

**CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS**

**ASSESSING THE AFGHAN ELECTIONS**

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CAROLINE WADHAMS: On behalf of the Center for American Progress, I want to thank you for coming today for our panel discussion on assessing the Afghan elections. My name is Caroline Wadhams. I'm a senior national security policy analyst here at the center, and I cover Afghanistan and Pakistan. We still don't know the results of the Afghan presidential and provincial council elections, which took place on August 20<sup>th</sup>, and we may not know for some time if the Afghan election authorities do not meet their September 17<sup>th</sup> deadline.

The counting is taking place amidst allegations of fraud and intimidation, and [the](#) Afghanistan Independent Election Complaints Commission has recently reported that they have almost 700 Category A allegations out of more than 2,000 postelection complaints. These are allegations that actually have the potential to change the results of the elections.

However, now, President Hamid Karzai appears to be in the lead with almost 46 percent of the vote, with challenger Abdullah Abdullah receiving approximately 33 percent, with about half the votes tallied right now. Unless Karzai receives more than 50 percent of the votes, a runoff may occur to determine the next president.

In the midst of these serious questions over the legitimacy of the elections, and whether the United States will have an effective Afghan partner, we're seeing leaks in the media about Gen. Stanley McChrystal's strategic assessment, which reports indicate, is arguing for increased engagement and, most likely, laying the groundwork for a troop increase request. The assessment does not call for those troop increases but people believe it's laying the groundwork for that.

We are privileged to have Eric Bjornlund, Jackie Northam and Brian Katulis here with us today to assist us in understanding what happened on election day, what's happening now in the postelection period and what these elections mean for broader U.S. national security, for broader U.S. policy towards Afghanistan.

They were all in Afghanistan during the elections: Jackie, as a reporter for NPR, and Brian and Eric as election observers. I'm going to first briefly introduce the panelists, and then turn it over to them to give remarks. We will then open it up to a question-and-answer period, and end promptly at 10:30.

Jackie Northam is NPR's national security correspondent covering foreign affairs, defense and intelligence policies, terrorism, and other national security issues. Jackie has worked for NPR since 2000 and has reported from Afghanistan, Pakistan, Beirut and Iraq for NPR. She's also NPR's lead reporter on the U.S. prison camp at Guantanamo Bay. And she was a reporter for many years before working for NPR.

Eric Bjornlund is the cofounder and principal for Democracy International, which fielded an election observation delegation to the Afghan elections. Eric has designed and directed democracy and governance programs over the last two decades in 30 countries in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union and the Middle East. He has extensive experience in

international and domestic election monitoring and he is the author of “Beyond Free and Fair: Monitoring Elections and Building Democracy,” which can be found in the back of the room.

Brian Katulis, our very own senior fellow at the Center for American Progress, focuses on U.S. national security policy in the Middle East and South Asia. Brian participated in the elections observations delegation organized by Democracy International. Brian has served as a consultant to numerous U.S. government agencies, private corporations and NGOs on projects in more than two dozen countries. He is the co-author of “The Prosperity Agenda,” a book about U.S. national security.

I am going to start with Jackie to share your observations on the elections and what you believe these elections mean for broader U.S. policy. Thank you.

JACKIE NORTHAM: Thanks very much, Caroline. Yes, I went into Afghanistan for these elections. I was called in – I had been in Afghanistan in June and July – pre-election coverage, that type of thing. And at the time, you know, we talked to a lot of people in Kabul and the north of the country. I only got to the south to do Helmand, where we didn’t talk to potential voters and that type of thing. But there was an excitement, certainly, about the elections. And people seemed really politically astute. There was a “looking forward” type thing.

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Anyway, I got called back in to cover the elections because my colleague, Soraya Sarhaddi Nelson, who is our bureau chief and correspondent there, wanted to go to Kandahar. She speaks Farsi and she’s been to Kandahar many, many times, and she just felt that we needed coverage from that area. So I came in to cover anchor out of Kabul.

And we were expecting there to be a low turnout in Kandahar, a better turnout in Kabul – just because, again, there was this excitement. It didn’t turn out that way at all. And we should have had an inkling right at the beginning, I guess, because in the days leading up to the elections, as we all know, there was a series of bombings – outside NATO headquarters was the day that I arrived; there were some rocket attacks after that. On the road to Bagram there was another suicide attack there.

But on the day of the election, there was huge security in Kabul. I mean, you couldn’t go 50 meters without having to go through another roadcheck and that type of thing. There was a lot of security at the polling sites, as well. In fact, there was private security but they wouldn’t tell us who they were working for or who paid them.

Anyway, we set off very early in the morning. We got there long before the polls opened. And during the day, we went to many, many polls throughout the city; kept going back, constantly going back to these polls.

And at the beginning of the day when they opened, you had some hope. I mean, all the election people were doing what they were supposed to do with the ballot boxes. They were sealing them, registering them; everybody had their inkpots out ready to go and pens poised and that type of thing.

And for the most part, there were probably two or three dozen voters that had shown up. That was to be expected because everybody thought, they're going to gauge what the security situation is like; they're going to wait just to see if there are going to be any attacks or any problems with Taliban or what have you. And so it was expected to be a low turnout in the morning, and the hope and the expectation was that it will have increased during the day.

That actually wasn't the case. We went back – I had to do a Q&A to go on air here at noon, Kabul time, and so we went back to a polling place to do it there. This was a polling place that was a high school, and it was a place that we went back several times during the day. There were eight rooms for men to vote and a couple for women. And at high noon, when we were doing my two-way with my host here in Washington, there wasn't one voter there. There were election workers but there was not one voter in that place, and we're thinking, all right, maybe lunch, maybe high noon, the heat, everything else like this – but this is not a good sign.

We duly reported that and went back later on during the day a couple times, and the most we saw was about six people, eight people, and that was it. Now, again, this was Kabul. This should have been – you know, there was security there; it's a huge urban area. There should have been a better turnout, but there simply wasn't.

So here we are, all the journalists a couple days later and all the analysts thinking, what went wrong? Why wasn't there a better turnout? It could have been apathy, it could have been fear, but we don't know. We don't know why people did not turn out. Maybe there was just this resignation that they knew who was going to win no matter what happens.

Now, one of the problems was that the Obama administration came out very quickly and called this a success, or something of a success, simply because there wasn't a huge wave of violence that swept through the country; that some people did come out and vote. But they're starting to backtrack from that now. And even the president came out – unfortunately, immediately afterwards – and said it was a success. But there is a lot of backpedaling on that right now because we're seeing obviously that we're getting indications, allegations, of fraud and intimidation, and that that's what kept people away.

Basically, the elections happened about the same time as Gen. McChrystal's 60-plus day assessment is due, as well – whether by circumstance or coincidence, we don't know. But it'll be interesting to see what effect this has on the new strategy for the administration; what they're going to do with Afghanistan because the elections were meant to be the centerpiece. That's certainly a major component of the strategy.

In other words, give the people security; they'll come out and vote; you get a legitimate government in place; everything starts. You can start working on anticorruption programs, counternarcotics programs, everything else like that. But that's not what we're seeing here right now. So the problem is, where does this place the U.S.?

Now, by no means is this election over. We don't know how these allegations of fraud are going to be investigated; what the upshot of that is going to be. It's a little bit too early for the administration to decide.

But the problem is, if the new government in Afghanistan is deemed as tainted or somehow not legitimate, what does the Obama administration do about linking itself to that government if they want to move ahead? In other words, there's a military component here, but there's also a political component in Afghanistan. And then that begs the question, how much more of a commitment does the U.S. want to make?

And one last thought here is that in the pre-election stuff that we did in June, July and certainly just in the days leading up to the election, we talked to a lot of representatives and diplomats from the international community. And they made it very clear that this is a finite commitment that they have to this place, and they've made that clear to Karzai, himself.

Their patience was stretched very, very thin when Karzai decided to make Marshal Fahim his vice presidential candidate, and then bring Gen. Dostum back in just before the election. This goes against the grain of everything that the international community is trying to do there. And the problem is, if the Karzai government does get back into power again, where does this leave the international community? But they've made it very clear to Karzai, and to Abdullah to a certain extent, that there is a limit to how much they're willing to invest in this country. So I'm going to stop there.

ERIC BJORNLUND: The Democracy International group started its observation process in July, and I'm joined by a number of members of that group here this morning. I wanted to particularly mention my colleagues Glenn Cowan and Jim Moody, who are the leadership of the delegation. And Hardin Lang is here to help answer questions, and a number of others of our colleagues.

I wanted to say a couple words about election observation in Afghanistan, and then I can say something about the elections themselves. These are the most challenging elections to observe that we've encountered, after a couple of decades of trying to develop a serious methodology about finding out what happens in elections in controversial circumstances – particularly the security environment made it very difficult for international observers.

And there were several international observer groups, including several from the United States – more than you would typically find in international elections, at least from the United States. And there were a couple of different approaches that we collectively took.

I think the other groups tended to combine domestic and international observers. Domestic election observation is something that we've encouraged all over the world, and found to be often a constructive part of the process. But what was different in Afghanistan was that several of the international groups incorporated domestic monitors. There was, in fact, a significant domestic election monitoring group that had received a lot of international advice and assistance and funding, and sent some significant number of observers around the country for

election day. But the international groups also recruited some of their own domestic observers as a way of expanding their reach.

We chose not to do that, and we feel that there are some limitations on domestic observers in a context like Afghanistan, particularly the fact that they can be intimidated, and there are some questions about their ability to operate. And we chose to go for a more traditional international delegation, which made us a particularly large group of international people. We were 62 people as actual observers, 47 of whom were Americans. And we went to 13 provinces, including many in the south, which were particularly difficult to go to, as you might expect.

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We also, for the first time, had a small number of observers join PRTs as where they were based and where they operated out of. So that was a new way of approaching a situation that was more daunting than what we've encountered before. But even given the security constraints, our reach was pretty typical for international observers. The criticism of international observers – that they can't be everywhere and don't see everything – is inherent in the process. International observers are always going to be something that builds on other sources of information, including domestic monitors.

In some ways, we're like journalists, only there are more of us, and we bring a lot of experience in the country and a lot of experience in other countries. But we directly observed in 258 polling stations, and we had as large a group as we would typically have for most international elections. I think where we were more constrained was in our ability to get out of provincial capitals into rural areas. And we had to rely on indirect means of collecting information for that.

The elections themselves: The security environment, as you all know, was very daunting, and a lot of people were intimidated into not participating, and polling stations didn't open everywhere. But there was a lot of worry about violence on the eve of the election, and I think some of the initial – now what seemed like overly positive – commentary was out of a sense of relief that violence didn't unfold on election day the way that it had been feared. But there's no question that the climate intimidated a lot of people from going to the polls. And as Jackie said, turnout – anecdotally – turnout seemed to be low in many places – not everywhere. We saw lots of voters in lots of places.

The actual percentage of turnout is not only unclear now; it'll probably always be unclear because the number of voters is uncertain. There is no real comprehensive voter list in Afghanistan. There's a certain number of voters that were on a list from 2005, and a number of voters that have been added, but there has been difficulty in integrating those lists and having a comprehensive list. And that is, I think, a problem that we hope to learn more about and report on, and we hope can be addressed in future elections.

But it means that, in terms of getting numbers about turnout, the most useful information is going to be what the total number of voters was, rather than percentages, because the denominator in percentages is always going to be unclear. And it looks like the total number of voters will be down substantially from the presidential elections of 2004. I think we're now

projecting it'll be under 6 million voters, which is at least a million-and-a-half fewer voters than 2004.

There were problems reported about election administration on the day. And most of those were pretty typical. They were the kinds of complaints you will see in elections all over the world; they were complaints about the quality of the indelible ink, which was meant as a check on duplicate voting. There were complaints about the poor quality of the punches that were supposed to put holes into voter cards.

Those kinds of things are very common in elections around the world. They remind you of long lines in places in U.S. polling places, where some neighborhoods have disproportionately longer lines or poorer equipment. And they certainly, in many other countries, you'll see those kinds of things. So I wouldn't say those kinds of problems were trivial, but they were certainly not something that we should all be thinking about in terms of what kind of credibility we give the election process.

As you know, there is an electoral complaints commission that's chaired by a Canadian expert that has responsibility for looking into complaints about the election. And they have said that they've received more than 600 serious allegations of fraud that they are looking into, and those are allegations that are serious enough that, presumably, they might invalidate the polling stations or the boxes from those places.

I think that the most important message I would suggest for this morning is that we still don't know how much credibility to give to the Afghan election process. The process is not yet played out. As an organization, we have not even yet officially released a preliminary statement. We've made several comments to the press about how we see the process so far, but we're still waiting for the initial part of the process to be completed; for the results to be released before we even make a preliminary assessment of the process. And we still think that we should give the independent election commission and the electoral complaints commission an opportunity to do their job.

As you've heard, reports that some of these allegations of fraud are very serious, but the ECC will be looking into them, and we'll see how they deal with it. The vote count is now being released in stages. There was some initial delay in releasing partial results, which heightened tensions a bit, but it's now being addressed as results are being released regularly, which I think helps increase the transparency of the process.

Afghanistan also doesn't have political parties because of choices made in the past, in part, because the choice is about the voting system for the parliamentary elections to have single non-transferable vote system, there aren't really parties. And that has a lot of implications but for the election, it had the implication that there was no, sort of, organized way for people to collect information about the results and about the complaints. And I think that's partly – is among the reasons why we don't have as much information as we'd like from Afghan sources about what happened in the process.

But so far, Caroline, to answer your questions, I think many other elections in the world that have had international observation have seemed worse. And you know, we're still hopeful that this process might unfold well enough that the international community and the Afghan public can accord it some credibility.

MS. WADHAMS: Brian, let's turn it over to you to give us your observations. And also, if you could speak about what these elections might mean for U.S. foreign policy towards Afghanistan.

BRIAN KATULIS: Great. Can you hear me in the back there? I was passed a note here that we engineered these technical difficulties just to show you how difficult it is to get anything done in a country like Afghanistan. So it really is – and it was my first trip – I'd been to the region quite a lot and Pakistan – and lived in the Middle East for 5 years. But I was struck by the infrastructure challenges there. And before I just make a couple of remarks, I want to thank Jackie for joining us this morning and I'll note if there are other NPR nerds like I am in the audience – safe bet here, at the Center for American Progress, there might be.

It was really a pleasure to meet her in person in Kabul and talk with her about the elections. And then Eric and Glen, thank you for inviting me and the rest of the delegation to participate in these elections. Eric and Glen have built, I think, a phenomenal organization that is bringing some real added value to the field of democracy promotion and bringing new talents. And I think it's been an honor to be with them.

I just wanted to make three points, mostly about the next stage because we can talk about the election process and what we saw as observers. But three overall points as we're moving into what I think is a phase for U.S. policy in Afghanistan and a key debate point. First, number one, I think it's not too early to start examining ways and start thinking about how to advance power-sharing in Afghanistan after these elections whether there's a second round or not. And part of my analysis here is colored by my focus over the last couple of years on Iraq and as I was in Afghanistan, I was thinking back quite a lot to the year of 2005 in Iraq and some similarities. And you have to be careful, you know, because they're completely different countries and making the comparisons is like comparing apples and bicycles – it's not even apples and oranges.

But there are some cautionary tales, I think, about electoral processes, especially those that were disputed or opposed violently by certain actors. And I think, you know, most democracy-promotion experts know this but early transition elections like this one are fraught with great potential for instability and for hardening internal political divisions as opposed to facilitating that. And that – you know, I agree with Eric, we have to wait and see what happens with these results. It's still too early to tell, but you could anticipate a post-election environment where you have different candidates jockeying for power and that if these elections have done anything, they may clarify the balance of power. But it hasn't yet facilitated the power-sharing agreement among those who participated.

I made a not-so-bold prediction a few days before the election of the potential for post-election violence and it's not so bold because there were at least three to four hundred attacks on

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election day, as Eric noted. It was – and that’s ISAF data, I think. It was a combat zone for some voters. They had – they faced the choice of whether or not to show up at the polls in a combat zone. And some of our observers experienced that quite directly. But we could predict more violence.

I think it’s been somewhat quiet the last week or so, relative to what we’ve seen this summer. But we heard from some of the leading candidates in the pre-election period and even in the post-election period, hence that they would not accept the legitimacy of the results. And hence that they might even take their supporters to the streets. So that’s one type of violence in power-sharing I think we need to worry about.

The second, I think, is the one that’s staring in front of our face – the intimidation from the Taliban. And this, I think, raises a point to the – of challenge for the next leadership in Afghanistan, whoever emerges, whether Karzai’s reelected or whether there’s an alternative or some sort of coalition, that Afghanistan’s leader must come to grips with the insurgency and the forces that drive it.

And part of that is a military challenge, I think, for Afghan leaders and it’s a decision for U.S. and coalition commanders, ISAF commanders. But they need to find a way either to co-opt, share power or defeat militarily some of the insurgent forces. And I think that’s the challenge here. And the parallel, going back to Iraq – I really worry that to a certain extent, yes, we had an election process like we did in December of 2005 in Iraq. It took six months for there to be a governing coalition formed.

Those were different elections; they were parliamentary elections. These are presidential elections. But what happens over the next couple of months, whether or not there is a runoff is terribly important and whether it can facilitate power-sharing, I think, is crucial. So that’s the first point, is that you know, we hope that these elections are deemed legitimate, but the hard work actually begins after this.

Second, and this is more along the lines of advice or thoughts to the Obama administration as it thinks through its next steps and those – I see friends from Capitol Hill and others that – it’s extremely important, I think at this phase, for U.S. leaders to place greater responsibility on the Afghan leaders that emerge from this process on a couple of key issues: fighting corruption, narco-trafficking and governance, because all of these things, sadly – and I’ve only begun to engage in the Afghan debate.

But in some of the discussions we’ve had here with Gen. Fields from the SIGAR office. A lot of the investments that were made over the last four or five years, we have yet to see real, tangible gains from that. And some of that, I think, could be placed on the shoulders – some of the blame on the Afghan leaders. And I think it’s essential, no matter what is done in terms of policy, what decisions are made about troop leaders, that the Obama administration needs to make clear that it has certain expectations of serious commitments, from whoever emerges as the leaders of Afghanistan, at various levels.

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And we've talked about this in previous forums that we've organized this summer – the fact that Transparency International ranks Afghanistan as the fifth most corrupt country today, that President Karzai, in the pre-election period pardoned five senior drug traffickers and he has known ties to some of these drug-trafficking elements. We need to make sure that there's a serious commitment on their part.

And I know, for those of you who are working on the Hill, you might think benchmarks, like we did in Iraq. I would dissuade you from just simplistic 17, you know, benchmarks, that are never really used in policy and never really taken seriously. But I think there needs to be a bargain here. For us to build a solid foundation for a new policy in Afghanistan, we do need to have a commitment from Afghan leaders and I don't think we've seen that strong commitment just yet and I think there needs – that needs to be clear.

I mean, I think if there were a candidate – we've been studiously neutral as a country in not having a preference. But I think if you look at what people campaigned on, if there was a U.S. candidate, if it would've been Ashraf Ghani. Ashraf Ghani was trying to promote a lot of things that I think President Obama talks about when he talks about his national security strategy, development, governance and a whole host of things.

Sadly, it looks like Ghani will only get about 3 or 4 percent of the vote. He was not popular and I don't know that he'll emerge in this. But this commitment to – if there's a new commitment to more forces and more resources, it's got to require, I think, more responsibility on the part of the Afghan leaders.

Otherwise, this whole notion of full-blown nation-building, counterinsurgency that I think is dominating our debate right now will be built on a weak foundation. And we need serious commitments at various levels, not just the central government, but the provincial elections and we're going to talk mostly about the presidential elections but there were provincial elections too, which had largely been ignored because these bodies are, I think, advisory bodies.

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That begs the question of if our assumptions are governance is terribly important in Afghanistan and governance was likely to be decentralized in Afghanistan, what can be done to help Afghan leaders make that level of governance more effective? How do we move beyond just the level of sloganeering about governance and decentralization and actually help Afghan leaders implement it in a serious way? Doesn't seem like we focused that much in this election on those other sets of elections – the 3,000 people who ran for 420 seats and largely because I think their advisory councils.

And just one last point on policy – and again, I'm trying to take the discussion a little bit beyond the elections, but I hope we can come back to some of the modalities of the elections is – there's a – I have a serious concern about the lack of clear goals and objectives in Afghanistan. And I think this was best exhibited at a forum we organized last month where – where Ambassador Holbrooke was asked by my boss, John Podesta – what's the goal and what do you measure it? He essentially said, using the pornography quote, "We'll know it when we see it." That's not sufficient enough, I think, when you think about engaging more deeply in a war and sending more resources into a combat zone.

And having gone through, in some cases, engaged in and then suffered from the Iraq debates we've had in Washington for the last three or four years, I'm really worried that we're tending towards a more rhetorical and political debate about some serious national security questions. When I read op-eds in the pages of our major newspapers that tell us how to lose in Afghanistan or just use basic catchphrases of victory and certain defeat or if the debate is necessary war versus war of choice.

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Or I've even heard some criticisms of – the old phrase “cut-and-run” re-emerge in our dialogue. And I would encourage us to move beyond, I think, beyond that very superficial debate and think through. It's not whether we stay there endlessly or leave tomorrow, much in the same way we try to present, I think, the Iraq option choice of we've got many different levers and many different tools of power.

And I'm worried that our debate has not moved beyond that. When you see just the statement from Gen. McChrystal yesterday: “The situation in Afghanistan is serious but success is still possible.” We need – I feel like I have a sense of Groundhog Day when I read that sort of statement because I think that legitimately – and we have research assistants looking at this – we've been hearing statements like that from policy reviews for the last two years about Afghanistan and we're to blame – think tanks, people in the media, people in Congress.

We've not, I think, had a serious debate on Afghanistan and that moment is coming in the next couple of weeks to really move beyond just the optics and you know the, what I think is kind of just football, pep-rally language of you either choose to win or lose. No, these are serious issues. We've got serious interests at stake and I think we're going to have resources there for a while.

But the most important thing we need to ask is how do we effectively move beyond this sort of rhetorical debate. I mean, President Obama, last January, said he wanted to end the mindset that got us into the Iraq war, not only end the Iraq war. And if you look at that quote – I actually looked at it – he was talking about mission creep. He used the term “mission creep.” He was talking about fuzzy and unclear objectives.

And actually, President Obama has an opportunity, as he receives McChrystal's review and I think he's going to take it – I suspect he will – to have a broad and serious debate that says these are the resources we actually have. This is how we can actually implement a civilian surge. These are how many USAID or State Department employees that could actually effectively be deployed to Afghanistan and to help the situation there and here's the outcome.

And that's the most important thing is the lack of clarity, I think, in all of these policy reviews of where might we be at the 2012 or 2015 because it will take a long time. That lack of clarity, I think, clouds our judgment, and not only our judgment, but clouds the debate that we have on Afghanistan and I think it's terribly important for us – and this is why I think this discussion is part of a series that we'll be having this fall – to try to bring a bunch of diverse voices to talk about not only the political dynamics, political transition in Iraq – in Afghanistan – but also the economic difficulties and diplomatic difficulties. So those are the three points.

Moving forward, I think we're really at a crucial phase and we all have a responsibility to actually sharpen this debate much more than it has been.

MS. WADHAMS: Thank you, Brian. I'm now going to ask a couple of questions myself and then I'm going to turn it over to the audience. I wanted just to start off with a question going back to the elections themselves and I think maybe Eric or Jackie, if you could take this. How – at this point, how likely do you believe it is that we're going to see a runoff, that we're going to see a transparent resolution of the complaints, these over 600 complaints that have been – have been put forward? When are we going to know or ultimately determine if these elections are legitimate or not? Let's start.

MR. BJORNLUND: As most of you probably you know, there is a provision for a runoff if neither candidate – if no candidate gets a majority of the vote in the first round. Results that have been released so far are only partial results and they aren't necessarily representative of how the results will turn out. So we actually still don't know if there'll be a runoff and people who know Afghanistan pretty well, looking at those numbers carefully, say that it will be very close, that it's possible that President Karzai will be reelected without a runoff and it's also possible that there will be a runoff, which, of course, increases the burden on looking at those disputed polling places and problematic areas. When we'll know that is unclear. There are more results that are scheduled to be released in a day or so and they originally had targeted September 17<sup>th</sup> for certifying the election results.

There's a suggestion that that date may not be met if it takes longer to investigate complaints. Grant Kippen, head of the Electoral Complaints Commission, has said publicly that the priority is having effective investigations of the allegations of fraud as opposed to dates. But so that suggests that it still could be a week or more before we have a real indication and longer than that, then we'll know for sure as whether there'll be a runoff or not. And whether – you know, how we all end up looking at this process is still to be determined, or at least it should – we should be holding out to see how the – how effective the procedures that exist are at addressing these complaints. We – it may be some weeks before we still really know that.

MS. NORTHAM: Let me add to that. You were talking about the credibility of the elections, too. I mean, because there have been so many complaints because there was this sort of, votes were cast under this, you know, this pall of intimidation or violence of what-have-you and people – and low turnout and that – that even if, for some reason, if the ECC certified this and the IEC certified this as a good election, a legitimate election, I fear that there is a stain on this election anyway, that you know, perception is half the battle here and I think that's actually been lost by the Afghan people. I mean, there was obviously a sense of apathy that prevented people from turning out too but also by the international community because there are just so many complaints. And I think it's going to be a – (inaudible).

MS. WADHAMS: Thank you. A bigger strategic question to you, Brian. Back in 2005, you coauthored a report called "Strategic Redeployment" that became the blueprint used by progressives for a – calling for a strategic redeployment for Iraq. Part of the rationale you used at that time for withdrawing troops from Iraq was moving some of those troops to Afghanistan. How do you feel now about potentially adding even more troops to Afghanistan, especially given

some of our – some of your concerns about the legitimacy of this – the new government that may be in place?

MR. KATULIS: Great question. (Chuckles.) When we wrote that report in 2005, we had, I think, about 20 to 30,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan and now we're up to about 68,000 and looking at the prospect of another 20 to 40, depending on what we get in the next couple of weeks.

And I really – I mean, to answer the question, I come back to some of the points that I've made and importantly, do we have a partner in Afghanistan to work with because I think at a certain stage, yes, we can pour more troops into Afghanistan. And given that we've got the finest military the world has ever seen, it will have some sort of impact and will likely contribute to a decrease in violence.

The question that I have is whether it's sustainable and whether it actually advances U.S. national security interests as defined as trying to defeat the networks like al-Qaida. You know, and the buzzwords you should watch for when I was talking about the rhetorical debate in the next few weeks and you'll see this in the front pages of the New York Times or the Washington Post are "victory" or "certain defeat" or things like this.

The nature of these wars – particularly asymmetrical warfare, – isn't like the type of war we fought in World War II and it's the sort of language that I think infected our Iraq debate. And I think at the end of the day, I mean, part of it is into garnering more public support from more resources, which may be necessary. But the worry that I have is that it leads to this fiction like we saw in Iraq and still do that everything will be okay or that everything will be stable. We spent what? Ten to 12 billion dollars a month in Iraq. We still have 130,000 troops there.

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And according to Jackie's colleague, Deb Amos, was talking to Baghdad, it's still a horrific situation for ordinary Iraqis. Has it made it substantially better for U.S. national security interest? Did we defeat some of those terror networks? I think it had an impact, but it wasn't necessarily the increase of troops; it was the fact that we co-opted some of the insurgents. We actually paid some of them off, to a large extent; people that were shooting at us in 2003, 2004 came on our payroll.

And that's the sort of thing, I mean, again, I dissuade you from making too many direct comparisons between Iraq and Afghanistan. But the reality is, I think no matter how many troops we send in there, we're never going to get to the force level required for the textbook counterinsurgency method.

And if – you know, I go back to my central point – if we don't have a serious commitment from Afghan partners and if strategic ambiguity on their part – working with us and taking U.S. taxpayer money while at the same time working with drug warlords or others – then I don't see the point to a large extent. So, at this stage, I think it would be advisable and probably wise to at least pause and have a real debate and assessment. One could make a cogent case for more troops, but I haven't heard it just yet.

MS. WADHAMS: Thank you. I'm going to now turn it over to you all for your questions.

MS. NORTHAM: The other thing I just wanted to point out, though, is after 8 years into this, the U.S. runs a risk of looking less like a liberation force and more of an occupation force. And I think that can be a real problem for the U.S. if it's not careful how many people they put in there and where they put them and what they're trying to do. And obviously, it brings into all of this, this question about the civilian forces that we need to get in there; still, Iraq is not easy.

MS. WADHAMS: Thank you. Please state your name and affiliation when I call on you. Jim Moody?

Q: Thank you very much. It was an honor to be part of this team. We're sort of caught on the horns of a dilemma here, it seems to me. I'm going back to Brian's comments. On the one hand, what is our leverage vis-à-vis the political leaders in Afghanistan? Can we really talk about leaving? That's one point in that dilemma: Do we really have that leverage?

And the other horn is that we have a reputation that is growing ever stronger in the region of just leaving and, as we did in Afghanistan itself, the Pakistanis next door feel that we left them for a long time. So how do we convince people, no, we're not leaving, which local leaders need to stand up to their forces inside their own country. At the same time we're protesting we won't leave, to exert real pressure on Karzai or whoever to really shape up and get serious about corruption and drugs and a lot of other things. So we're caught in that horn, that dilemma problem.

MR. KATULIS: Sure, I mean, that's – again, that's the tough question. And I think – I mean, first of all, this notion of an open-ended commitment, we need to start questioning. I go back to my second point that there needs to be some sort of commitment from whomever emerges as the leadership that they're going to do a better job.

I thought of your question when people were – the State Department was raising protests about Dostum being included in the coalition by Karzai. They issued this protest around about the same time President Obama was calling the Afghanistan war the necessary war. And it's a dilemma that we faced in Iraq completely.

And this becomes dynamic, I think, in the next couple of years. We have already seen this emerge already and the criticisms from Karzai and his administration about air strikes and the recalibration of our strategy there, that don't be surprised in 2010 to 2013. In that period, you'll see a reemergence and assertion of Afghan sovereignty, of Afghan leaders saying, you know, despite the fact that they're heavily dependent on the U.S. at this point, like in the case of Iraq, you'll see them – which I think in the last year-and-a-half in Iraq we've seen them assert their sovereignty in ways that have surprised many people in the Bush administration and then in the Obama administration.

They will tend to, especially, as Jackie said, if we start to look like an occupation force inside of Afghanistan, it will create incentives in the Afghan political system that would give greater voice and power to those who say, get the occupiers out, which we've seen in Iraq.

I think, ultimately, at this stage, the number one bit of leverage that the U.S. and the international community has right now is the money. Afghanistan could not even have held this election, as I understand, without support from the international community. And, I mean, my position – and it's been this and it's still in formulation – is that it's foolish for us without any clear idea of what is the commitment from the Afghan side. And I know there are mechanisms out there. I think there is an international compact with Afghanistan, as there was with Iraq. I don't know how much this is actually raised by our ambassador or Ambassador Holbrooke or people at the U.N.

But having that sort of commitment and contract enshrined, whether it's in some sort of compact or a strategic framework agreement I think is one way to structure the relationship. At this point, from a policy matter, I don't think we have a very structured relationship. We have a lot of political rhetoric, I think, aimed at perhaps garnering more resources, but we don't have a serious – this is our bargain as the United States and then as the international community. And this is what we expect from the Afghan leaders that emerge from this election process.

MS. WADHAMS: Thank you. Jeff Laurenti, here with –

Q: Hi, Jeff Laurenti with the Century Foundation and, like Brian Katulis, an NPR nerd and enthusiast. I wonder if you all could suggest to us the degree to which the Afghan citizen thinking about where she or he would cast his or her vote would have had a sense that that vote would make a difference in terms of this foreign presence, in terms of being able, either, to get control over the foreign forces operating there to register a choice as to whether, yes, we have to try to defeat these Taliban, keep these crazies from coming back into power over our lives; or how are we going to reconcile with our brothers who are in the Taliban that the foreigners are trying to keep us apart from.

To what extent does this enter as a factor in the debate, in the dialogue that the candidates and those behind them would have been presenting to voters? To what extent was, in fact, the direction of this war something that Afghans might have seen as at stake in their election choices?

MS. NORTHAM: I'll go by some of my colleague Soraya's reporting on all of this because she spent a lot of time in the south. I've just mostly been in the north. Basically I think the fear, the Taliban is in the lives of so many Afghans that they can't separate themselves from it. And you were talking earlier, Jim, about how long are the U.S. going to stay?

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Well, I can assure you, the few times I have gone to the south, people that I've talked to, they know as soon as the Taliban go up to the hills and the Americans come in and take a town that the Americans are leaving and the Taliban are coming back in. They live with that daily.

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So I think that the whole idea about casting a vote didn't have anything to do with the foreign forces. I think it had to do with who is going to be in their lives day in and day out – and that's the Taliban. And if they were told not to go vote, they didn't go vote. So it's really sad.

Again, where I was for this, at the beginning you felt heartened when you talked to people, the few people that did come out because they said, forget the fear, forget the intimidation: This is our right; this is what we have to do and that. But those are just so few people that – did you want to –

MR. BJORNLAND: I think it's really extraordinary that people did vote in the face of that kind of intimidation. I mean, it's really quite remarkable that there were voters. We saw voters in places where Taliban was active and so there were people that were willing to stand up in the face of that, but it's not surprising that many, many people couldn't do that.

Q: Yeah, [Chia Chen](#), freelance correspondent. You said [Afghan](#) is the most challenging place to vote and also, from your description, I don't think we can term this election have any legitimacy. And the problem, you say, okay, for current election. After the election, important is us people there in your words: "cooperate, share power and the governments." I think this is too much to ask. You even can ask people in Washington, D.C. those things.

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And another thing is this: Taliban and al-Qaida have moved their headquarters to Pakistan. Now Pakistan is in big trouble. So the question has two parts. First is this: How are we going to help Pakistan? And second is this: How does Obama going to qualify his war in Afghan as a war of necessity, because the main Taliban, al-Qaida, is not there anymore? Thank you.

MR. KATULIS: So, just briefly, the two questions were: How are we going to help Pakistan? And then, how is Obama going to justify the Afghanistan war being a war of necessity because al-Qaida is in Pakistan?

First, on how we're going to help Pakistan, I actually think that's even more complicated than the subject of our panel today. And we've written some things on this and, in fact, they are in the back of the room. I think Colin Cookman – we have some suggestions on U.S. policy. It's a country of 170 million people, tremendous challenges, but a government that, to a certain extent, the security services are quite effective and a military that is one of the most effective around the world. And I think a big part of the challenge in Pakistan is we articulate in these reports is working with the range of Pakistani leaders to try to help stabilize their country and their borders.

And that's – you know, you can look at the details; I won't get into the details of what we suggest, but, in my view, given that we're not likely to have tremendous U.S. troop presence inside of [Pakistan](#) – we've got a couple of dozen advisors, I think, working on certain parts of the training and work with the Pakistani officials – that, to me, working with other institutions, working with other governments, is much more complicated. But I am seeing some progress in trying to tackle some of the militant threats and address some of the challenges in Pakistan.

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And I think it's going to require this full-spectrum approach; that it's not just military, but really using development assistance and diplomacy in ways that I think are becoming the emerging Obama doctrine of using the other components of national power but is, I think Tony Cordesman at CSIS said the other day, we should stop talking about smart power as if we actually have it. We have great people in the State Department and AID but these are agencies that we've under-funded for decades and it's going to be a tremendous lift and we should support the efforts to try to dedicate more civilian resources to Pakistan.

I don't know how to answer your second question on Obama and frankly, I mean, I'm just going to avoid it – answering it because I think it's the type of – my third point – the type of problem that I think we have with the policy debate – necessary war versus war of choice. I don't care, as a policy analyst.

I actually think the more focused debate is what is our objective, what are the resources we're going to apply towards that objective, what are other resources that we can use in Afghanistan and other places to achieve our goals? And we actually haven't had that debate – even in the – and I'm saying, even here, in think tanks at Brookings, CSIS, other places.

We've been remiss and I think we think missed a moment of opportunity in the media and other places at the end of March when President Obama released his Af-Pak strategy. There were a lot of unanswered questions there of implementation and execution. Okay. Yeah, okay, good. But thank you. I mean, I just think we need to move beyond the necessary war versus war of choice.

MS. WADHAMS: Sir, right here in the blue shirt.

Q: Gareth Porter – Gareth Porter, Inter Press Service. This is a question for Brian Katulis. With regard to the strategic debate – policy debate that needs to be mounted in Washington on Afghanistan – it seems to me that there is a larger narrative here around the election that might be the basis for this debate.

And I'd like to ask whether you would agree with this; the larger narrative being that this election was the result of Karzai's deals with the congeries of warlords who – and de facto rule in the provinces because they command the militias and that that is the actual structure of power of the country, that it therefore suggests the problem of anticorruption reform, governance reform, is a – insoluble because of the powers that do govern in the provinces do not have an interest in reform. So I'd like to ask you whether you, in fact, would agree that that's a debate that we need to have in Washington.

MR. KATULIS: I agree that that's a debate we need to have and I actually think – I mean, just briefly, there's a really good policy paper called "Warlords as Bureaucrats: The Afghan Experience" by an analyst at Carnegie. You should take a look at it because it actually is the type of policy analysis that I think is important and it talks about the need to adapt some of our models of governance to reflect the realities in places like Afghanistan and I still don't think we've done that in Iraq. I mean, we've had, you know, elections and other things but there's a certain – and those of you who have worked in Afghanistan and Iraq, you know this – that

there's a certain way that we adapt our models of local governance to try to affect the situation there and I think.

I mean, you raise an important which we should debate is, you know, how far does one allow for official corruption and you know, what are ways to co-opt those centers of power that actually exist out in the world and around. And I think – I don't know the answer but this paper and that sort of discussion should move us towards that model because I think we sometimes over-bureaucratize our approaches.

We look at provincial reconstruction teams and the delegation we were on benefited from those reconstruction teams. I think they're tremendous work in trying to understand the human terrain and other things but we really need to – if we want to have an impact in stabilizing the country, if we want to talk about governance and decentralization, that's where the rubber hits the road.

It's not simply just training up a bunch – tens of thousands of police and army, which, I think is necessary and we'll need to do to some extent, but connecting that to some sort of governance structure. That's still an open question in places like Iraq – the civil military, you know, oversight and those connections. So I think we're going to need to adapt. It's not going to be like what we have in our own communities. And to a certain extent, that's okay if you go back to our central goal of trying to protect U.S. interests.

MS. NORTHAM: You're absolutely right and I think there is sort of varying degrees of warlord-ism in Afghanistan. If you look at – up in Balkh Province, Mohammed Atta, you know, well-known warlord who's the governor of the province, but this is a province that is functioning. I mean, there's security there, there's development there, there's progress; business is just flourishing up in that area. The guy's a warlord. So we kind of accept him. Somebody like Dostem or Fahim – no, we don't. There is a certain scale that you know, that we do – that the U.S. does put up with. But in many ways, you're right.

We're trying to put an American model in Afghanistan and I think this – this came up in one of our forum meetings yesterday in that we have to do a story on – essentially is that this place is so unique that we can't accept any sort of – probably more than Iraq because Iraq had a structure at some point in its life, and Afghanistan never really has. And I think until that's clarified, until that's seeped into the whole mentality here in Washington, then perhaps it's not going to move any further. You just have to – there's a certain level of acceptance in Afghanistan that's needed.

Q: Excuse me, Edward Joseph with the Helsinki Commission. First, congratulations to Glen, Eric, Jim and Brian for great work over there – particularly Democracy International sent observers to the South, which I think was really quite to your credit. Eric, let me try, if I could, to draw you out a little bit more on elections.

Your counseling caution, counseling folks to wait until the process plays out and I understand that. Let me ask you though – you – we want to wait and see what the tabulation process and the complaint process brings, but based on what we see already, as Jackie has

alluded to, it's other journalists like Carlotta Gall's piece yesterday in The New York Times, which was quite scathing and I think rather credible about a particular instance that seriously challenged the integrity.

It's increasingly the narrative is quite negative about these elections, quite negative and even you know, you would – people would start to throw around the word sham. Eric, based on your direct and indirect observation, what you draw from other observers, from domestic observers, can you provide folks with a little bit more to rebut what seems to be increasingly negative view of these elections? Thanks very much.

MR. BJORN LUND: You know, the title of my book on election observation is “Beyond Free and Fair” and one of the ideas of “Beyond Free and Fair” is the idea that international observers should not think of their role as giving a verdict on the legitimacy of the elections, that we're trying to contribute in a different way and our role isn't just to give a thumbs-up or thumbs-down to the process. So I don't think it's our role to rebut this kind of emerging negative narrative. It is our role to try and develop an independent sense of whether we agree it, whether we would sustain that or find counterexamples.

And ultimately, it will – it's a political question for the political establishment and the public in Afghanistan and for the international community how people view these elections, you know, where they place them on a – you know – a scale of legitimacy and you know, what respect they should be accorded. Clearly, these elections didn't meet the standards that we wanted them to meet. They didn't meet international standards, if only because polling stations weren't able to open in lots of parts of the country and a lot of people weren't able to vote because of fear for their lives or their personal safety.

But our role as observers, I think, is to continue to pay attention. One of the faults of international election observation is it tends to be even more superficial than it needs to be. We tend to pay attention to balloting and initial counting process and then leave the country and maybe come share some impressions in forums like this but lose interest or certainly lose the attention of the media and our other constituencies.

We're trying to combat that and we've urged that for a long time by continuing to have people in the country to continue to monitor the process, to understand, in this case, what's happening with the vote count process, what's happening with, you know, how the complaints are being addressed, you know, how serious those processes are, whether they're credible or not. One of the reasons why there's so much uncertainty about the extent of fraud and the vote count is that there really wasn't any independent source of information about the vote count.

In most countries, you have the media, political parties and other groups, domestic monitoring groups or civic groups collecting information about the vote count in some way or another. In our country, we have the media doing exit polls and that's how we develop our dominant impressions about the results and how we develop our early impressions. In emerging democracies, we've counseled organizations to try to collect actual information about the vote counts from polling places.

There was no real effort to that in Afghanistan and that was a failing of all of us collectively and means that we have less information about the credibility of that process than we might have had. Now, if there's a runoff election, probably a lot of sins of this past process are going to be forgiven and the focus will be on what happens, what unfolds in the future and the stakes will be very high for that, of course. If there is not a runoff election, there's going to be a lot of focus on this process of investigating complaints and such.

But again, I don't see it as our role to – to give the ultimate verdict. There's a very complicated international political process and process in Afghanistan that will – that will judge, sort of, how we should address these elections. What we can do is try to encourage parallel vote tabulation in future elections so that there's better information for the Afghan public and the international community to make those judgments.

MS. WADHAMS: Thank you. The gentleman right here.

Q: I'm Robin Walker. I run the national security blog "Smart Influence." To jump on your last point there, given the 600-plus major complaints about the last election, if this does go to a runoff, what do you think we can do to encourage it better? What policy choices can make this more effective and as you said, wash the sins away of the past election? And what do you think the likelihood that that will actually occur will be?

MR. BJORN LUND: I think exactly what I said. I mean, we need to pay attention to the runoff. We need to encourage observation of the runoff in the same way that there was in the past. We need to reinforce the efforts of domestic groups to monitor the process, including trying to get them to places where there have been concerns expressed or there were problems reported in the last round.

One specific thing is to encourage the domestic election monitoring group or other domestic groups or media groups to do an independent check of the vote counts because if there had been a sample-based collection of results, we would at least have some basis for judging whether fraud was distorting the results or not, and that'll be, potentially, even more important in a runoff than it was in the previous election. But we still don't know whether there will be a runoff. So that becomes a little bit of a hypothetical question.

MS. WADHAMS: This gentleman over here – the red suspenders.

Q: Mohammed Kassim (ph). I'm partly Afghan, but I was also at the World Bank and did a lot of work in Afghanistan. This election was a farce, okay. It was there to justify your man – Khalilzad's man, by the way. If there was a more powerful person, it was Khalilzad, who was – (inaudible) – ambassador of – (inaudible) – Afghanistan.

Secondly, you can only talk about Afghanistan up to a certain point. It's a conceit drawn by three Brits and one Russian. Kabul never accepted that Durand Line and three days after Pakistan was declared, it abrogated that treaty. That line was drawn to cut off the Pashtuns who have ruled Afghanistan brutally. I spent a year with the Hazaras; I have an affinity with them. Those horrible stories you've heard about this – terrible. In fact – (inaudible) – much worse.

So you talk about warlord, you know, the Tajiks, the Hazaras, the others wanting their own piece of cake, ganging up against the Pashtuns – Karzai’s people. And now the Pashtuns are caught in a bind because they have to fight for their existence. I can understand any Hazara was a member of the police or member of the armed forces goes into Pashtun land, he’s killed. There’s 400 years of revenge there. And these are never recognized. You know, you talk about Afghanistan doesn’t exist. Northern Pakistan doesn’t exist – these Pashtun areas. So we’re seeing the end of the British Empire, finally, but I think the American empire should understand that.

MS. WADHAMS: You want to comment, anyone?

MR. KATULIS: Yeah, I mean as somebody who’s analyzed the Middle East and South Asia, now, for about 15, 20 years, I often tend to blame the British Empire for a lot of the problems we face – (chuckles) – policy problems – and you raise some interesting points but we have to deal with the facts as we have them right now. And I think, you know, they’re challenging in and of themselves enough before we go to the U.S. proposing things such as undoing the works of the British Empire from 80 years ago.

MS. WADHAMS: Back here, the gentleman in the blue shirt.

Q: This is a question – I’m Zach Davis from the Carnegie Endowment. This is for all of you. My question is about long-term prospects for democracy in Afghanistan. How much support do you feel there is among the people? Do you expect it to survive past American presence and how likely is a good functioning government to emerge once U.S. support withdraws?

MS. NORTHAM: It’s a very difficult question. I think one of things that’s always struck me about Afghanistan since I’ve been going there is that the West has been trying to impose this whole idea of a central government on the people outside of Kabul and that just doesn’t exist. It’s never existed probably – it’s just never existed and that’s what we’re trying to do.

And I think the Obama administration or the new strategy is recognize that it has to be from the ground up. But still you’re having a presidential election that everybody’s pinning hopes on that will come down so it’s – I’m not quite sure if there’s just sort of mixed messages that we’re sending there and not. Chances for democracy, I mean, who knows? And what’s democracy in an area – in that area of the world? It’s certainly not what we’re going to see here.

And here, we’re still trying to figure out what it is to true democracy. So the chances for a stable government – one of the things I wanted to say before is, the thing is, if Karzai does get in again and you were talking about leverage. This is an interesting thing. I think it was quite a breach between Karzai and the Obama administration at this point and I hate to say this but before the election, when he allowed Dostum to come back – we virtually – we equated it to sticking an eye – sticking the eye of the U.S. government because they made it very clear that that was not to happen. It went against the grain of everything that the Obama administration was trying to do, letting the drug lords go – putting Fahim and I just wonder if he knows that the

U.S. is on its own track, and they're going to stay because of what the U.S. wants; not because of what will be good for Afghanistan, but what will be good for the U.S. in terms of security and that type of thing. And I think Karzai understands that.

Karzai has proved to be much wiler than we thought. Same as Prime Minister Maliki - has much more spine than I think a lot of people gave him credit for at the beginning. And we're seeing this with Karzai. Karzai has evolved and I think he understands that he has the upper hand in this. I wouldn't underestimate what the U.S. government can do - (chuckles) - but I think that's position right now. Is that what you're getting as well?

MR. BJORNLUND: Going back to one of the points I was making in the beginning, I think the prospects for democracy - I was depressed when I saw that Karzai actually pushed through a law that allowed a husband to deny food to his wife if she wouldn't have sex with him. And this was a couple of weeks before the election. So those sorts of things, more than elections, I think, matter a lot for fostering the sorts of civil liberties and political rights which are important. I still think, though, that - going back to one of the earlier points - that we need to think about what local governance actually looks like.

We still have not done this in Iraq; we had provincial elections. But this is the one thing that we're not good at in our policy debate. We're very good at debating how many troops the U.S. should send to train the security forces. We're not very good at helping societies restructure the way that they organize governance from the central and national level down to the provincial and local level, and actually decentralize power in a meaningful way that provides effective governance, and to a certain extent, representative governance.

That's actually, I think, a real task. It's a puzzle that's not been solved in Iraq. We're not even beginning to scratch the surface in Afghanistan, as I was indicating, due to the lack of attention to the provincial elections component of these August elections. And that's the hardest part if you want to get serious about policy.

I think it's pretty simple to figure out how many tens of thousands of trainers we might send to help train up a number of Afghan citizens to serve in a police force and shoot a weapon. I think it's much harder to help societies understand how to structure the power relationships, and the nature of how to develop a governing system that is decent, at the very least, if not democratic.

And I think the onus is in large part on the Afghan public, but we need to play more of a role and exercise more of our mental energies in advising them how to do that. And that I think it has to - as Jackie was saying - look to the different parts of Afghanistan, and figure out, what are the models that are most appropriate for the different provinces.

MS. WADHAMS: Okay, I'm going to group a couple of questions here. The woman in the green shirt and then we'll go to this gentleman in the second row.

Q: I'm Linda Rotunno and I'm the CEO at the American Council of Young Political Leaders, and I just want to thank Jackie for your amazing stories from dangerous places. I've enjoyed your news reporting for years, so thank you.

I actually work for an organization that provides training for young political leaders around the world, and we've worked with Afghanistan in the past, and we're kind of looking towards the future. And this is a question for all of you: Are there up-and-coming young leaders that we can be working with at the provincial level, at the regional level, or are we just kind of shooting into the wind at this point in terms of trying to identify people who we can really work with in a meaningful way?

Q: Peter Fromuth. I'm a D.C. attorney, formerly at State doing policy planning. I want to get back to the question of the electoral complaints commission, and the specific – as specific as you're capable of being – measures that they must undertake to actually put facts on the table with regard to first, the 600-and-change priority complaints, and such greater number of the 2,000 as exist, and are significant in terms of they could be consequential for the outcome. I guess my larger concern is less with the purity of a profoundly flawed election, but with the potential volcanic effect within Afghanistan, particularly within Uzbek, Hazarajat, Tajik and other ethnic areas of Afghanistan.

If, in fact, Karzai is anointed as a consequence of this exercise, when, as Jackie and others have mentioned, it is the almost-universal perception among the groups noted that this has been a flawed election – if indeed we get there, then I think we would be very prudent to look at ways in which the U.S., by resources, by an addition of, perhaps, even bodies, can extend the reach of the electoral complaints commission and its little posse of investigators who, in many cases, have so little to go on. I think some of the articles indicated a name and a phone number. I mean, there's so much writing here, I'd just like to know if you could explain what they will do, in specific terms.

MS. NORTHAM: I'll take the first one if you'd like, or if anybody else wants to jump in. It's rather discouraging to find that, no, there really isn't. You had, initially, a field of 41 candidates, I believe, or something like that. And the election commission actually expressed their displeasure with that because you really water down the field. But this election was really more about Karzai, Abdullah, Bashardost, and Ghani – that type of thing. And I think it's indicative of politics there; it's personality rather than a political party, if you like.

You see the same thing in Pakistan, as well. I mean, Benazir Bhutto was chairperson for life. You know, she didn't have anyone coming up underneath her because she was it. And I think that's a lot of what you see in Afghanistan. If there was, you know, they weren't allowed to move away from the shadow of the Karzais and the Abdullahs to rise to that occasion.

And I think, yeah, again, it is just very discouraging because everything is just based on tribe. At the beginning, I think it was – it may have been Ambassador Holbrooke who said that this time around, it really was issues-driven, and we saw this in the presidential debate. And I think there is a certain amount of truth to that. But merely what they were saying, they were

going after Karzai and his government, so it was issues, but it was really more of accusations rather than issues and debating things fully.

So it got a little bit beyond personalities, and they saw some indications, perhaps, out on the field that people were going not necessarily with their tribes, and that type of thing. But overall, I think that's where we resided. And we didn't come across any sort of up-and-coming "Obama" – (chuckles) – if you'd like, or whatever like that, somewhere along the way. But they're just getting started. We can't forget that as well. This is all new to them, too. So let's just get through this one first.

MR. BJORN LUND: Yeah, one more comment on the first question. This is another implication of the absence of political parties. If there were political parties in this society, there would be a much more natural process of developing new, young leaders and reform leaders.

On the question about the process, I know Glenn or Hardin may have something to add here about the details of how this process works. The election commission, itself, as we understand it, has quarantined some results from particular locations that their own analysis suggests there's some question about.

So they have some kind of algorithms that suggest to them that there's something about the results from that particular place that are anomalous in some way, and deserve some kind of investigation. That's separate from complaints that have already been brought to the electoral complaints commission.

And the electoral complaints commission has some kind of process to do an investigation about these complaints, and to try to make their own assessment about how much validity these complaints have; how much basis in fact they have; and make some judgment about them. It's unclear to us – it's certainly unclear to me – about what kind of appeals process to the supreme court that there may be.

There seems to be some murkiness or disagreement about exactly what the process beyond the electoral complaints commission's determination about each of these complaints. But you're absolutely right that there could be a lot riding on these determinations, particularly since it looks like it could be very close to whether there's a second round. Hardin or Glenn, do you have anything you want to add to that?

HARDIN LANG: My name's Hardin Lang. I'm with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, and I was out with Democracy International for this event. But just speaking very quickly to the question of the electoral complaints commission, they have a fairly limited capacity, yes. And, perhaps, surging additional assets into the commission might enhance their ability to undertake investigations.

But, I mean, I was based down in Kandahar for a couple of weeks during this process, and a number of the people who brought complaints forward brought complaints that would be very, very difficult to research. So even if you had additional people inside the commission, itself, who were able to undertake the investigations, they're not working with a great deal of

information. As said before, they're working with an address, you know, somewhere down in a district that's almost next-to-impossible to get to.

So I'm not too sure how much additional assets would actually help the commission at this point in terms of investigating complaints that are far outside of major urban areas. And this may now be an exercise that's based primarily in Kabul in terms of reviewing the mathematics of the process.

MS. WADHAMS: Thank you, Hardin. Unfortunately, we have to close this meeting. I want to thank Eric, Jackie and Brian so much for sharing your insight, and thank you for coming to the Center for American Progress.

(END)