharif and they might not be able to do anything of use in Paktika or Ghazni or Khost.

Q: And a quick follow-up question on that – what's your sense – looking at the idea of putting McKiernan at the head of both commands and kind of reorganizing? In your travels, did you get a sense from NATO allies of how they would feel about that, or is this something they've been considering for a while now?

MR. SINGH: I got a sense from Americans of how they would feel about that. I don't know if I could say I got a sense from NATO or from ISAP, when we talked to them, about how they would feel about that. It seems to me that there are a lot of – that feelings would be hurt.

MR. FICK: And the Poles are taking over in Ghazni almost exclusively, it seems, for reasons of national prestige. They want to be in charge of a big, important chunk of territory in Afghanistan. They don't have the capacity. They don't have the doctrine. They don't bring the resources to bear.

Q: I think the ANA commander basically said that he considers them Russians. (Laughter.) And that he won't allow them on this base.

MR. SINGH: And – (unintelligible).

Q: And – (unintelligible).

MR. FICK: And they're driving old Soviet vehicles and flying MI-8s. I can't wait to see –

Q: It's going to be awesome.

MR. FICK: – MI-24 gun ships over Afghanistan again. How are people going to respond to that?

MR. SINGH: Psychologically.

MR. FICK: I mean, talk about losing the information operations campaign at every opportunity we're given.

Q: Yes. Just quickly, what do the Americans you spoke with, what was their sense of it?

MR. SINGH: They want one commander. They are tired of having basically a CENTCOM chain, an ISAF chain and I think it was almost universal that we would be much better off if we had one boss –

Q: They're trained in unity of command.

MR. SINGH: – for the various efforts. I don't think Americans would feel anything but – they would not regret losing the multiple masters and having everything go up one. In fact, they'd probably be indifferent to which one it was, if there was just one.

Q: I just wanted – when you mentioned Russians – and this is getting more into that other cliché of hearts and minds – but when we talking about that civilian casualties and there was – I don't know if you saw, there was a “60 Minutes” segment where a village had been struck and there was one boy who survived. And the guy is telling whoever – Scott Pelley or whomever – he said the Americans are worse than the Russians. And if that a widespread or not unique sentiment about how America is operating, that's kind of scary.

I don't know if this was something that you were looking into, but that whole issue of how things have changed against – if you over-watch over the past couple of years about public sentiment towards American and troops in general, it used to be that you were just sort of – everybody was welcome, and now there's been a considerable change of sentiment. Whether or not the information about civilian casualties is true, it becomes a fact. It becomes a reality in the public mind certainly, and works against the Americans.

And then just getting back to the Herat incident, I don't now if this plays any – is at all of interest to you, but where are they getting the intelligence from? In the Herat incident, there was activity on the ground that preceded the calling in of the air strike, right? And there were reports in the press here that there was a family feud, and now, this is also not a unique situation. So, how much do the Americans know about the intelligence they're getting on the ground? They'll be saying that, oh, the Taliban want to make it look like we're killing civilians on purpose, but what if the Taliban have nothing to do with that? It's a little bit out there, but not – (inaudible).

MR. FICK: I'd like to just address your first comment, and I have known Scott and his old producer, Sean (sp) for a long time, and I understand why they used that quote. It's a great quote, but it's no more true than me sitting here and saying two plus two is five.

Q: Okay.

MR. FICK: I think it's that absurd to say that the American presence is worse than the Soviet presence.

Q: No, but I mean – I said, not that it's true, but it's a view, that it's a view.

MR. FICK: I don't even think it's a widespread view. When the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, there was a massive displacement of refugees to Pakistan and Iran. With the U.S. in Afghanistan, one of the challenges we're dealing with is what to do with them coming back.

Q: No, I mean, I'm not disputing the facts, but is there a frustration that makes people say things that are totally inaccurate?

MR. SINGH: I'm sure that wasn't inaccurate to that man on that day.

Q: Right.

MR. FICK: Right.

MR. SINGH: You're going to feel that. I was surprised by the degree of continuing support for the international military presence, really surprised. We have not earned through the good will at this point. Afghans are not closed people that resent foreign presence. These are stereotypes of Afghans that I think are very unfair.

Q: Can you just – (inaudible) – what sort of – what is that based on?

MR. SINGH: That is based on talking to –

MR. FICK: We have some polling data that I'm happy to send you. We didn't do it. It's a Charney poll; it's pretty good.

MR. SINGH: The Charney poll is good, but let me just finish my thought there. I would say that what's happened is you've gone from – you've got people who've slipped from hope to disappointment, and they're going to slip towards frustration, and some are slipping towards anger, but we're still kind of at the hope slipping to disappointment range of the spectrum.

I think we're far outside of the specific times when things go very wrong for people and the increasing anger at the seeming – at the increase in civilian casualties, which is connected to this increase in using air power throughout the country. I think we are eroding that support, but to say that it's gone beyond that, if that's the trajectory, we haven't yet gotten to widespread anger, but we're certainly getting into disappointment and frustration.

MR. FICK: And Gareth, we're not academics, so we have the luxury of reasoning from anecdote, which is really great.

MR. SINGH: Yes – (inaudible) – from people I talked to.

MR. FICK: So our anecdotal conversations around the country led us to conclude that people would say to us not why won't the Americans leave, but why won't the Americans do X, Y and Z? So it's a frustration not with our presence. It's a frustration with our incompetence, and that is different.

Q: On that point, you know that General Barno has had that concept of a bag of capital that he had to spend very carefully in terms of the tolerance of –

MR. SINGH: Yes, we're spending a lot of it.

Q: – U.S. foreign forces in Afghanistan. In the 2006 – or was it 2007? Sorry. His Military Review article said frankly, that it was his view that that capital had been spent rather rapidly; in other words, he took a rather more pessimistic view than you are. And I'm wondering what your response to that would be.

MR. FLOYD: Sure, quick. We have time for one more question from Linda, or three or four more questions from the audience. (Laughter.) I'm sorry – I've been waiting for that. I've sat here waiting for half an hour to say that because I came up with it. We're almost out of time here, but go ahead and answer that question. We have time for one more.

MR. FICK: I think that with all of us having followed Afghanistan now for seven years and Iraq for five, you can always frame the window of opportunity as stretching three or six or 12 months from when you're making the statement, and we seem to keep doing that.

We had a long meeting with General Barno just before we left, and I obviously can't speak for him, but I would suggest that maybe his views are a bit different now than they were when he wrote the piece. He seems to think – he's now spearheading an effort over at NDU at the NESAC Center that's focused on the Afghan election in 2009. And he, I believe, and his team there, see this as a window. And on the other side of the election, if things go poorly, maybe the window shuts, but he and we, I believe, see an opportunity with again, this confluence of events from this year into 2009 that offer maybe a few more pennies at the bottom of the bag of capital.

Q: But when he talked to you, did he address the bag of capital and where he felt – how much was left?

MR. FICK: I read his piece in Military Review and he's embarked on this major effort at NDU to make sure that the election goes the way it needs to go, which suggests to me that, in his mind, all is not lost, but getting this election right is really –

MR. SINGH: I think it's hard to build that capital back up when it's depleted, but I don't think it's a one-way thing. I think you can burn capital and you can build capital. People are amazingly resilient and amazingly tolerant, but I think that the frustration levels are just – are getting higher and higher, and that's going to start driving some people to decide that it's not worth it to keep supporting our endeavor, and that's a risk.

One, a former senior Taliban person we met with said that eventually, if you're not careful and if you're not wise, and you don't get a little more smart about how you're doing things, the lion of the people will turn on you. And I think if the lion of the people turns on us, then I do think we lose.

MR. FICK: As soon as the kids are running away from the Humvee instead of running towards the Humvee, then we're going the way of the Soviets. In our view, that hasn't yet happened.

Q: I had one thing about the – (unintelligible) – that we have from the TV and the radio. We have reporters and we really – they talk to just one or two persons for interviews,

so we have a chat with them beside the official interview. And they all support your view that the people are a little bit disappointed in NATO and U.S. troops, that why they support the incapable government of Karzai, which is full of warlords and they support the drug lords.

And you mentioned also the question of legitimacy of the government, that people – and this question has been for a long time. So they do question that – they feel like the NATO forces and Americans are supporting a government that doesn't do anything for them. And also, it's a personal opinion of those people that in Afghanistan government, the NATO and U.S. government are targeting insurgency and al Qaeda.

But there are elements in the government from previous governments – let's say, a communist governments; let's say some people who have links with Iranians. They do mislead on purpose the U.S. government efforts, the NATO efforts, and they do support the drug lords and other people.

So in the internal problems of the government to slow down the efforts to do something for the people, that is also a great factor. I don't know how much you can agree with that, or you find it in your – this is what we get from the people we spoke, especially the event in Herat, the personal enmity and the general who agreed to call the attack – NATO attack on the village. If you check his background, according to those people, he was a very close, or a very standard communist and KGB operator.

And these are the things that are not hidden from the people of Afghanistan, so they might be doing something, especially Russia and Iran. They always want something to happen in Afghanistan, and this where U.S. forces, Karzai's government and other people there, but still, the Afghans are hopeful for that. I hope something comes out of this maybe in the next election.

MR. FICK: We encountered often – the Afghan people know the intimate personal histories of most of the people in government, things that we don't know, and the shifting alliances, and the various offenses that have been committed over the last three or four decades, they know. And I can only imagine how enormously angering it is when they see us naively supporting people whose backgrounds they know. These backgrounds are a matter of public record.

Q: It's the same as in Iraq.

MR. FICK: The same as in Iraq.

MR. SINGH: A great quote was – I got – just because somebody is cooperative with you does not mean that they're a good whatever. Just because the governor cooperates with you and helps you out doesn't mean he's a good guy. But it's awfully hard to see that when you've got a new American moving around in a particular area.

MR. FLOYD: Thank you so much for coming, everyone.

Q: Thank you.



MR. SINGH: Thank you.

MR. FICK: Sure. All right. Thanks. Thanks a lot.

(END)