



Center for American Progress

SPECIAL PRESENTATION

**“RECONCILIATION AND INSURGENCY
POLITICAL STRATEGIES IN THE AFGHAN WAR”**

MODERATED BY:

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FEATURED PANELISTS:

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JOANNA NATHAN, INDEPENDENT CONSULTANT

**2:00 PM – 3:30 PM
THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 5, 2009**

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MS. CAROLINE WADHAMS: Okay, we are going to begin. Welcome everybody to the Center for American Progress. Thank you for coming to our panel “Reconciliation and Insurgency: Political Strategies in the Afghan War.” We’re delighted to have an excellent lineup today to discuss the prospects for reconciliation in Afghanistan and of course the impact of Karzai’s presidential victory, on the insurgency, on reconciliation efforts, and on U.S. policy.

My name is Caroline Wadhams and I’m a national security policy analyst here at the Center for American Progress. And we are co-hosting this event with the New America Foundation. And I want to thank Michael Cohen from New America in particular for helping us put together this great panel and I also want to thank a number of my colleagues from the Center, including Colin Cookman, Emma Diebold, Rudy DeLeon, and Brian Katulis for their assistance.

This event is the second in a series that we are co-hosting with New America Foundation on Afghanistan and Pakistan. And the purpose of these series is to question basic assumptions made about Afghanistan and the mission, expand the debate beyond troop levels, and look more deeply at some of the proposals that have been put forward. Reconciliation with the Taliban is one of those proposals that has been advocated by many policymakers.

Leaders in the U.S., NATO, and Afghanistan have all pushed for reconciliation with at least some members of the insurgency. In the Obama administration strategy, which was released in March, 2009, on Afghanistan and Pakistan, one of its main recommendations was to integrate reconcilable insurgents. While stated that the senior leadership of the Taliban was not reconcilable, it said that we needed to convince non-ideologically committed insurgents to lay down their arms, reject al Qaeda, and accept the Afghan constitution. President Karzai has also made overtures to the Taliban and even the senior leadership.

In the aftermath of a flawed electoral process and the continuation of a tainted Afghan government, the idea of reconciliation with the insurgency seems, at least superficially, like a very attractive option. Many policymakers hope that reconciliation could offer a way out from a very costly and deadly mission. However, a deeper look at the prospects for reconciliation raise serious questions, especially because the Taliban leadership has rejected these overtures, denied distinctions that we have made between moderates and ideologically driven Taliban. And they’ve also established as a precondition for discussions a withdrawal of all foreign forces.

Our panelists here with us today will unpack this proposal, drawing from their understanding of the insurgency and power dynamics in Afghanistan. They will also discuss the impact of the elections on the prospects for reconciliation and maybe – I’m

hoping – provide some advice to the Obama team as they deliberate. Should reconciliation be part of the strategy moving forward?

I'm going to quickly introduce our panelists and turn it over to them.

Dr. Gilles Dorransoro is a visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. He's an expert on Afghanistan, Turkey, and South Asia. Previously, Gilles was a professor of political science at the Sorbonne, Paris and the Institute of Political Studies of Rennes. He also served as the scientific coordinator at the French Institute of Anatolian Studies in Istanbul, Turkey. And he's written extensively on Afghanistan, the Taliban, reconciliation, and more.

Michael Semple currently holds a fellowship with the Carr Center for Human Rights Policy at Harvard's Kennedy School. He's a regional specialist on Afghanistan and Pakistan, with 25 years experience in the two countries. He was a political officer with the UN. And from 2000 to 2004 served as deputy to the European Union special representative for Afghanistan. He has probably interacted with more members of the Afghan insurgency than any other international official. And he has recently authored books and articles on reconciliation in the region.

Joanna Nathan was based in Afghanistan from May 2005 to July 2009 as the senior analyst for the International Crisis Group. She previously worked with the Institute for War and Peace Reporting in 2003 and 2004 on a media development project focused on the Constitutional Loya Jirga which evolved into Afghanistan's first independent news agency. She is currently undertaking a mid-career Master of Public Policy at the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton University and continues to work on Afghan issues.

We are honored to have such an experienced group of panelists with us today. And I'm going to first turn it over to Gilles to begin his remarks.

I just want to ask you a couple of questions to begin. And you can take it from there. You've argued, Gilles, that most Taliban are not hired hands who can be swayed to the other side. Could you, in your remarks, describe the insurgency in more detail? Are the Taliban an irreconcilable ideological force? Are they a national movement with which the United States could one day do business and what's the impact of the elections on the insurgency in Afghanistan and reconciliation with the Taliban? Thanks.

MR. GILLES DORRONSORO: Thank you. You can hear me? Yes. Thank you. First I would like to say that the subject of reconciliation with the Taliban is very much in the media right now because a lot of people are looking for alternatives to the COIN strategy, the strategy that is advocated by McChrystal. So it could be counterterrorism, if you remember what Biden said a few weeks ago, or it could be other alternative like reconciliation or like more money for aid and development. Or it could be other things.

What is then just probably with this kind of analytical approach is that we could lose the general picture. So for example, reconciliation is just a part of a more global policy and I think I'm speaking probably for my colleague, but he will say it himself. We should not think as reconciliation as the whole of a strategy, just a minor part of a strategy.

The second point is that there is a kind of fascination for local stories in Afghanistan. Sometimes the idea – that's a beautiful country, so every time you're changing – you're in another valley, it's another story, another people, sometimes another language. So you know it's fascinating to see all these local things, plenty of local things.

I don't think that the history of Afghanistan is just the sum of these local stories. That's much more dynamic. You have more general processes that are taking place right now in Afghanistan. What I mean is that you can always find a story of something that is working somewhere. And that's why most of the articles I have read about Afghanistan just few weeks are a little bit frightening because from one case, not necessarily one understood, they are building the general picture. So this kind of methodology is very dangerous in Afghanistan.

So let's take some – let's be careful. Let's take some distance with the fascination with local stories.

Now, to be more in the subject, you have two ways of understanding reconciliation. One is general. I would say it's a strategy called decision. You're entering negotiations with the Taliban. And the second one is much more local. It's about dealing locally with groups. And of course, the two subjects are to a certain extent very different. So we have to be careful when we are going to speak about reconciliation today about be precise about what we are talking about.

So first element, is it possible right now to have a reconciliation process going on with the Taliban as such with Mullah Omar – (inaudible) – and the leadership of the Taliban really? I do not think so. Why? Because we are in a phase where the war is escalating obviously. Most probably, there will be more troops in Afghanistan next year, so the U.S. military is thinking that it's possible to win against the Taliban and on their end, the Taliban must probably think that it's a good thing – (inaudible) – a good thing because it means that the failure of the coalition is going to be fast. The idea is that if you have 150,000 troops in Afghanistan, it's not going to stay long. They win or they lose.

So right now, I don't see any possibility of any kind of meaningful reconciliation process with the leadership of the Taliban. That would be one point.

The second point is that I don't see a possibility to use reconciliation as a political weapon to break the Taliban in two parts. That would be the moderates, so-called moderates, versus so-called – (inaudible) – Taliban.

I think here we have a major problem with understanding the Taliban, and to quote the title of a recent book, decoding the Taliban. It's not so easy. It's not so simple. My personal feeling based on what I've seen of the Taliban in the '90s and what more indirectly I have seen since a few years is that the Taliban are not a coalition of local groups. They have a structure. They have a central structure. Of course, it's Afghan style, so you have a lot of local improvisation, local adaptation to the context, but it's still a political coherent organization. And when you compare with the coalition – I mean our coalition – I'm not sure that they are less disorganized than we are on the ground.

Basically, when people are saying, "oh, you know, but the Taliban, they don't have the same strategies in the north and south." For God's sake, you look the German and the British. Do they have the same tactics? Not exactly, I would say. And I don't even think they have the same objectives.

So the Taliban are certainly not a perfect organization, but they are gaining coherence and what I suppose, my guess would be that large part of the Taliban are not this kind of mercenaries that have been described sometimes, but they are local guys fighting for their world view that is not very complex ideologically speaking. They are not intellectuals. They are illiterate. They are farmers. But they have a very strong world view about what is just social order, what's the place of the woman, what foreigners should do or should not do in Afghanistan, and so on and so on.

So I think we are facing with variation from one place to another something that is really a political movement. And I would say we should not forget also that the fight in itself is creating the movement. People have a very strong feeling of solidarity when they fight together. So a young guy, 15 or 16 years old, who is joining the Taliban for one reason or another, is becoming part of the organization, is becoming part of the organization because maybe if he's going to be married, it will be with a gift from the local Taliban commander. If his friend is killed in the fight, he will feel responsible for that. That's very usual, normal think. We know about war and conflict and violence.

So this idea that you can so-called protect the population on one hand and separate the Taliban from the rest of the population, and then at the end of the game just have the – (inaudible) – Taliban is extremely dangerous and concretely I don't think it will work somewhere. I mean in Afghanistan. I don't have very positive experience to mention about that.

Now, what is local process of reconciliation? Here we shift to another level. We shift to a local-local level. For example, in one province, I would not say element, but you can have a local process of reconciliation in the sense that if the local coalition commanders feel that maybe a deal is possible with certain Taliban commanders. Here we have a number of problems that I am just going to mention, not to be too long.

First problem, it's not very clear if the deal works for the Taliban or for the coalition mostly. My feeling is that for example in Uruzgan, what's quoted again and

again, and the success by the Dutch PRT, I'm not sure that the Taliban were – (inaudible) – fighting in Uruzgan. They were in control of the places they wanted basically. Why not – the deal was not necessarily a bad thing for them.

So a deal between the coalition, local coalition commander and local Taliban commander isn't necessarily a win for the coalition. It could just be that you are sanctuarize a part of the country for the Taliban.

The second problem I see is that in a country which is fragmented – fragmented politically, if you are doing a deal with one part of the local population, in certain cases it means that the other part of the population is going to be your enemy. So if you're doing a deal with the Barakzai in Kandahar, it's not going to help you much if you're dealing with Mohammadzai, just a district, the next district, and so on and so on. It's a very complex game and I'm not sure that we can always predict the result.

The last main problem I see is that this process can be way too stabilized locally a situation – stabilizing means less fight – but it doesn't solve anything in the sense that the state building process, which is the only way I see for us to exit Afghanistan, to have a state that is able to defend itself, is not accelerated by this process. On the contrary, it could mean that local officials are totally out of the game because basically the coalition is making a deal with local Taliban commanders and that's it. You don't move. It's not a dynamic process.

So considering that the time is not playing in favor of the coalition, but in favor of the Taliban, I think we all agree on that now, we haven't resolved major problems.

The last question I will ask is do we have the competence to do that? It's a very, very serious question. It's not offensive, but we don't have people speaking the local languages and since we are especially dealing with Pashtun, we need people speaking Pashtu and that's not easy. And for me – (inaudible) – I'm just speaking Persian because Pashtu is too difficult.

So we don't have a lot of people able to do that. It's micromanaging society. It's bordering on social engineering sometimes. And it could be extremely dangerous. We don't know exactly what we are doing when we are making deals like that. And see the way that Karzai himself has a very ambiguous position sometimes with people clearly linked to the Taliban in some situation. Maybe he knows what he's doing, but I am not totally sure about that to be honest. (Laughs.) We can – it could be a debate depending on the places.

So even if Afghans could be trapped in some very dangerous situation by this negotiation process, as a foreigner, I would say we should be extremely careful, extremely, extremely careful about that.

Thank you. I think that was it.

MS. WADHAMS: Thank you, Gilles. I'm going to turn it over to Michael now. Michael, you've taken part in reconciliation efforts in the past with Taliban insurgents and have – my understanding is that you've advocated pursuing more reconciliation efforts. Could you describe some of the efforts you were involved in and what you think reconciliation might look like? And also if you could comment on if there would what would the red lines be if it did take place and also how the election fits into your perceptions of this?

MR. MICHAEL SEMPLE: Thanks, Caroline. I'd like to sort of take off from where Gilles left off, asking – he was asking this double rhetorical question. On the one hand, do the international players have the capacity to be doing even the kind of relatively low level deal making, reconciliation that seems to be all the vogue at the moment? And the other part of that question was does Karzai know what he's doing?

I have done what was even – what I have done in terms of talking contacts deal making, had deliberately much lower ambition than sometimes it was sort of projected as when it got into the media when Karzai started to say, “you won't talk to the Taliban.” I had – we both remember dealing with the Taliban in the '90s. I was UN official during the Taliban period, which gave me access to much of the Taliban leadership, as well as the commanders in the field. Many times, Taliban commanders came to me and said, “yes, Michael, come on, join us in fight against the Hazaras.” I said, “I got a job to do, thank you. And I'm not going to fight against the Hazaras, thanks.” So on the basis of that, obviously, right from the start of the Bonn process – because I was part of then the UN political team that actually helped lay the foundations. And I think I probably even counted Karzai's first set of ballots and didn't allow any fraudulent ones in there. In fact I even grabbed – Marshall Fahim grabbed my hand and said, “Michael, make me a democrat.” He said in the Loya Jirga tent, when he went to cast the first vote in his life. The point being that from the start, I worked closely with the national security council of the Afghan government and on the basis of the prior contacts which I had with the Taliban, they asked me to keep those up. And in a fairly loosely structures dialogue, before the Afghan government had any policy on reconciliation, I actually contributed to some of the ideas and thought pieces, which they then put together and put into their policy on national reconciliation in 2005. Lots of other clever people in the coalition forces and so on that contributed to it, but I helped them on the basis of sitting with lots of Taliban and saying something is possible. And I helped trigger the process whereby the Afghan government showed its hand. This is what we will try and do. They basically said, “we will try and co-opt. We'll provide the mechanism whereby we will co-opt Taliban who'll come in.”

I then in my capacity then as having switched over to the EU – (inaudible) – on something which in our – (inaudible) – Francis Vandrell, my boss, was supporting Afghan government efforts towards reconciliation, which is not negotiating the future of Afghanistan. It was sitting with members of the Taliban movement at different levels, from minor commanders, mid-level commanders, to members of the leadership and talking about what was possible and what could happen and in some cases referring

people off to – actually allowing for some people to reintegrate peacefully inside Afghanistan.

So I can – we can come back to what kinds of messages and impressions did you get from talking to those people. They – some of the issues that Gilles touched upon, I drew upon my experience of talking to a couple of hundred commanders and leaders in that process. So you get things like the ideology and commitment to the world view are important, but not necessarily the driver. That people who are – people you can come with as particular story and narrative as to why they took up arms again, what local grievance they had, what happened to the whole of their network, all their mates, all commanders were back fighting – (inaudible). But almost every one of them still would articulate what they're doing with some reference to a religious ideology and a world view. And one of the things which became clear to me was that joining in the insurgency, taking up arms as a Taliban fighter, gave these young men and some of them who've been fighting a bit longer, middle age men, gave them a respectability and a status, which they didn't have otherwise.

And when I think back to this, the references to world view ideology from the discussions makes me think that all the talk of money and mercenary motive at the moment probably has not taken that adequately into account. And this idea that somehow put cash on the table and the guys are coming over does not really resonate with my impressions of these young men. Not to say that the economics and resources are not important, but anything that they were going – none of them would do the kinds of things which would look like surrender, which it involves saying mea culpa, which would even involve being portrayed as friends of the United States, might be pragmatically very happy to cooperate with the government and the United States, but in a way which makes them look like true mujahedin.

So to jump back from what I was doing and talking to individual commanders, just thinking how I understand the way the insurgency and the movement are going, the Taliban – the Afghan Taliban movement is fighting a civil war which is dressed up to look like an insurgency against foreign occupation. They have probably no prospect of winning an Afghan civil war outright. They came close to it in the period '98 to 2001, but messed it up and lost that opportunity. Things have sufficiently changed on the ground that even factoring in just about any international mistake or loss of will or whatever, they still don't have a prospect of winning an Afghan civil war because fundamentally they are insufficiently – they have the maximum possible constituency in Afghan society in the civil war setting is not big enough to win the civil war, to defeat all the other people who will remain opposed to them. However, in a situation of national uprising against foreign occupation, potentially they can move into other constituencies, mobilize people who fundamentally are not the same as them. And if they can spin it as this insurgency against foreign occupation, perhaps they have prospects of making more progress than they can inside civil war mode.

So I think that anything that one is thinking of a way forward, including of reconciliation, we've got to think politically, understand what's going on, understand the

different Afghan actors, and pitch what we do. Although – I would stress the hope that all of us sitting here are in favor of piece and ultimately that’s what we would hope to achieve, but in a strange way, we have an interest at the moment that the conflict should be a civil war which we helped to put an end to, rather than of course being a straight fight, either from their perspective a fight against foreign occupation, or even, from say, the West’s view, a fight against this great terrorist threat.

Quickly just to say – because – (inaudible) – is reconciliation possible, think out of the box. Jump ahead to 2012, although Joanna grabbed me over lunch and said, “Mike, you’re too optimistic.” You can – imagine the headlines that the ceasefire is holding across most parts of the country, few incidents, the traditional Loya Jirga has just endorsed the deal that we just hammered out in Saudi Arabia. The Taliban nominees are not themselves known Taliban commanders, but who are nominated to join the government have all been sworn in and started work in their ministries. The new minister for transport had a discussion about the allocation of revenues gathered from commercial vehicles plying between Mazari Sharif and Kabul with his director. The other – former fighter, but now turned minister in the ministry for livestock production discussed the survey of chicken production in the country and the Mullah Omar from his new residence in Saudi Arabia said that inshallah everything that is happening is in keeping with the Taliban’s goal that a true Islamic system should be established inside Afghanistan and inshallah we are making progress towards that goal. The senior U.S. official also gave a statement that they’re very happy that the fighting in Afghanistan is now out and there’s the national unity council involving senior members of the Hazara, Tajiks, and Uzbeks, and Kandahari Pashtun committees had another happy meeting in Kabul.

It’s not inconceivable. I wouldn’t bet a huge amount of money on it, but perhaps – yes – (laughs) – perhaps there has not been enough out of the box thinking really to think what would be the implications to create the conditions for this kind of thing happening on all sides of the divide, what would have to be done, what would be unpalatable, what could be done to make it more palatable. It’s – I think that we tend to get stuck too much in war fighting mode and not to say you want to jump straight into naivety, by various thing would have to happen politically. Some of the developments in this would be extremely unpalatable even for some of us – (inaudible) – if that were the price you had to pay for peace, so I would encourage a bit more free thinking. You could have another future you could imagine of this when you think of the headlines where his Excellency, the presidential advisor on religious affairs, Mullah Brother from his residence in – (inaudible) – today issued a press statement that he’s delighted with the performance of the police chiefs who have been recruited from the ranks of those patriotic Taliban who have now joined the national government and he also expressed satisfaction with the improvement of performance of district managers who had been accused of harassing Taliban who have returned to their homes. And he appealed to those brothers who have unfortunately sided with al Qaeda and are carrying on the struggle to lay down their arms and to come in too.

It’s a subtly different future, not completely impossible. I don’t think that you can – it’s pretty difficult that you can project the trajectory we are on to get to that, but you

probably want to think of both of those. Probably there is a – of course, a much bigger political process in the first one than there is in the second one. The second one is about robust military stance, shoring up the security situation, improve performance of Afghan institutions, credible Afghan police and intelligence service and army, working security arrangements by Afghan tribal forces in the rural areas. It's all about – which in a sense make the pragmatic wing of the Taliban suddenly becomes visible after being invisible for so many years. And so they decide to come over like his Excellency, that famous – sorry – Mullah Brother probably gets reinvented also as a – (inaudible) – tribal elder rather than just an enemy of the free world, which actually and seriously make me think back to the meetings which I had with Taliban. Sometimes people try to distort and somehow you say this must be covert. Michael – must be somebody dropped by helicopter at night behind lines. No, sorry, sitting in the EU office, meeting Afghan men with long beards and turbans, and the female secretaries does feel slightly – (inaudible) – feeling slightly harassed by it. But only I and they would know who's the tribal elder and who is the Taliban leader.

Anyway, the point is if you make progress on this kind of thing, some parts of the narrative are going to have to change.

Just before you take the mike back, few of the points that I think – which we have to address and try to understand is making these things into practical strategies. Take it from here. Even if you've got this kind of vision of these things being possible, there is no easy solution. Anything worthwhile in Afghanistan is going to take time.

Gilles is quite right. He came onto the point of how do we understand the Taliban as a movement and said “don't make the mistake of only thinking that it's an incoherent assembly of lots of local groups and commanders.” It is and it isn't. Yes, of course there is a Taliban movement, a sense of belonging, a sense of who belongs and who doesn't belong, of course they have structures. Of course there's the issue of the authority of Mullah Omar. But there is also a local dynamic. There is also a politic inside the Taliban, which we tend not to understand very well.

There are the core Taliban and they know who they are and any of us who analyzed it also know who they are. To make themselves a force in Afghanistan, which can be in a sense threatening, which can be heavy weight, they have to expand beyond their original core. And that gets you into this interesting dynamic between the core and the non-core Taliban.

There are distinct networks that have got their own dynamics. Now, if you end up going – if you end up getting anywhere towards a grand bargain, not today because Gilles is 100 percent right that in the current circumstances, with the collapse of security and the hardliners in the Taliban saying, “one more push and the Americans are out.” There's no way that you're getting towards a grand bargain. But if you get towards a grand bargain, actually of course, the more of the top leadership were involved, the better, and the more of the core networks that stay with them, the better. Whereas of course, if after slacking away that becomes impossible, then of course the non-core networks splitting off might

be prepared to do a deal, probably not a deal with the international community, a deal with the Afghan government endorsed and supported by the international community.

And this is where I sort of jump into the reference you made to the elections and what is the significance of that. The elections matter everything and not at all. In terms of the dynamic of the relations with the Taliban in the short run, not at all. Before the elections, they denounced Karzai as a puppet. After the elections, they denounced him as a puppet. That was foreseeable. We knew that that would happen. It gave them a couple of cheap lines saying, “oh, he got elected on the basis of fraudulent vote, how dreadful.” We’re the only ones who remember it now. But that’s – there’re two kinds of politics going on in Afghanistan. There’s the insider politics, the politics of those in the Bonn process. And there’s the outsider politics, the Taliban versus the Bonn process.

So because the Taliban are fighting to offset the Bonn process, it doesn’t particularly matter who gets elected over there. Whereas, what’s been going on in the elections of course has been politics inside the Bonn process. Now, that’s where the issues of legitimacy start to become important for our countries being reassured there is sufficient legitimacy in the Afghan government to justify supporting it. It’s also significant amongst those people who’ve been with the Bonn process. Is it a credible process to keep everybody on board? Because we made certain promises. Everybody had certain expectations. I would like to think that it’s a watershed at least in terms of external analysts’ understanding of how bad things are inside Afghan government institutions.

I have my doubts that because of this or because of the political imperative of having a nice story to gloss over what’s happening, that is a deterrent to learning some of these lessons. It is deeply embarrassing when we hear the Secretary General of the United Nations going along with some of the officially pervade fictions about, “oh, we couldn’t have reduced the number of polling stations because it would have been disenfranchising.” Just fairy stories.

So the elections are significant in terms of the effectiveness, not just the legitimacy, but also the effectiveness of the Afghan government because the single – you want me – I’ll keep quiet after I sort of condemn the Afghan government. I never do that. But the single most important strategic relationship in this process, which will be laying the basis for defeat or victory, reconciliation or being stuck in this forever is the relationship between the international community and if we drop the jargon, the United States, and the government of Afghanistan because the reconciliation between, say, the United States and Afghan insurgents is very small limited agenda, for God’s sake, cut the links with al Qaeda, and then we can probably be your friends again. That’s only this much important. The relationship amongst the Afghans is so much more important and the Afghan government has got a key role in that.

If you have got a dysfunctional relationship between the United States and the Afghan government, how can you achieve all the other things which you have to to make reconciliation possible?

And I wish I weren't the one having to say this. But in a situation where there has been one-sided game play, whereby the preference of the government of Afghanistan is to indulge in disinformation with its strategic allies and to pursue entirely different objectives from the objectives which it has agreed with its allies and there is a reluctance to recognize that, to respond to it politically from the United States, we have problems because if we're all going to achieve success, American success in Afghanistan, it's going to be making the mission more political and less military. And the first thing that's going to change – would have to change for that to work is this relationship between the United States and its partner government of Afghanistan.

I'm not sure that those lessons have been sufficiently taken to heart in this election process. Let's see. If they have been, then maybe you can do all the things you have to make reconciliation possible. Otherwise, no.

MS. WADHAMS: Thank you very much. Joanna, I'm going to turn to you now. If you could just discuss your views on reconciliation and I also I'd love for you to expand on some of the things you've written about in terms of how U.S. and NATO have contributed to some of the corruption and empowered warlords in Afghanistan, which some people argue is fueling the insurgency, if you could touch on some of that, that would be great too. Thank you.

MS. JOANNA NATHAN: Thank you very much. Is this on? Sorry, hello, right.

Okay. It's such an interesting time to be here. I've been on the ground in Afghanistan for five years. I've never spent much time in the U.S. before and just coming here and seeing the debate taking place here, which is often very, very different to what's being discussed and seen as important and priorities on the ground.

I was actually going to take a step back first. Well, perhaps, first, I should agree with my other panelists and really say that the idea that there's some fabulous, easy, exit strategy out there, that negotiations were some such of the easy way out, is just not going to happen. It must be part of a wider strategy and it will not be quick. So I think the very first thing is to try and challenge that.

If President Karzai and President Obama woke up tomorrow morning and said "the Taliban can have the six provinces in the southeast or some such, it wouldn't stop anything. It would just allow them to consolidate and regroup. We've seen these sorts of policies of appeasement in Pakistan and the effects there in Waziristan, so I really want to emphasize that these ideas are not quick or easy if the ultimate goal is to be one of stability.

But yes, to take a step back first, I think there's often a lot of confusion about what is being talked about. A lot of people talk about different things. And I even saw this in the flyer today, talking about reconciliation and political strategies as though it's all sort of the same thing. And I think, to try and take a step back, I think political

solutions are obviously vital and military strategy is part of that – to put a bit of pressure here, to maybe push people to political solutions, to try and provide the space for political solutions to take route. So political efforts in terms of ensuring equitable representation is ultimately the strategy. And the military strategy is part of that. That's the broadest possible framework.

Reconciliation is only ever a subset of that. That's one thing you might do as a political solution. And it certainly – it might as well have a place within political solutions of reconciling with alienated communities and robustly tackling the grievances that can push them to be antigovernment.

Negotiations is a smaller subset of reconciliation. If you have broader political solutions, reconciliation is part of that, and negotiations, which imply some sort of concessions, are a subset of that. It is exceedingly difficult. I think it was well raised by our first speaker. This is a multiethnic country, quite apart from the tribal networks in the insurgent areas of how you would be seeing to provide rewards for violence to one group and how that would actually affect the violence in others.

So yes, they're simply not the same thing. It's fascinating. I was re-reading my favorite book on counterinsurgency the other day, on defeating communist insurgency in Malaya. There, they were very – Sir Robert Temple was very, very clear – Sir Robert Thompson, sorry, who wrote the book was very clear that political solutions were the ultimate solution. But he actually discounted negotiations. He absolutely cut that off. So as to say the different things, the subsets – negotiations are subsets reconciliation, subsets of political solutions. So I think try and unpack that a bit.

Going back to 2001, you've been asking about the setup. It is astonishing when you look at it, but basically the underlying drivers for conflict were basically put back in place. There was never the hard work of reconciliation that you had – you outsourced the administration to predatory power brokers in what was attempting to be a quick way of not putting a lot of foreign troops on the ground, just hiring some predatory power brokers, many the very same figures that was hated that the Taliban received some welcome the first time. You had elements in Pakistan continuing with their policy of jihadi proxies. I think that hasn't actually been raised much today so far as the whole regional aspects of this and again how any form of reconciliation or negotiation would need to tackle regional drivers, sponsors, and funders.

It must be emphasized it was never an explicit ban in Afghanistan on members of the former Taliban regime. It was actually extremely arbitrary what happened to them. You had some sitting in the center of Kabul now. Throw a stone and – (inaudible) – and you hit one. But – and others driven to Pakistan, others going back to their areas to be targeted and driven back to join the Taliban, others in orange jumpsuits in Guantanamo Bay. There was never sort of a strategy and I think this indicates the wider lack of coherence, a wider lack of agreed policies. Still today, just purely looking in terms of this, there're no agreed policies within even American institutions, let alone other countries within the international community, let alone with the Afghan government of

who exactly in the Taliban is to be targeted, who is to be isolated, and who they might perceive to be potentially reconcilable. It really points to the lack of coherence across national and international strategy today.

Currently, I think often the only – when reconciliation is pointed to in terms of seeking to draw individuals in, I think it's quite terrifying to be frank that often the only stand it seems to be their reconcilability, whether they will, whether we sort of offer them enough and they personally would come across. It's being completely drawn out of wider talks of justice. At the very same time that we talk about impunity being a major driver of the insurgency, we see people sort of reaching out to elements of the Taliban, with as I say, the only – whether that will end to reconcile or not being the only criteria, not what actions they may have done before.

I also think the way – okay, so yes. We've had very, very disjointed programs taking place. I've written briefly on them in the *CTC Sentinel*. Michael has written more extensively about the various programs that have been undertaken in the name of reconciliation, which just have not been robust to date, have usually been about actually embedding certain favored networks more firmly in place, rather than seeking to reach out to any alienated elements outside. And I think the way negotiation is being communicated is actually feeding to the very calculation of individual players and the dynamics of the insurgency.

Just constant meeting of violence with talk of – we must talk and we must draw them in, particularly when there's nothing robust underlying that taking place actually feeds into community disillusionment. Why should any village stand up to the Taliban if they think a deal is going to be done anyway? Why should some villager in the middle of nowhere put their own life in danger if they feel a deal is just going to be done anyway?

So as I said, it actually undermines community support for the government and individual – (inaudible) – can actually be driven to the other side if they perceived there are future rewards in play, if they perhaps join the antigovernment elements.

So I think it's extremely dangerous at the moment the constant talk of talks, particularly when there's nothing robust underlying them.

I probably would – I'm more skeptical than Michael in terms of dealing with individuals perhaps. I think the very first efforts need to be made to strengthen the administration to ensure – to try and undercut often very legitimate grievances that drive communities to join with Taliban. I would disagree somewhat in that I don't feel as a particularly ideological movement, apart from the very top. I think below that, they would certainly articulate their grievances often in sort of Islamist terms, but often it's very, very localized practical and even legitimate grievances that can drive communities into insurgents' arms.

So I think there needs be undercutting of support at that very local level in terms of tackling local grievances to cut off a recruitment pool and also the regional issues need

to be tackled strategic preferences within certain elements within Pakistan to cut off sponsors and patrons on the other end. I think tackling those two sides first creates far more pressure than any idea we're going to be doing deals any time soon with the leadership.

MS. WADHAMS: Thank you very much. It's very, very interesting. I'm just going to ask a couple of follow up questions and then I'm going to turn it over to the audience. Maybe I'll even ask just one because we are running short on time and I want to give the audience an opportunity to ask some questions.

Joanna, you just touched on this, the degree to which corruption, poor governance, and other grievances are driving people into the insurgency. Many people make the case that the Taliban or insurgents have actually been able to provide services that the government hasn't, that the Afghan government hasn't been able to provide like justice and security and other things, other services. Why – you all know the insurgency very well and know the members of this – have a better sense of the insurgency than most of us in Washington do. How are they able to do so much more in providing those services even than the Afghan government can or that all this money from the international community has been able to provide? Why have they been able to be more successful at gaining that support?

MS. NATHAN: Well, I don't think taking people outside and hanging them from trees after a five-minute trial is very expensive. So yes, I don't think the type of justice they provide would be one we would be competing on. And I don't think actually the majority of Afghans necessarily like it very much. But the problem is that or nothing. It's not that they get to choose between a fabulous functioning court system or this very brutal form of justice. I really think the average Afghan just doesn't expect very much beyond being left alone. And I don't – really this idea that we're going to win through lots of development and building schools and clinics and whatever else, I don't think is the correct one. I think it's far more about ensuring some equitable representation and voices being heard. I don't think it's providing things. I think security and justice, they certainly are desperate for.

I think it's being overegged now as to exactly what justice the Taliban is providing. But it certainly is something you hear again and again under the Taliban. You could travel around at night with sacks of gold in the back of your taxi and you would be safe, which obviously an enormous irony in that lot of the insecurity now is being provided by the Taliban.

I don't know if the others want to comment on that.

MS. WADHAMS: Do you have any comments on this or anything else the other panelists have said?

MR. SEMPLE: Yes, I would say. First of all, you should be careful we say providing services. The Taliban are not Hamas. They have not pursued a Hamas-type

strategy of building legitimacy on the basis of service provision. What they have been doing is they have been asserting that they dominate space and the way that you do that in Afghan rural areas is by providing a sort of an arbitration service.

I have talked to some of the earliest mujahedin commanders, who explained how they drove a previous Afghan government out of the rural areas. And they said “by moving into an area, we kill or intimidate all government officials, so that they run away. And then we sit in a commercial center or the districts center if we ever managed to occupy it and we wait for people to come to us and we arbitrate.”

That’s the way that they assert that they are in control, totally different from service provision.

And I think we should also get – be a little bit careful on the hanging them from the lamp posts analogies, although clearly every now and then Taliban have used this portrayal of the worse kind of brutality as a way of intimidation, but sometimes it’s sufficient for them to act as arbitrator small claims court. And you listen to some of the cases that they have dealt with. And they’re utterly trivial. But it’s still – the point is that we’re in charge. We’ve driven out the officials. We are the ones that people come to.

MS. WADHAMS: Gilles, did you want to comment?

MR. DORRONSORO: Yes, two comments actually. The first comment is about the best case scenario developed by Michael. I think sincerely that the Taliban have a prospect of winning in Afghanistan because what we have seen the last two, three years is that the insurgency is going north. Places like Herat, where the Pashtun population – it’s not clear if they are Pashtun sometimes, by they way, because they don’t speak Pashtu, but they have a Pashtun identity anyway – places like Herat are deeply destabilized. You’ve seen that also north of Herat in Badghis. You know the map. Kunduz is a total mess. And more and more what’s happening is that you have outcall Taliban insurgency in the north, plus you have places that are totally destabilized, where we are back to the period of the small commanders, fighting each other, competition of each other. And the Taliban in this kind of place can make a difference because they will provide this kind of external kind of arbitration.

The second thing is quickly to say that the risk of – basically the reconciliation should be between Afghan, not between the United States and the Taliban. That’s the key thing. And right now, we don’t have an Afghan partner to deal with the Taliban. Let’s be clear about that. What could happen is because Pakistanis want very much the Taliban in power in Kabul, what could happen is this kind of agreement, like the Paris Agreement in ’73, between the Taliban, the Karzai or something like Karzai, the United States, whatsoever, and then, two years after, the Taliban having full offensive after the withdrawal of Western troops. That’s a very, very likely scenario. And I think that’s the scenario the Pakistani generals have in mind.

The third comment quickly is that one of the key things that explain that the Taliban are in control in a lot of places is that they have very good network, intelligence network. Contrary to the government, they know who is working for the coalition. They know which family – in which family somebody's working for the coalition, for example translator. Translator is becoming very dangerous work in Afghanistan. They know all that, who's working for an NGO. Who is coming from Kabul regularly and so on and so on.

So what's fascinating is delivery of local control. And that cannot be explained outside two things. First, it's a real political network, national network. Second, it's based on mullah, local mullahs and ullimahs (ph). The one most fascinating thing in the '90s was that for the first time, local mullahs in villages were working for the state. The state was a clerical state of course. And that is still the case.

Everywhere we see the same story. For example, when the Taliban went – established their presence again in Logar in Wardak, Logar in 2003-2004. It's – (inaudible) – it's full of mosques. It's full of this network basically. And that's a key point because I don't think they just hang people on the trees. There is a very deep sense of the ullimahs are making the judicial decision. From time to time, they kill people just like that, but most of the time for normal people with normal differences. It's true religious arbitration. I mean sharia based justice. And that's a key point because people are receptive to that. Most of the people in rural areas are receptive to that. We have to be careful about the phrasing.

MS. WADHAMS: Thank you. Okay. I'm going to open up to the audience. I need to ask press first for their questions. So if anyone – okay, yes. Please introduce yourself and state your affiliation. Thank you.

Q: Gareth Porter, Inter Press Service. I want to come back to the question of whether the United States should in fact initiate negotiations with the Taliban leadership. The argument against that, as I understand it, is twofold. One, the Taliban's not interested, at least now. And the other is that it would somehow reward violence by the Taliban. But let me come specifically focusing on the first of those two objections. If we go back to the Vietnam conflict, the argument was made, of course, at that point, the same stage if you will in the military build up of the United States – '64-'65 – that the other side, the Vietcong, the North Vietnamese were not interested in negotiations and therefore we should stay away from that option. I think in retrospect it's clear that that was not quite correct. The Vietnamese communists were interested in negotiating if the United States was serious about that. And that raises the question whether it's not also the case that the Taliban could in fact be interested in negotiations even in the present juncture because there would be some advantages to that to show that they are prepared to have a political settlement, expressing confidence in their own political support. So would you address that issue?

MR. DORRONSORO: Yes, quickly, the basic problem with this approach is that if you're opening negotiation, re-negotiation with the Taliban, the timetable of the

withdrawal of the coalition's troops is going to be the first thing and probably the only thing that the Taliban would like to discuss. So if you don't want to address this issue, it's not going to work. It's not going to stop. Sorry?

Q: Why shouldn't we address it?

MR. DORRONSORO: So second point – (laughter) – the withdrawal of the Western – the coalition's troops will be some matter of years, two, three years, four years maybe, but after that it's not very reasonable. And in this interval of time, we don't have the possibility to build an Afghan army, to build a regime that is able to defend itself. So what's going to happen is that let's say after four years most of the U.S. troops would be out of Afghanistan. Nobody will ever come back to Afghanistan because – for this reason. It's not politically possible. If you go out you're not going to go back. And what's going to happen is that the Taliban with probably the support of the Pakistan will launch some kind of major offensive against a regime that is very weak and after three months is going to be over.

MS. WADHAMS: Do either of you, Michael or Joanna, want to comment on that question?

MR. SEMPLE: Yes, Joanna, go first.

MS. NATHAN: No, you go first.

MR. SEMPLE: Obviously the distinction between the American or international track and the insurgents versus the track amongst the Afghans is very important. The objection to sort of U.S. negotiating track with the Taliban is that – is not that somehow it's rewarding violence. It's not the interesting and fruitful track. The important thing is to create a political process, a restart of political process amongst Afghans in which the insiders from the Bonn process and the outsiders of the Taliban have another opportunity to negotiate the structure of government, the allocation of power, and the identity of Afghanistan. That's the one which potentially can produce something which is useful. The discussion between the United States and the Taliban, if it's just about, on the one hand, the United States seeking concrete guarantees that al Qaeda is going to be excluded from Afghanistan and the Taliban asking for the troop withdrawal within the shortest possible timetable is – doesn't solve anything in Afghanistan. So the issue is what can you do to try and create the conditions in which the more interesting inter-Afghan dialogue happens, which – although, of course, if there were an outbreak of pragmatism amongst the Taliban now, in which they decided, as I asserted, but Gilles contradicted me that if it's sort of as Afghan civil war, they can't win because the other forces are sufficiently strong to deprive them of complete victory. If that's the case, then of course, then they could have an outbreak of pragmatism and they could engage in that inter-Afghan dialogue.

But the reality is, at the moment, the Taliban tend to agree with Gilles.

MS. WADHAMS: Joanna, do you –

MR. SEMPLE: Lots of fun there, Gilles. (Laughter.)

MS. NATHAN: I would emphasize again that they fiercely denounce every time this is implied – the Taliban leadership rejects that there's been no sort of softening of the rhetoric you might see in a lead up to preparing their followers to reach out to this. They feel the strategic momentum is behind them, so there's not an incentive in any way, even if it was desirable.

This reference to having to have a withdrawal before talking, yes, it's a complete red herring. Against this is what I was saying at the start about, this is not a quick exit strategy if the goal is stability, if foreign troops' withdrawal is civil war. It really is as simple as that. And I do feel at this stage the Taliban are not a political movement, that they have the ability to disrupt, but certainly not to rule. So as I say, it would be a civil war. It wouldn't be them taking over.

I have to get back to my last point on the justice. I certainly would agree they provide some arbitration, but also want to – (inaudible) – they're incredibly brutal and not much attention is actually paid to this because well, the people who suffer civilian casualties at the hands of NATO and foreign forces can to a certain extent speak up and rightly do so quite vocally. You can't if the Taliban does. NATO is not going to come to your door and shoot you for saying this. The Taliban will. They are exceptionally brutal and it is not actually portrayed very much. They disembowel people. They hang people. They shot two women for working at a police station, videoed it and sent the DVD to local television stations.

This really doesn't actually get portrayed in the media very much because – and it doesn't get portrayed often in human rights reports very much because people are actually too scared to even talk about it.

MS. WADHAMS: Thank you. Do we have more – any more press? Sorry, I have to do this. Sir, are you from the press? Okay.

Q: Vikram Meyer (ph), writing with *Huffington Post*. I was wondering, when you said that they're fighting a civil war dressed up as an insurgency, two things. One, what does an internal admission amongst the White House national security team, even if they won't say this publicly, what does an internal admission of this reality do in terms of their strategy? Should they be preparing for something, regardless of what they're publicly saying in terms of a COIN approach, doing something to address that this is actually a civil war or can they just carry on on normal with their COIN approach, independent of the terminology that they use.

And secondly, if part of the reasons that we're talking about reconciliation being difficult is that there are so many different shades – the first speaker spoke of like the various groups and languages and pretty much sociological differences between some

groups, then in terms of your 2012 optimism, Michael, what does – is that stage even possible – not to say like is it likely. I'm just saying like if there are so many different shades and covers and interests and desires that many of these local groups are vying for, then when you talk about creating the conditions for having an inter-Afghan dialogue, how do we even get to that point if the different shades are what are providing a side constraint from reconciliation at this point?

MS. WADHAMS: Okay, who wants to start? Michael, do you want to?

MR. SEMPLE: Okay. What would be the implications in the U.S. administration team if they were to take on board this insight that there's really a civil war there and that to some extent it is to their advantage that there should be a civil war there, that they should not look to Afghans just as a resistance against foreign occupation? Well, I think the first thing it presents them with a problem in terms – it presents a problem in terms of explaining the conflict to the American people, a problem which is paralleled by that faced by all countries who have got troop contingents or other forms of contribution to the Afghan intervention because they – very clearly this administration's strategy starts from the al Qaeda threat. And dealing with a civil war in a far off country sounds very different than dealing with an immediate al Qaeda that bombs could be going off here if we don't deal with it.

I'm sufficiently naïve to think that perhaps honesty enters into these things, that if it is a civil war and that civil war has potential implications for international security, then perhaps it's better to tell it that way because yes, they may work it out otherwise. That they – just as we had domino theories back in the '60s and '70s and it seems dreadfully embarrassing to remember it now – part of the reasons that Afghanistan is still important is another domino theory, deeply embarrassing, but we're talking about the stability of South Asia. You don't have to stretch things as much as they stretched them in the days when we were worrying about sort of like Thailand or Philippines falling to say that. A substantial territorial gains by the Taliban in Afghanistan, the sight of Afghan cities being overrun by the Taliban or a raid into Kabul, where they burned down the U.S. embassy would lend a whole new impetus to the Islamist movement who are currently trying to destabilize Northern Pakistan, which in itself has got implications for India.

That's – go back, look at it, test it empirically, test it for propaganda value. That's why Afghanistan is significant, not actually because any international terrorist wants to use Afghanistan to plan the next bomb that they're going to plan.

So the first implication is they've got to rethink the story and what they say to their own people. But then, in terms of how you deal with it, it got lots of implications. One of the first things is that it means that what you're doing there is intensely political and you've got to shape yourself up to be led politically because if there's something which has been wrong with the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan over the past eight years, it has been the U.S.'s inability to do politics. We've don't engineering. We've had – we're trying to do institutions. We've don't military, but operating in a politicized

environment like Afghanistan, particularly when your key strategic partner is so political and you go in there in bureaucratic mode, just – doesn't work.

So the first thing is you've got to retell the story and the second is you've got to wake up to the fact you're going to have to do politics.

MS. WADHAMS: Okay, let me open it up for more questions if that's okay. Andrew Axelman (ph), then after Andrew, you go. We'll have this gentleman. Thank you.

Q: Hi. First off, I just want to thank the three panelists for coming here. We have three no kidding Afghanistan experts talking to us today and oftentimes here in D.C. you hear a lot from generalists who study Afghanistan. And I myself fought in Afghanistan, but I confess to be in the generalists as well. A lot of times when security studies folks approach Afghanistan, they approach Afghanistan looking at the larger body of literature, civil wars of insurgencies, and come with a few conclusions that then they apply to Afghanistan. And I'd like to ask Gilles if he'd shoot this theory down and the Michael to expand upon something that he discussed in his USIP paper. When you look at civil wars and insurgency in general, you come to the conclusion oftentimes as – (inaudible) – did that the causal relationship between collaboration and control is pretty one sided. In other words, that if you're trying to achieve collaboration or reconciliation or reintegration, what you first need to do is establish some sort of control of the population of a territory before reconciliation or reintegration is possible.

Now, one of the conclusions that people then draw from that is that in order to set the conditions for reconciliation or reintegration in Afghanistan, what you first need to do is have a surge of troops into a certain area and establish control over a population center or over a piece of territory. Now, Gilles says that's exactly the wrong answer in Afghanistan and that's be that work across purposes.

Michael, you talked in your USIP paper a little bit about military pressure and how in certain cases it's been advantageous if a leader is getting hammered by force, he or she is more willing to then go forward and maybe come to the bargaining table. And I'd like to get you, Michael to expand a little bit about on that. And then – and Gilles, tell me why the generalists are wrong. Tell me why the literature doesn't apply to Afghanistan. Thanks.

MS. WADHAMS: Thank you. And then we get one more question. This – sorry, just.

Q: I'm Raja Karthikeya from CSIS and thank you very much for this great panel. And Joanna, your research has been really helpful to my work. Based on my experience in Afghanistan, most recently as an observer for the last runoff elections – (laughter) – I want to actually pose three hypotheses and I would appreciate your comments on that.

First one, to what extent are the Taliban subordinating Pashtun nationalism. We don't hear about this much. It's not even discussed that the idea of Pashtunistan being a factor for Pakistan to even be interested in Afghanistan is not even discussed in mainstream media for some reason. But as now, Taliban, who were traditionally seen perhaps as traitors to the Pashtun nationalist cause, seem to be subordinating this cause, based on what I've seen in their propaganda, is this correct?

Secondly, we're talking about – when you talk about reconciliation, we're talking about the Taliban giving up one part of the world view that Gilles talked about. That is giving up a fight against coalition forces in the country.

Now, are we prepared then to accept the other elements in their world view if coming to the administration?

And thirdly, firstly is every insurgent in Afghanistan today a Taliban and if not, to what percentage of the insurgency today actually comprises the Taliban?

MS. WADHAMS: Great. Two really good questions with lots of sub-questions. Do you want to start, Gilles?

MR. DORRONSORO: Yes, about the insurgency, the generalists, the problem is in fact that a large part of the literature on insurgency is not – at the beginning, at least, is based on very concrete cases. And that's interesting to see, for example, that Petraeus book about counterinsurgency is actually more or less what the French officers were seeing in the '60s. There is no intellectual innovation really. And at the same time, when you take this mental universe of the '60s and we are trying to apply that in Afghanistan, you're always forgetting that there are implicit things about the counterinsurgency literature of the '60s. The first is that there is a state. When the French were fighting in Algeria or even when the French then, the Americans were fighting in Vietnam, there was a state, nothing to compare with Afghanistan. The level of state building was totally, totally different. Second, the basis of the insurgency, the dynamic of the insurgency was totally different.

We were, at that time, in presence of movements that were small, elitist movements, trying to gain popular support. And that dynamic is not at all what's happening in Afghanistan right now. And so there are other things.

But to keep it simple, I am afraid that the counterinsurgency as what it has been defined by McChrystal is missing a lot of view points that it's never discourse. And the premise is not about controlling something to be able to make a bargain. That's not a bad idea. The premise is what are you trying to control. And the key, absolutely the key two words in McChrystal's report are population centers. What does it mean? There're two hypotheses.

One, it means places, villages that are populated enough to be interesting strategically in the Pashtun countryside and that's what we have seen in Helmand, this

total disaster we've seen on the last three months. Or it means urban centers. Urban centers, then I think we can reasonably secure in two or three years. We can make a lot of progress there. And then it will be a base for the Afghan government to build institution and then to negotiate with the Taliban later.

But you see, if the counterinsurgency strategy means going back, trying to clear the Pashtun areas, it's going to fail. It's going to fail because here we have this major problem of where we are thinking ourselves in Afghanistan. We are thinking ourselves as the protector of the population. And the Pashtun people I don't think see us as a kind of protection. We are trouble. We are the main provider of insecurity in Afghanistan.

When we are somewhere, it's a fight. When the Taliban are in control somewhere, I agree totally, it's – (inaudible) – but if you're doing your own business, you do what you want basically.

So it's all about what Michael said. It's a civil war. So we are not in as a kind of neutral people, working for everybody. That's not true. We are aligned with very special interests.

Quickly on the three hypotheses. The relationship between Taliban and Pashtun nationalism is extremely complex. I would say they don't see themselves as nationalists because nationalism is not their kind of ideology. And inside the Taliban, don't forget that you have non-Pashtun people.

The second thing is that Taliban as Pashtun nationalists is the Pakistani interpretation of the Taliban. And we could speak about that, but the Pakistani view of the Taliban is just an instrument to gain some kind of so-called strategic death in Afghanistan. That's why they are using the Taliban. That's it. And it's most probably that we are going to regret it if it works.

And for the rest thing, I don't have percentage. I don't trust most figures in Afghanistan. But what we can say is first, fundamentalism in Afghanistan is not only the Taliban. Inside the current government, when you see the judicial apparatus, when you see the judges in Afghanistan, today from the governmental side, you see plenty of people who are quite fundamentalists, quite ready to kill somebody because he converted to Christianity or because he maybe said something wrong about the Koran. So to think that people like Saiaf (ph) or even Rabbani – well, Saiaf, okay, it's a easy one – or even people like Rabbani or other people in – or Ismail Khan in Afghanistan are not fundamentalists seems to me a little bit strange.

Let's face it. The guys, who are in charge, really in charge in Afghanistan, whatever the side, are not exactly democrats. Well, that's the point.

MS. WADHAMS: Joanna, do you want to go next and then Michael?

MS. NATHAN: Oh, sure. Just talking about the counterinsurgency question first actually. To be quite honest, I've never really understood clear, hold, build very much. I'm confused about the building. As I said, I don't see that is the vital thing to win people over anyway. And counterinsurgency, all literature, when you go back through it, is very, very clear. This is basically an administrators' war that again and again in Afghanistan we hear the military run in. They then start complaining. Where were the development people? You shouldn't even be going there until the civilians sort of have a plan. There is, as you say, very much constraint on building the governance and institutions in the centers to then move out.

The thought you sort of dash in and then think about what you're going to do there, as I said, I can't find any precedent in any counterinsurgency literature.

I'm not sure it's a civil war. I think it easily could be if the foreign troops leave. And I do think it's important to emphasize that the Taliban certainly do not represent all Pashtuns, that the vast majority of people who are dying today are Pashtuns. So I think that's important to emphasize.

MS. WADHAMS: Thank you. Michael?

MR. SEMPLE: On the issue of generalism and then control of areas, I think where you get the – where the Afghan specifics are very important is that there's a long tradition of indirect rule in Afghanistan, whereby the – which the practice in Afghanistan has been similar to what was codified by the British in the Pashtun tribal areas. But the Afghans were careful to avoid codifying it, which is one of the reasons that they haven't sort of like clearly communicated to us or we sometimes are slow on the uptake about it.

I have seen, for example, in the latter stages of the Najib regime, go and visit Char Darrah and Kunduz, where probably – Gilles was probably there only a couple of months ago – you turn up in the Center of Char Darrah District in Kunduz and there's a broken down health post and there's a broken down vacated school. And there's an office. And there's about 500 meters of scorched earth and then the mujahedin start. And by holding those three buildings and that scorched earth, the Najib government was able to exert some influence on the rest of the district in an indirect rule which continued, the way things had been. Even though Afghans tell us many other stories, denying it, the point is that the administrative center – and there's a difference between administrative center and population center – the administrative center was very important for ruling in the district. That this radius of 500 meters is the area which belongs to Caesar. This is where – what the administrator says will happen, and that sometimes means the rule of law and quite something subtly, subtly different, he, who is appointed by law, will determine what happens there. Everything which happens beyond that 500 meters is all indirectly, by agreement and by influences and it doesn't mean that he exerts no influence on security developments. If it's working well, a decent administrator sitting there, who's got enough backup to be able to avoid losing his district center, of course, he's got a network of 500 people in all the different villages who are cooperating with him, informing to him, and helping him play the game.

So it's not important that he should have a physical military presence in those areas. It's important that he should know how to do this. He should know how to exert in direct rule in those areas. It's codified on the other side of the border in Fatah by what they call "protected areas." That the protected areas are the 5 percent of the territory inside Fatah, where the government rules directly, the political agent does decide what happens. And the 95 percent, of course are dealt with indirectly.

You've got to understand this dynamic if you're going to understand how you're going to behave in these areas, which sort of takes me back to the thing that it's never really going to work when it's the U.S. troops which are trying to do it. It's a reality. The sooner – of course, it doesn't mean that there is any easy option to redefine the military mission in such a way – in one month time or two-month time you can get to a purely political approach. There is a war going on. And pull them back immediately and everything collapses. But there is no part of U.S. government or any international organization that can do that kind of administration to exercise in direct rule, particularly in direct rule in the midst of a war like I saw in Char Darrah in 1990. Which gets us back to the other – the real problem at the moment is not the strength of the Taliban or the somehow poor definition of mission of the U.S. forces or poor equipment or something. It is of course, is the weakness of the key partner and the dysfunctionality of the relationship with the key partners. What happens to what the Afghan government should have been doing over the past eight years of building up a decent administrative service to do this?

Just briefly on the issue of pressure. My wife actually grabbed here saying, "are you implying that it's good to be targeting commanders?" The point was that this operates at a micro and a macro level. I'm sort of like just speaking empirically. I have talked to Taliban commanders who are well aware that there are the third or the fourth person occupying the position that they're in because the previous commanders were killed. They don't want to do that, particularly if – because often the succession of a command is passed on within families, and they don't just acquire the command. They also acquire the dependence of the deceased.

So they're humans. In the presence of an option and also all the kinds of considerations we talked about earlier that of course you have to have some kind of ideological cover. It's got to be fulfillment of their jihadi duty, not accepting money from the infidels. That they want to survive. They want a viable way out of it.

That's at the very local personalized level, but of course it applies to the macro level as well. The more it looks like the whole pack of cards is about to collapse, that the Afghan army is so poorly led and reluctant to fight, that it's not worth a thing, that there is now will in the Western countries to stick with the fight, that everyday Karzai gets out of bed and says, "Omar, Omar, please come to me," in those circumstances there is an appearance of national collapse, which of course is a great deterrent of anybody, even a pragmatist in the Taliban movement, who's highly political, not global, wants to see a

deal, but yes, they're not full enough to put their hand up in a Shura meeting and say, "I think now is a good time to talk."

MS. WADHAMS: Great, well thank you so much. Unfortunately, we have to close this meeting, but thank you to Gilles, Michael, and Joanna for your remarks and thanks, everyone, for coming. (Applause.)

(END)