

# COUNCIL *on* FOREIGN RELATIONS

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*Transcript*

## U.S Policy in Afghanistan

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### Video Audio

MICHAEL GORDON: Well, I'd like to welcome you to the Council on Foreign Relations meeting this evening, and this is an interesting event because we not only have the audience here, but we have Council on Foreign Relations members participating from around the nation. It's also being televised on C-SPAN. There's a media presence. It's a multi-dimensional event with lots of different types of participants.

It's important, of course, you know, everyone turn off their cell phones and pagers and all that sort of stuff that might interfere with the sound system which seems to be working quite well tonight. And as you know, many of these events are done on a non-attribution basis. Well, this is not such an event. This is being done on an on-the-record basis and -- with Ambassador Holbrooke. And I'm going to say a few words about him and then, also, point out an interesting feature of this event.

I think Ambassador Holbrooke's well known certainly to this community. He won't remember, but I remember I first encountered him when I was a somewhat younger person and he was the youngest assistant secretary of State for Asian Affairs. It was a lunch with Tommy Koh, a Singapore ambassador. And then he went on -- of course, he was a key architect of the Dayton Talks which helped quell the fighting in Bosnia, which was a major contribution to stability in that area.

He was, I think, the last diplomat to see Slobodan Milosevic for the -- in a valiant but ultimately unsuccessful effort to persuade him to cede to NATO's demand before the Kosovo air war, which I covered as a New York Times correspondent. And he was -- he's been a columnist for the Washington Post and all sorts of things.

And now, he's taken on, really, what is probably -- may be the most challenging assignment since maybe his young days as a Foreign Service officer in Vietnam. But the Af-Pak assignment -- he's not a special envoy; he's a special representative with an interagency team grappling with the issues of Afghanistan and Pakistan with the understanding that they're interrelated.

And an interesting feature of this evening's event is he's brought a good portion of this team here, and I think they're seated in the front row. I don't know think it's all of them, but he's got a lot of them.

AMBASSADOR RICHARD HOLBROOKE: Almost the whole side here. (Laughter.)

GORDON: And so, basically, as I understand it, if he gets any really difficult questions that he doesn't feel he can answer, he's going to have one of his -- (laughter) -- his aides stand up and take the heat.

Since the policy -- Afghanistan policy has been rolled out by President Obama and a retinue of aides, there's been enormous emphasis, understandably, on the military side of the equation, which is really what I've often generally focused on. How many forces are to be sent, what their role is, and less so on the civilian side and how that's to interact with the military, which is what we want to get to tonight.

And, you know, what's interesting to me about the policy -- just to frame it -- is that if you really go back a couple of years -- three years -- to '06, we had a debate in this city about would the Iraq surge work, and if we sent forces and mounted an effort there could we turn things around.

And I think that it's generally conceded the Iraq surge had an important effect on reducing the level of violence there, and I would argue even in encouraging political progress. And at least on the surface, there are a lot of similarities between the Iraq surge and the Afghan surge. The number of troops is more or less the same. The goal is to partner with indigenous forces and help them take on the fight.

We talk in both the Iraq surge and the Afghan surge about creating political space and time for the government to stand up. We have some of the same commanders. And somewhat ironically, the name of the Bush administration's Iraq surge -- The New Way Forward -- was somehow unconsciously endorsed by the Obama administration, which calls its Afghan policy a new way forward.

But that said, there are also enormous differences. Afghanistan, you have a rural insurgency. You don't have a centralized government. You have the Pakistan issue. You know, it's a very poor country. And I think that makes the Afghan situation really much more complicated and problematic.

So, really, to open up the discussion, I would like to ask Ambassador Holbrooke, you know, we know we're in -- the president has said we're in this fight because of al Qaeda, and in order to take on al Qaeda, it's important to stabilize Afghanistan. And in order to stabilize Afghanistan, we're sending 30,000 troops.

How does the effort you're coordinating -- the civilian side of the equation -- contribute to this? And how is it supposed to work in concert with the military effort?

HOLBROOKE: Michael, thank you, first of all, for hosting this and thank all of you -- so many old friends in the room -- for coming today.

You all know that Afghanistan is entering its ninth year of the war. And the question that I'm asked most often, particularly by people I just run into, is why are we in Afghanistan. I think most of you know the answer, but to back into Michael's question, I just need to state clearly at the outset that we're in Afghanistan for the simple reason that it was from Afghanistan that we were attacked on September 11, 2001.

It is obviously true that the people who did the attack were driven east into Pakistan, and that's why we now talk about Afghanistan and Pakistan as an interrelated situation. And I will state right up front that success in one country requires success in both. We will not be able to succeed in Afghanistan unless our Pakistan policy is equally successful. While the troops are in Afghanistan, the hard core of our core enemy is next door.

So why are we in Afghanistan? We have examined in the last 11 months and in the course of this intense policy review -- and I would just note parenthetically that of all the policy issues I've ever been involved in discussing going way back to the formulation of our Vietnam policy when I was a very junior officer in the Foreign Service and I worked for some of the people

I can see out there in the room and worked with others, this has been the most thorough, the most detailed, the most careful and methodical policy review I've ever participated in.

President Obama himself chaired in numerous meetings. And for every meeting we had with the president, we had meetings with the principles and the deputies. And we're going to have another one tomorrow to continue focusing on how we implement, and much of what we're talking about today we'll be talking about again tomorrow down the street here.

The consensus of this discussion over and over again was that you could not, at this point, separate the Taliban from al Qaeda. I need to underscore that. If the Taliban were just another awful odious social movement with terrible values, with certain points of view we don't agree with, it would be a serious problem, but it would not justify the commitment of what will ultimately be 100,000 American troops after this build-up is completed and a good number of our allied troops numbering in the 35 (thousand) to 45,000 range at least, including build-up and commitments still to come.

But the separation of the Taliban from al Qaeda is not currently on the horizon. The leaders of the Taliban and the al Qaeda are deeply intermeshed as are certain other groups like the Haqqani Network, which are critically important in this story.

So it is our judgment that, if the Taliban succeed in Afghanistan, they will bring back with them to Afghanistan al Qaeda. Al Qaeda will then have a larger terrain from which to operate, and they will have the most enormous international psychological, political victory imaginable to inspire more of the kinds of people who threaten our homeland. That is the core rationale, and from that was derived the core goal to destroy al Qaeda, to defeat al Qaeda.

That's going to take a while, and everybody in this room and everyone in the United States needs to recognize that, while our troop commitment is not open-ended, our -- we have not -- we're not going to abandon Afghanistan as happened in 1989 and it started to happen in 2004, 2005 with disastrous results. This is a critical component of what the president announced at West Point on December 1.

Now, as Michael suggested, I don't want to dwell too much on the strategic and political issues, although happy to answer your questions on it, because my mandate was clearly the civilian side of the war. When President Obama and Secretary Clinton announced my job shortly after inauguration formally, it was stated that General Petraeus and I would be counterparts and work together. Now, there's a problem there. He has more airplanes than I have telephones -- (laughter) -- but we work very closely together. David Petraeus is a good friend of mine, and I have the most enormous respect for him.

And at the field level in Kabul, we have the relationship and parallelism between our ambassador, Karl Eikenberry, and General McChrystal but with one important caveat that you all should focus on and that is that Stan McChrystal is dual-hatted. He's the American commander reporting to General Petraeus. He's also the NATO ISAF commander reporting through the chain of command up to the NATO headquarters in Brussels.

So it's a little more complicated in Kabul, but the relationships there are very close.

GORDON: Well, let me ask a question at this point. You gave a good -- an explication of the reason as you see it for the involvement in Afghanistan but now in terms of how we execute this strategy, a number of important questions arise. And a big one -- and it does speak to your portfolio -- is the issue of a sanctuary in Pakistan.

And certainly in the case of Iraq, we had Iran providing lethal assistance to Shi'ite militias, we had the Syrians turning a blind eye to some foreign fighters crossing. But we didn't have insurgent leaders headquartered across the border with significant numbers of fighters moving back and forth across -- more or less at will. And it seems that the Pakistanis have taken on the Pakistani Taliban, but according to recent comments by General Petraeus, they have not really stepped up to the issue of the Afghan Taliban.

What specifically have you and your team done to pursue this problem, to deny these sanctuaries and to get the Pakistanis to take this action? Because without it, it's really hard to imagine the United States making the kind of progress it would need to make by July of 2011.

HOLBROOKE: I agree with your general comment at the end, Michael. I would simply say that this is a matter of the highest concern to us. We had had more high-level visitors travelling to Pakistan than any other country in the world since January 20. We feel that Pakistan did not get the attention it required in the last eight years, and to a considerable extent, the attention it got was focused in the wrong areas.

We have to look at Pakistan in its entirety. It's the second largest Muslim country in the world. It is true, as you say, that, in its western areas, are some extremely dangerous people who openly and directly threaten the United States, some of whom are al Qaeda recruiting people for international terrorism and some of whom cross the border, as you point out, to fight against the allied forces.

At the same time, we need to broaden out our approach. In recent months, Secretary Clinton and I went over there. General Jones, national security adviser, went over there. Admiral Mullen is there today or tomorrow. General Petraeus was there yesterday. I look forward to going back next month. I'm just working out the schedule now. I was with the Pakistani ambassador this afternoon at some length going over this.

And we -- in this effort, we want to broaden out our attention towards Pakistan so that we are increasing our civilian aid very substantially. There was a great imbalance between military and civilian aid, but we're also increasing our military aid. I was about -- when you asked your question, I was about to ask to introduce my team so that people here would get a sense of how many issues we cover in our office, but in every case, we cover issues involving Pakistan.

Senator Kerry and Senator Lugar and Chairman Berman in the House passed the so-called Kerry-Lugar-Berman Bill, which is \$7-and-a-half billion over five years authorized money for Pakistan's civilian aid. That was a true landmark bill, somewhat misunderstood in some quarters in Pakistan, but it was designed to bring large projects in energy and water, plus education and health projects, to the people of all of Pakistan -- energy, for example, Karachi, the world's largest Muslim city -- 18 million people -- four hours of electricity a day during the summer this year.

This was creating an economic spiral. Textile mills were closing because of lack of energy. There were demonstrations in the streets. This was creating instability, there are a lot of political problems. And meanwhile, in the west, the situation you described, and we wanted to take an integrated approach to Pakistan in its own merits. And my own personal view is we ought to increase the aid to Pakistan.

Now, in regard to the sanctuaries, I believe and General Petraeus, I know, also shares this view. In fact, I think he said it today publicly to a journalist. I believe that the Pakistanis have made considerable progress this year. They took on the terrorists in Swat and they disbursed them. They moved into South Waziristan, which they had not previously done, and fighting there is continuing.

There have been all sorts of activities to stand up to the Taliban in the west. Is it enough? Well, obviously, we want them to do as much as they will do, but I'm not going to sit here and demand of a sovereign country what they have to do. They know what they should do in terms of their own interests and ours.

We're engaged in the most intense dialogue under the most complicated circumstances with Pakistan. All of you who studied South Asia -- or I can see in this room some of you who've served there -- understand that the interaction between the countries of South Asia creates very complicated dynamics. And the history between Pakistan and Afghanistan, since 1947, has been exceedingly complicated.

And let us not forget that the origins of what we're now dealing with go back to the 1970s and 80s. And there are direct lines from the -- all the way through. And a lot of mistakes were made, which we inherited and we're trying to sort out. But I want to stress how absolutely central Pakistan is to stability in the region by virtue of history, geography, ethnicity and destiny.

And our commitment to work with the Pakistanis as close friends and allies is undiminished. It's not easy, and a lot of what you read is stirred up by the media over there. They have one of the freest medias in the world. But that's the facts.

With your permission, because you mentioned civilians, I would love to let these people just introduce themselves.

GORDON: Well, I think -- let me just ask a couple more questions, and we'll get to the team.

HOLBROOKE: They're getting agitated, you know. (Laughter.)

GORDON: Good.

HOLBROOKE: (Laughs.)

GORDON: And let me squeeze in a few questions here, and then we'll introduce the team. Not to worry.

HOLBROOKE: Don't worry. You'll get your chance in. (Laughter.)

GORDON: But I just want to continue to this theme of what needs to be done operationally as a strategy. And, clearly, an important concept is the desire not to have to fight all of the Taliban and to either reintegrate or reconcile important elements of them into the Afghan political structure.

HOLBROOKE: That's a very important point.

GORDON: And the question I have is, obviously, there is some of this going, maybe not all that successfully according to recent media reports at the ground level in Afghanistan, but in terms of your effort as a special representative and that of your team, have you been doing anything specifically in terms of reconciliation with the Taliban leadership? Have you been exploring this with them? Reaching out to them directly or indirectly with an eye towards creating -- well, some sort of new political compact in Afghanistan?

HOLBROOKE: Well, this is a very interesting issue. And I think we need to be realistic and honest here.

We checked the mission statements of ISAF when we took office. And the mission statement was to defeat al -- was to defeat the Taliban in Afghanistan. And the resources allocated for that was about 30,000 U.S. troops and about an equal number of non-U.S. troops.

So the resource mission mismatch was spectacular. It couldn't be done. And then you have to analyze, as Stan McChrystal has done, as we've done in our office, as David Petraeus has done, you have to analyze, A, could it be achieved; B, what would the resources take to do it; and, C, even at that level, was it achievable.

In Petraeus' strategic analysis done in August and leaked to the newspapers, he addressed this problem, and he came up with benchmark numbers based on classic counterinsurgency doctrine which were absolutely enormous -- Vietnam-level numbers. At the height, we had 550,000 troops in Vietnam.

And he -- and all of us agreed, A, that was neither necessary nor desirable nor would it achieve its stated goal. So we needed to concentrate on what we were trying to do. And that leads us to an analysis of the Taliban once again.

We are not going to try to eliminate every member of the Taliban for several reasons -- neither achievable nor necessary nor are they all devotees of Mullah Omar or al Qaeda. The majority of people fighting for the Taliban in Afghanistan, according to all the information we can garner, are not committed followers of Mullah Omar or Osama bin Laden.

They are people who fight for money. They're people who fight for -- because of grievances against the government -- that's where the corruption issue comes in. The Taliban's greatest calling card when they came to power in the mid-1990's was the lack of an effective and open and fair justice system. And that's still a problem we need to deal with, and it's one of our major programs. And a couple of my colleagues here work very aggressively on the rule-of-law issues.

GORDON: So have you had these kind of contacts? Or is it too soon --

HOLBROOKE: Well, let me get there, Michael.

So the Taliban can be divided clearly into three groups. The majority of them are not ideological, as I was saying. Then there are people who fight in organized units on a local basis. And then there is the hard core.

The leadership of the hard core is, as we've already said, in Pakistan. Our goal is going to include reaching out to what has sometimes been called the reconcilable elements. That is the reintegration program.

Now, one of the major reasons we were not able to do that effectively since January 20 is the kind of 800-pound monster that sat over our heads from January 20 until November 19. From the day we took office until the day Hamid Karzai was inaugurated, the elections hung over everything else we did.

And in some areas, they had relatively little effect, like agriculture and counternarcotics and many specific programs that weren't controversial. And in certain areas, including this one, including rule of law, including anti-corruption, they were so integrated with the political system that we couldn't get them going.

In Karzai's inaugural speech, he said very clearly that he was going to revitalize this program. We have been talking to our allies about it. We've talked to him. General McChrystal and Ambassador Eikenberry both have people working on this. We have people working on it here in this room and back at the State Department.

What are we going to do? We're going to work out a revitalization of very ineffective past programs that offered an opportunity to people fighting with the Taliban. There was an extremely good article in the Washington Post yesterday, front page on this, which outlined how the program had failed. People who had heard that was a -- they didn't want to fight with the Taliban. They came in and they got no kind of benefits. That's a major issue for us.

And so in regard to this issue -- which I consider one of the most important around -- you're going to see a significant change in policy in conjunction with the Afghan government in the coming weeks.

GORDON: I want to ask -- you mentioned President Karzai. I wanted to ask you a question on that, and then we're going to get to your team.

Before the election of President Karzai, it was no secret that many members of the Obama administration -- either as legislators or as vice presidents -- were very critical of President Karzai. It was reported that Vice President Biden walked out on him maybe on more than one occasion.

As a columnist in the Washington Post, you certainly, in one of your columns that I read, were critical of Karzai for not taking action in, I think, regard to -- (inaudible) -- after some abuse. You've had your own difficult meetings with him.

Now, he's the accepted leader of Afghanistan. I think in occurs to me many of these expressions of dissatisfaction were made before it was understood he was, perhaps, going to prevail as leader of Afghanistan. But what is the challenge in working with the government of Afghanistan in this context? Is it possible to -- despite this difficult history -- work successfully with President Karzai? And is it possible to work with other levels and strata of the Afghan government to, perhaps, bypass some of these problems? And how can you do that if Karzai appoints all ministers and governors?

HOLBROOKE: I see no problem in working with President Karzai. He was elected. It was -- as President Obama said, it was a messy election. We knew it would be. I said repeatedly before the election it wouldn't be perfect.

Hillary Clinton said very much more eloquent than I can that, to ask a country to hold an election in these circumstances under war with the Taliban saying they would cut off the finger of anyone who had the purple ink on it, which meant they'd voted, was a daunting task. No country at such a low level of education, infrastructure, war for 30 years, had attempted anything like this.

And so it was difficult. But at the end of it, there's an undisputed president, and it is Hamid Karzai. We have no problem with that. Contrary to what you implied a minute ago, it was always clear he would be the heavy favorite. No one doubted that.

Our effort was to make the process as honest as possible. We did not have a candidate. Some people interpret that as supporting Karzai, and some people interpret that as opposing Karzai. Neither fact was true. We were supporting an open process.

And it came out -- as it came out -- and on November 19, Secretary Clinton and I sat in the audience as he gave his inaugural address, which we felt was a good address. He addressed every issue you've raised so far. President Zardari came from Pakistan to present his respect and sit in the front row. And that was a very nice piece of symbolism given the relationship between those two countries.

Now, where do we go from here, in answer to the second part of our question. We have absolutely no problem working with his government. Is it as good as it could be? Is it as good as we'd like it to be? Well, he himself says he'd like to improve it. He had a long section on corruption in his inaugural. President Obama said clearly that he looked for actions backing up the words.

Karl Eikenberry and I spoke this morning about corruption, about the next series of elections. You mentioned the question of ministers and governors. In any government, you don't work just with the president, with the chief of state. You work with the ministers.

There's some very good ministers in the government. The government's about to change. I don't know which ministers are going to stay and which are going to leave. But we have had excellent relationships with many key ministers.

I'll just take one obvious example, the minister of agriculture. The minister of agriculture is a terrific minister. My colleague, Otto Gonzalez from USDA and there's Beth from AID, go out there regularly. We have a major agricultural program which is now our most important non-security program because it's an agricultural country.

And we are working directly with the minister, Rahimi, and with the department of agriculture people in every -- the minister of agriculture people in every single province. We had 10 Americans working in agriculture when I took this job. We have over 100 now and building from AID and Department of Agriculture. And that does not count at least five agricultural development teams from the National Guard from states like Texas and, I think, Nebraska has one. What are the others?

Kentucky, Indiana, Texas, Nebraska -- there's a fifth -- and California. Thank you.

So these are terrific guys. So we have 200 people working agriculture. Agriculture -- we were spending less money on agriculture than we were on poppy crop eradication in the last few years. We ended eradicating poppy crops. We were just driving farmers into the hands the Taliban. And we're building agriculture.

Otto and Beth are headed back out there at the beginning of January to work on building up an agricultural credit bank. This was a great agricultural country. It exported raisins and pomegranates and saffron and pistachio nuts and even wheat and even wine -- good German Rieslings from the Shomali Plains. And that all ended in '78.

And we were ignoring agriculture. And if you get an agricultural economy revitalized, you're going to start to withdraw the incentive, the attractiveness of the Taliban to some of these unemployed youths. So we're going to revitalize agriculture. The Congress has backed us fully on this.

And in this effort, we're not working directly with President Karzai, Michael. He supports it. We're working with the ministries. We're working with the province governors who are good on this.

I could give you many other examples, but I start with agriculture because it is our top non-security priority. And the only priority which is higher is training the police and the army, something I know you'll want to talk about.

So, yeah, we work with the president. We work with his ministers. We work with the better governors. When you encounter a ministry that you can't work with, if you even encounter a ministry that you think is corrupt or incompetent, you have to adjust accordingly. That's just the realities of the nature of the job. And we do that.

But this is a whole-of-government effort in both Afghanistan and here in Washington.

GORDON: I think at this point, following on that, I think this is a good time to introduce your team. And I'd like to move on the second part of this program where the members and participants and press and all that get to ask questions.

But why don't you introduce your team and then we'll move to questions --

HOLBROOKE: What I'd like to do, if it's all right with you, is ask each one of them -- they've been waiting weeks for their moment -- (laughter). I'd like to ask each one to stand up, turn around, and just say who they are, which agency they come from, and what they do very, very quickly. And one point there, we do not have one agency here. They're located in Langley, and I can't remember their name -- but they're not -- they can't join us.

So there are 10 agencies on our team. It's certainly the largest interagency effort ever assembled in the State Department. And it is, I might say, in my career -- and I joined the Foreign Service a long time ago -- this is the best team I've ever worked with.

So in no particular order, starting with Vikram and going this way -- it's almost the entire right side of the room -- (laughter).

VIRKAM SINGH: Hi. I'm Vikram Singh detailed from the Pentagon to Ambassador Holbrooke -- (inaudible) -- work on defense issues -- (inaudible) -- adviser -- (inaudible) -- and on very difficult issues of communications.

RAMI SHY: Hello. I'm Rami Shy from the Treasury Department, and I am working on a list of finance issues both by disrupting illicit financial -- (inaudible) -- and creating an environment non-conducive to illicit financing in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

HOLBROOKE: And let me just say that what Rami did is nothing short of central. There was one person in the Treasury



department at the beginning of this year working on illicit financing. There was a theory that all the money came from drugs. That theory was not true.

And when we asked the intelligence community, they came back and said, no, the largest source is from the Gulf. There's also extortion. Rami came over to our office and, with the support of Stu Levey and David Cohen, under secretary and assistant secretary of the Treasury, and Tim Geithner, there are now something like 25 people -- there are 25 people in Treasury alone -- we're also working with people like Will (ph) Wexler (ph) at the Pentagon -- this is a very big effort, and Rami and I will be going to the Gulf to work on this again in January.

VALI NASR: Good evening. I'm Vali Nasr. I'm senior adviser to Ambassador Holbrooke on Pakistan issues, and I came from the Fletcher School and the Council on Foreign Relations.

OTTO GONZALEZ: Hi. Good evening. My name is Otto Gonzalez. I'm the senior adviser for agriculture from the U.S. Department of Agriculture. We are focusing on working with USAID and the U.S. military on improving agricultural sector jobs and incomes and improving Afghan confidence in their government, particularly, the ministry of agriculture.

DAN FELDMAN: I'm Dan Feldman. I'm one of two deputies to Ambassador Holbrooke. Among other things, I help to coordinate a small team focusing just on international engagement and diplomatic initiatives, in part, to help make donor coordination more efficient. I also help to oversee a range of legal, detainee, human rights and other issues.

HOLBROOKE: And the back story on that is that when President Obama and Secretary Clinton appointed me, other countries began to follow suit. And we now have 28 different countries where I have counterparts. The last one to appoint one was Belgium last week.

Some of these are very important, but we welcome them all whether they're big or small. We'll meet again in the United Arab Emirates in early January. And this is the central mechanism through which we're coordinating an international effort. And this is a work-in-progress, but Dan and his team -- a lot of whom are not here today -- are working with an international secretariat to coordinate the international effort on assistance and to go to the diplomatic issues that we haven't addressed yet.

BETH DUNFORTH: Good evening. My name is Beth Dunforth (ph) with the U.S. Agency for International Development. I work on development and assistance issues in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

RINA AMIRI: Good evening. My name is Rina Amiri. I'm senior adviser on Afghanistan. And my primary area of focus is the political developments in Afghanistan.

JOANNE ARTS: Hello. My name is Joanne Arts (sp), and I'm from the State Department. And I work on deploying the civilians that are going to the increase in Afghanistan.

HOLBROOKE: Now, that increase is remarkable. We had 300 American civilians in Afghanistan in January. They were on six-month tours. Lengthy vacations, 300.

We have more than tripled it by the end of this month, and we'll keep going next year. Joanne (ph) has special authority from the president to short circuit the hiring process so it's a little less onerous, although, frankly, I still think it's pretty onerous, but it's better.

We -- Jack Lew, our deputy secretary, and I worked hand in hand on this. And Jack ought to be on the stage with me on this subject. Tripled the number of civilians with no more six-month tours. One year tours. Anyone whose spouse is willing to take a job can go out as a tandem couple. Although school-aged children are, obviously, a big problem.

This is the largest, fastest build-up we've ever had. And the interesting thing to me was when we eliminated the six-month tours, recruitment went up. And this is -- this is both AID and State and also includes some of the detailees from places like Agriculture.

ASHLEY BOMMER: Hi. I'm Ashley Bommer, special adviser to Ambassador Holbrooke. I do his trips to the region and I also work on communication issues as well as our new mobile products that we are introducing with the mobile banking, the mobile payments to the police, telemedicine, and our SMS programs in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

HOLBROOKE: And this is -- we found that telecommunications technologies -- white simple ones -- have a tremendous value in cutting down corruption. If we get police to pay -- to get paid through telemobile facilities, they immediately discover they were getting paid 30 percent more than their paychecks. You can imagine where the other 30 percent was going. Desertions dropped.

So this is a central issue. The New York Times in its innovative section in the magazine this last week -- 100 good ideas of the year -- listed this as one of them. And it's one of the great innovations we've done. And Petraeus and McChrystal have picked up on it.

DEREK HOGAN: Good evening. My name is Derek Hogan. I'm a State Department Foreign Service officer, senior adviser to Ambassador Holbrooke, and I focus on governance and civ-mil coordination. And particularly in the area of governance, we're trying to help the Afghan government become more visible, effective and responsive to the needs, particularly at the subnational level.

GORDON: I think we should just --

HOLBROOKE: Let them finish.

GORDON: No, I think we should let them finish --

HOLBROOKE: Please --

GORDON: And I'll let you finish so that the audience can ask some questions.

TIM LIST: I'll try to be quick. Tim List from the Department of Homeland Security, homeland security adviser working mainly on border management, cross-border, and customs issues.

ROSEMARIE PAULI: Good evening. I'm Rosemarie Pauli. I'm the chief of staff. I do whatever needs to be done.  
(Laughter.)

CHRIS REIMANN: Good evening. Chris Reimann detailed from the FBI. Police adviser.

MATT STIGLETS: Good evening. My name is Matt Stiglets (ph). I'm on detail from the Department of Justice working on rule of law, corruption, and other related issues.

HOLBROOKE: Three more. Brian?

COLONEL BRIAN LAMSON: Good evening. I'm Lieutenant Colonel Brian Lamson from the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I work security issues.

MARY BETH GRIMM: Hi. I'm Mary Beth Grimm (ph). I'm a Foreign Service officer from the State Department covering economic and energy issues for Afghanistan and Pakistan.

PAUL JONES: Good evening. Paul Jones, deputy to Ambassador Holbrooke and deputy assistant secretary of State for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Derek and I were a little late. We were just visiting with the 51 civilians going out who are training right now at Camp Atterbury, Indiana, with our military colleagues.

GORDON: Okay. I think that was well worth doing. And we're now at the point where -- that you've been waiting for where we're going to try to squeeze in a few questions. And please wait for the microphone, identify yourself, and state your affiliation. And let's see if you can keep your questions concise, we'll try to squeeze in as many as we can.

Right there?

QUESTIONER: Hi. Good seeing you again. We saw each other in Kabul during the election.

HOLBROOKE: Thank you for your work on the observer mission.

QUESTIONER: Thank you.

HOLBROOKE: You'd a great job with that election, Jim.

QUESTIONER: Thank you very much.

I was in Iran going village to village in my previous work while the shah was still there, and I spotted many of the same things I see in Pakistan. I go to Pakistan and frequently go out to the villages. And there was a tremendous disconnect between the top level in Pakistan, the upper-level society, and the people in the villages.

You emphasize AID will look for for energy and water and large projects. I hope, also, that you work on -- get a network and a delivery mechanism to get AID help out to the villages, out to the rural areas where, in Pakistan, only 40 percent of the children of school age are in school.

Thousands of children die every week because of minor health things they could have if they had vaccinations. The hearts and minds of the rural people, I hope, will be an emphasis as well with AID.

Thank you.

GORDON: Okay. There?

QUESTIONER: (Inaudible.) I write for the Pakistani Spectator, and my question is about Kashmir. I asked you this couple a couple of years ago at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. We all know deep down that there is no solution for the Afghanistan and South Asian problem without resolving the Kashmir issue that is controlled by Indian government.

Are you serious to appoint any advisers to resolve this issue? I asked this question to Fareed Zakaria because he wrote a book and he exaggerated Asia and I -- he told me my question is based on racism, that -- that somehow we south Asians are unable to resolve our problem. I told him that we couldn't resolve for last 60 years and, God willing, we will keep fighting for next 60 years about Kashmir unless someone from the U.S. help us.

And my second question is about --

GORDON: One question.

HOLBROOKE: Let me be very clear. I am not working on that problem. (Laughter.)

GORDON: Be glad for that. (Laughter.)

HOLBROOKE: I don't even mention the problem I'm not working on. (Laughter.) It's a game. And when I go to India -- and I go to India frequently and I look forward to going back soon because we keep the Indians we closely informed of our efforts because India is a hugely important factor here.

But whenever that question comes up, your Indian journalistic colleagues try to get me to mention the K word, and I won't do it because everybody keeps saying that either I am secretly working on it or I ought to be working on it. (Laughter.) Well, they're wrong on both counts. I'm not working on that problem. The president addressed it very clearly as did the secretary of State in recent interviews.

And my job is to work on the civilian side of Afghanistan and Pakistan. We all know how important that issue is. Everyone knows it and its long tortured history. But it is not what I do, and it's not what the countries in the region expect me to do. And I think we -- I'd why you ask it, but that's the simple fact.

GORDON: Okay. Rick?

QUESTIONER: Dick, you made some very eloquent comments at the beginning about how important Pakistan is. And you mentioned the Kerry and so forth bills, \$7.5 billion of aid to Pakistan. But we've got to be spending in that same five-year period at least ten times, if not 20 times that amount in Afghanistan.

Don't we have it backwards? You've implied that Pakistan is even more difficult. We just heard 40 percent of the kids in Pakistan are in school and the rest aren't. I mean, the needs there are enormous.

Is our focus in the right place?

HOLBROOKE: I don't think that we're short-shrifting (ph) Afghanistan at all, but I do accept totally the premise of your question. I wrote it before I came into the government. I've been fighting for this since the day I came in. I can assure you that President Obama and Secretary Clinton share that view.

We led up with an enormous increase on civilian assistance for Pakistan in Kerry-Lugar-Berman. We pledged a billion dollars at the Tokyo pledging conference in April. When the refugee crisis hit in Swat and we had two and a half million refugees appear out of nowhere, Hillary Clinton was out there four days later with the first \$110 million. Normally, the United States puts 20, 25 percent of the international assistance in refugee issues; in this case, we put up almost 50 percent and led the world.

We are out there all the time. But as I said in my opening remarks -- and I was preemptively addressing your question, but I'll postemptively address it -- we don't give enough aid to Pakistan, in my view. But it is extremely difficult because of the long, complicated history between the two countries.

And one of the best -- I mean, the best book on this is Dennis Cook's on U.S.-Pakistan relations since 1946. And if you read the whole panoply of the relationship, you see how many ups and downs we've had, how many times there was some kind of misunderstanding.

So speaking for myself -- but I know with the general sentiment of my colleagues -- we should give -- we should give more

money to Pakistan, but it should be an international effort. This is not the Truman Doctrine-Marshall Plan days again where it all comes from us.

The European Union gives a tiny fraction of its assistance. And, finally, at Tokyo, they gave \$500 million, which was a big step forward. And I was in Brussels last week talking to the new -- sort of the new foreign minister of Europe -- Baroness Ashton -- about this. And I think she's going to be a very good -- I think Carla Hills -- you know her -- I never met her before. I was tremendously impressed with the opportunities.

But the answer to your question is absolutely, it's a little bit out of kilter but that doesn't mean cut Afghanistan. It means increase Pakistan, and it means get the international community, which is being pretty generous in Afghanistan -- look at Japan, \$5 billion over the next five years, a 400 percent increase announced in the last month. Got to get the same thing in Pakistan. And that will require national understanding here in the United States led by a bipartisan congressional effort.

And, for me, that is one of the three or four highest priorities is to get our Pakistan assistance internationally up to that level.

GORDON: Let's go over there and then we're going to go to the back of the room.

QUESTIONER: Allan Gerson, AG International Law. Hi.

Ambassador Holbrooke, could you discuss the benchmarks that you have in mind for the success of your programs and, also, how you assess the chances of success?

HOLBROOKE: Allan, the Congress asked for and the president separately asked for a series of metrics or benchmarks to measure our progress. Those were laboriously hammered out in interagency process which was directed by the National Security Council with input from some of my team.

Quite honestly, they're pretty technical. And for me to go into them now would be diversionary. All of you can imagine what they are. And so I'll just leave it at that. They're publicly available, and they've been shared with the Congress.

Congresswoman Harman -- Chairman Harman was very instrumental in helping us hammer through to that, and I'm glad to see Jane here today because she's been very active in helping focus us in that area.

GORDON: Over there? The woman over there? Yeah?

QUESTIONER: Hi. Pam Constable from the Washington Post.

I'd like to raise an issue that's sort of hard to quantify, but it's very powerful. I appreciate everything you've said, and I have no doubts about the -- either the good will or the expertise of all the efforts that are going into Pakistan today.

But as someone who has lived there for much of the past number of years, I don't discount something else, which is an extraordinary sense of what I sadly call defiant self-destructiveness of Afghans.

I can't quantify this, but I think that there are a lot of Afghans who hate us more than they hate the Taliban and, certainly, more than they hate al Qaeda. So my question is then: With this surge that's coming, both military and civilian, in which many, many good intentioned, highly qualified people will go into this country, some of them will die. What are you -- all of you -- doing to try and counter the extraordinarily perfidious and persistent notion among Afghans that we are the enemy?

It's not for nothing that Afghanistan is called the "graveyard of empires." And I think you understand that much better than I do. So thank you.

HOLBROOKE: Well, thank you, Pam. I don't know if I understand it better than you do because there's no reporter in the field that I admire more. And I'm astonished to see you here. I go -- every time I go to Kabul, I ask to see you and you're always in some remote area, and we've only actually met once.

But you remember we were in our agricultural staff meeting in Kabul when we discussed these issues. And I'm glad to see you here.

First of all, you talked about -- it was an interesting phrase -- I'd never heard it before. Defiant self-destructiveness of Afghans. I've even seen that in the United States, Pam. (Laughter.)

Then you alluded to the fact that some Afghans hate us more than they hate the Taliban, but you know as well as anyone that that isn't universally true. Every single public opinion poll -- and there are polls in Afghanistan, and Afghanistan is a poor country with a high illiteracy rate but very sophisticated politically. They've lived politics for centuries without quite realizing that's what they lived.

They don't like the Taliban. They know what the black years were about, and they don't want to return to it. At the same time, what knits Afghans together is their sense of being Afghans whether they're Pashtun or Hazara or Tajik or Turkmen. There's never been a separatist movement in Afghanistan, whereas, it's neighbors, Pakistan, Iran, and, if you will, the Soviet Union until it fell apart -- all had separatist movements. What bound them together was the historical narrative that they drove out the others -- the graveyard of empires.

And I greatly respect that otherwise this country wouldn't exist. On the other hand, its geography, its poverty. Its role in history has been, as we all know, as extraordinary and dramatic one. But very few people support the Taliban volitionally.

Now, what about us? I will say frankly that the United States failed to explain to the Afghan people what they were doing there when they went in and when they -- and particularly after the little golden period after the Taliban left when everything seemed possible and NGOs poured in and there was such an excitement. (Inaudible) -- cups of tea drama unfolded, and that book is a perfect micro chasm of it.

But as things turned the other way and civilian casualties began to become a dominant issue and the U.S. made no adequate explanation of why we were there, things began to turn in an unpleasant way. Two of the people who just introduced themselves, Ashley Bommer and Vikram Singh, have been focused with me and with Undersecretary for Public Diplomacy Judith McHale on this issue.

And David Petraeus and Mike Mullen, Stan McChrystal and I have been focused on it. And we have changed the articulation of our presence very substantially in both countries but particularly in Afghanistan because we have to explain it better.

I hear you loud and clear. Every one of my colleagues and I worry about this every day, and that's why we stopped destroying poppies, Pam. You know that. You covered that.

I could not understand why we were spending more money destroying poppy crops than we were building up agriculture, driving farmers into the hands of the Taliban and, instead, with General McChrystal's strong support, we ended that program. We're building up the ag. And we will issue a white paper on this within the next day or two. And at the same time, we put heavy emphasis and interdiction in destroying the drug bazaars.

Some of you may have seen on television during the fighting season these mammoth explosions of drug paraphernalia, opium -- we've done tremendous damage to them. We know from information we receive through various sources that, by removing that irritant, we removed a creating tool.

And now we have to go to work on other issues like encouraging the government to deal with corruption, which is another vulnerability. This is tough work. It's the toughest job I've ever had. And you put your finger on the underlying dynamic.

But let us not doubt why we're in this country. We're in this country for the reasons I stated at the beginning. It's in our own national interest because of al Qaeda. But to succeed, we have to address these issues. And that's what this team and people who are not here today and people out in the field are trying to do.

GORDON: In the very far corner way back there? Yep.

QUESTIONER: Good evening, this is Mohammed (ph) from Voice of America.

I think most of the people in Afghanistan believe that the conflict between Afghanistan and Pakistan -- (inaudible) -- from the -- (inaudible) -- which based on that most like a big part of Afghanistan became a part of Pakistan. So do you have any plan to work on that issue? Or do you have any concern about that?

HOLBROOKE: I'm not sure I follow you. Are you talking about the Durand Line?

QUESTIONER: Yes.

HOLBROOKE: (Laughs.) You know, there's a former ambassador -- he may be here today -- Ron Neumann. Is Ron here? Ron has suggested we work on the Durand Line, and I kind of looked into it because one of the big problems is that we're talking about cross-border operations in an area where the border isn't agreed on.

But it is my reluctant conclusion we really cannot achieve much in that area right now. Most of the international boundaries in this incredible area of the world with the two largest countries -- China and India plus Pakistan plus Afghanistan plus some of the former Soviet republics -- most of those boundaries are not agreed on.

India and China have constant problems. Pakistan and India have their famous problems. And we have the Durand Line. And it is a very, very serious issue, but it is not one I think we can fix in the middle of the war.

So I hear you. I understand the importance of it, but we're not going to put that on the front burner right now.

GORDON: I'm going to ask a last question. It's not my question. It's a question sent in by a national member who have been participating through video means. And it's just Jonathan Paris of South Asia Center, the Atlantic Council of London, England.

And it's about Pakistan. It's about the effect of our Afghan policy on Pakistan. He said: Given that the Obama administration several times during the last few months has said Pakistan is the prize, are you concerned that the American pressure on the Pakistani army to go after the Afghan Taliban inside Baluchistan will ultimately undermine the cohesion of the Pakistani army and contribute to destabilization of Pakistan?

Is that sort of a concern --

HOLBROOKE: I don't think any American official ever said, quote, "Pakistan is the prize," unquote. But what we did say -- and I repeat again today -- is that you can't separate the interconnectedness of the two countries and the previous question illustrated why. The border isn't even agreed on, and there are Pashtun intermarried kinship patterns, family ties across that disputed border.

Are we concerned about these issues? You bet. You bet. And Pakistani officials have said publicly prior to the president's decision and since the president's decision to send 30,000 additional troops, they said very clearly and very honestly, you know, in 2002, you drove the Taliban and al Qaeda east into Pakistan without consulting us or preparing us, and we inherited the consequences, and we need to be consulted. And Stan McChrystal, with our strong encouragement -- and Ambassador Eikenberry similar encouraged -- go to Islamabad pretty regularly with no publicity in order to talk to the government and the military about these operations so that, this time around, we are very much more conscious of the fact that if we have an operation opposite Baluchistan, the more successful it is, the more it might put pressure on our ally in Pakistan, and we have to coordinate it.

And while it is far from perfect -- it's very complicated because there's so many moving parts -- we have really moved the ball forward here in terms of close coordination. And I've talked to General Kayani and General Pasha, the head of ISI, about this. They're very -- I think they're very pleased with the constant flow of information between us and them.

As I said earlier, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the commander of CENTCOM have both been in Islamabad yesterday and today or tomorrow. And we are in constant communications.

That doesn't make it perfect, and this is a very important question. But we are fully conscious of it, and we are working on it continually in close collaboration with our Pakistani friends and allies.

GORDON: I'd like to thank Ambassador Holbrooke and, really, all the members of the team that came here tonight -- (applause) -- for an interesting discussion. And with that, I'm closing the meeting and reminding everybody that this is on the record. (Laughter.)

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