

THE INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR

"AFGHANISTAN IN 2011 AND BEYOND: COUNTERINSURGENCY, TRANSITION  
AND DRAWDOWN"

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**FEATURED SPEAKERS:**

RETIRED ARMY GEN. JACK KEANE, CHAIRMAN OF THE ISW BOARD OF  
DIRECTORS

SEN. JOHN MCCAIN, R-ARIZ.

SEN. JOSEPH I. LIEBERMAN, I-CONN.

**MODERATOR:**

MICHAEL O'HANLON, DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH AT BROOKINGS INSTITUTE

**TEXT:**

O'HANLON: Good afternoon, everyone. I'm Michael O'Hanlon from Brookings, and thrilled to be here today. Thank you to the Keane Center and to the Institute for the Study of War.

I know General Keane and I are thrilled for the opportunity, and will be joined soon by a couple of senators you may have heard of who are presently voting on the candidacy of somebody else you might've heard of to potentially be the director of the CIA. So, we'll see them soon, as I think you were just informed.

But we'll start right away because we have General Keane, and not too long, to discuss a big topic. And we look forward to involving you in the conversation as well. And General Keane, as you know, was vice chief of staff of the U.S. Army, retired in 2003. He also is one of the principal architects of the surge strategy in Iraq once he was out of uniform, but thinking through the problem back in 2006. And he's been, of course, a mentor to General Petraeus throughout Petraeus's career, and continues to be an adviser today.

And, General, it's just an honor for me to be able to talk with you about Afghanistan today. I thought the most natural thing is to begin with a big, broad question. We spent a lot of last week debating whether the president was trying to rush our forces down too

quickly. I'm sure you'd like to comment on that.

But more generally, where do you think we are in the mission? Do you think that we are in a reasonably good place? Do you think we are in a place that's got a lot of potential, but we're still trying to turn the corner? And how does this troop decision influence the trajectory of the war?

I want to -- I'm going to follow up by asking about, at a more detailed military level, what is General Allen going to have to do to adjust, potentially, to this smaller troop total than he initially might have expected. But let's start with where you think we are right now and how you see the war at this moment, June 30, 2011.

**KEANE:** Well, from a military perspective, we're probably in the most favorable position we've been in since 2001 when we took the Taliban regime down when we were aiding, obviously, the Northern Alliance. And that's the case because we've never been able to put a counterinsurgency strategy in play in Afghanistan as we were finally able to do in Iraq in 2007 and 2008.

The counterinsurgency strategy obviously came about as a result of the White House review back in 2009, and the president's decision to put that strategy in place and also to provide the resources for doing it. You should recall that the request for those resources by Petraeus and McChrystal were 40,000 troops. They actually got 30,000. That does affect the campaign.  
Hey, Senator. Good to see you.

**MCCAIN:** How are you?  
(CROSSTALK)

**MCCAIN:** I believe -- I agree with everything that General Keane said. That's unusual for a Navy guy.

**O'HANLON:** Your timing is very good because he's actually just beginning the response to the very first question, which is sort of where we are in Afghanistan. And I look forward to hearing your take as well in a moment.

**KEANE:** So, overall the military situation as a result of the decision to put 30,000 additional forces in gave us the capacity for the first time to put counterinsurgency in play. And the main effort was Helmand province and Kandahar province.  
Welcome, Senator.

**LIEBERMAN:** General, good to see you.  
(CROSSTALK)

**KEANE:** And as a result of that main effort we've been out for about 15 to 16 months, we have handed the Taliban a major defeat in the south. We have taken their safe havens away from them, their strongholds away from them. This is the birthplace of the

Taliban, remember. This is their ideological center.

We've been involved in some of the fiercest infantry fighting that our infantry has ever been involved in going all the way back to World War II. And as a result of that, the Taliban are not -- are not going to take that ground back as long as we are able to stay where we are on the ground with the Afghan national security forces.

Why? Because they cannot generate the force ratios, and number two, the people are aligned with us. And that's very significant. We took 50 IED factories away from them and hundreds of caches. Their entire logistical infrastructure, we took away from them. They can't sustain themselves in the future there.

And what's significant about that, the people gave us more than half of that after we killed or captured and drove the Taliban out of there. So, what we have done in the south is very significant.

They're trying to get back now, but they're not going to make it back. They're going to resort to desperate attacks, trying to kill police, government officials. And they made a strategic decision to kill Afghan people, some of which you've already seen. All that said, part two of this campaign, because we had 30,000 versus 40,000, we had to do this campaign in two parts. Part one I just described. Part two is the Haqqani network east of Kabul. And the plan is to do that in 2012.

If we had the 40,000 that Petraeus and McChrystal had requested, that would've been ongoing right now, simultaneously with the plan in the south. And obviously when doing military operations, as much pressure as we can put on an enemy at the same time is to our favor.

The second part about that, it also keeps our own casualties down because we -- the enemy's not able to re-set, as they will be able to in terms of what we're going to do in 2012. And there's no secret about what our intentions are in the next year. So, we have made significant military progress, to answer Michael's question. Politically we have an ineffective, corrupt government in Karzai. I don't believe we're going to much change that from now until the election in 2014. I think we'll continue to work at the margin. We don't isolate him. We work at -- with him as a partner, in my judgment. But we have to recognize what's realistic and what's not.

Politically we should be moving towards an election that's open and free in 2014, a red line that Karzai does not stay, does not manipulate the constitution so that he can stay in power. That would be outrageous if that happened. And also I think we would lose whatever support remains in the American people and also in Europe if -- if such a thing did occur.

There are opponents out there who certainly are somewhat credible and want to reform Afghanistan. Whether they will do it to the degree that they suggest, I don't know that, and I don't think anybody does. But they would probably be better than what we have

and give us something to work with.

In terms of the decision that the president announced, in my own mind, I'll be quite frank about this, I think it's a pretty irresponsible decision because I think it undermines the gains that we have made, and those gains have been rather significant.

I think there's a certain recklessness to it because what it does is it's going to force us to do more against the Haqqani network with considerably less. And that's going to drive our casualties up, make no mistake about it, as long as we're still trying to execute a counterinsurgency strategy and make the kind of progress we want to do by -- by 2014. So, General Allen's got a huge challenge on his hands to still deal with the part two of the campaign against the Haqqani network. We're currently in a military stalemate with - - try to generate the forces to do that and continue the momentum we currently have.

O'HANLON: Senators, if I could ask you to comment on the same general spirit. But you both in the recent confirmation hearings made your concerns and questions apparent. And I'd like to ask -- maybe go one step beyond that today and comment on whether you think the mission is still doable with the current drawdown trajectory. Is there a necessity to try to persuade President Obama to redefine what the summer means so that maybe the forces can stay into the fall next year? Or is there a potential for workaround where there are some ways you can imagine that we can still be successful, even with smaller forces than battlefield commanders apparently had requested? So, I'd be very curious for your reactions.

**LIEBERMAN:** After you.

**MCCAIN:** Thank you, Michael. And by the way, thank you for your many contributions to the debate and discussion over a number of years about America's national security challenges.

And as I mentioned before, I'm a great admirer of General Keane's. And the general was one of those that -- one of the key elements in the architecture and more importantly the selling of the surge in Iraq back in 2007.

I can't add a lot to what General Keane said except that I hope, obviously, that this strategy will succeed. We've spent an enormous amount of American blood and treasure. And the consequences of failure in Iraq (sic) are -- I think are far more impactful than perhaps we even appreciate today.

The fact that Afghanistan could not only return to the Taliban, which is so odious to us as the principles of our nation. But I'm afraid that Afghanistan could become a cockpit for conflicts of other nations in the region: Iraq, India -- excuse me, Iran, India, Pakistan. I think there would be an enormous potential for long-lasting and terrible conflict there if we fail there, not to mention the impacts on the United States' influence in the region. So, I hope that it can succeed. I think that General Allen is a worthy successor to General Petraeus. I think that the quality of the leadership that we have from the

noncommissioned officer all the way up is the best I have ever encountered, far exceeds expectations that I have had.

When I see an individual that says, "I'm on my fifth tour to Iraq or Afghanistan," and they want to come back. They think that -- and you know I'd like to mention one other thing. And I won't go on too much longer.

But when you hear someone say that our troops are exhausted, then you haven't been talking to the troops. You haven't been talking to these leaders. They're exuberant. They're -- they're winning the fight. And I can guarantee you when you lose the fight, the few of us old ones that remember what happens when you lose, that's when you get exhausted, is when you lose.

So, I'm very, very, very worried. And so, these decisions were made without military -- recommendations from our military. The commander-in-chief is the commander-in-chief. I understand that he makes his decisions based on a broad variety of input. But I know of no military expert that I know of that believes that this was a wise decision to base withdrawal on a calendar, rather than conditions on the ground.

**LIEBERMAN:** I'll just add -- just add briefly to that. Am I audible? OK. I am to myself. That's the good news.

But to answer your question, Michael, one, we not only can succeed in Afghanistan, we are succeeding now and we've got to succeed for all the reasons that Jack and John have said, which is we do have vital national security interests on the line there in terms of the future of Afghanistan, the future of the region, and the future of American credibility in a very dangerous world.

The other thing, and the reason why the three of us reacted as we did to the president's announcement, is that we have learned, notwithstanding all of the remarkable technological advances in warfare, that numbers matter, troops matter, particularly in this kind of counterinsurgency combat.

So, there are some risks that I worry about that are taken in the drawdown schedule that really could've been altered quite easily. I mean, generally speaking, all of us agree that the 33,000 surge troops should be out, if I can put it this way, as soon as possible after the end of the next fighting season. To demand that they come out in September, it's -- all you'd have to do is move that forward a couple of months and there would be a lot less risk.

I guess my hope here -- so to answer your direct question, can we still succeed? We can. I thought the most hopeful exchanges with General Allen the other day at the Armed Services Committee were when he made clear that he believes that he's been given -- to simplify this, but I think this is the way he understands it. He's got to draw down 10,000 troops this year of the surge and 23,000 by the end of September next year. But the pace at which he draws those down in those two blocs

and the nature of the troops he draws down to -- to reach the 10,000 and then 23,000 are up to him as the commander of our forces.

The second thing to say is that he assured our committee in response to questions that if he feels that something's happening on the ground, events are happening on the ground that suggest that the schedule that the president has decided on is really jeopardizing our mission, our security of our forces, then he will feel a responsibility to report that up to the chain of command to the president and ask that the withdrawal schedule be delayed. And of course we will -- our committee will monitor that carefully because it's so important that we do succeed.

O'HANLON: Thank you.

**MCCAIN:** By the way, Michael, we're -- Lindsey, Joe and I are leaving tonight to go back. We've spent 4th of July either in Kabul or Baghdad for a number of years now. We're looking forward to being there on the 4th.

O'HANLON: Colonel Graham?

**MCCAIN:** Colonel Graham. As I mentioned at the hearing, that's the millstone that General Petraeus has had around his neck all these years having to deal with Colonel Graham.

O'HANLON: I've just got one more question for each of you, and then I know the audience is going to want to participate.

General Keane, if I could follow up on the campaign plan, and I realize there are some things that you probably haven't sorted out yet yourself and some things you may not want to say publicly about how you could imagine compensating for a more rapid withdrawal than you would've recommended. But can you anticipate at least some of the broad contours of what one might have to try to do?

Does it mean that the war is going to last longer, for example, because we're going to have to use a smaller force over a longer period of time to clear the same land? Does it mean we're hoping more that the Afghan army can ultimately do it itself as it improves and grows? I mean, what are the alternatives to the original campaign plan that you had laid out?

**KEANE:** Well, on the surface of it, if you're going to do more with less, and that obviously if there's no change to the timetable, that's what will happen. That would probably mean more protraction of the campaign plan. In other words, it'll take longer. So that -- that's -- that's probably a given.

But in terms of how do we mitigate less forces, well there are a number of things that we can do, certainly. The Afghan national security forces, and we should all be encouraged by what's happened here with them and particularly the army. Their numbers are now considerable. The whole force is moving towards 300,000-plus.

And the army, I spent a lot of time looking at this, is a credible force. It fights side-by-side with us at platoon and company level. Our commanders have confidence in it. And look, we cannot look at them through the prism of the United States forces or through the prism of the West or even through the prism of Iraqi forces who have a history of a standing army. We have to look at them through the prism of that country and what its security needs are and who are they fighting.

They're fighting Afghans who are also illiterate, who also use drugs, who also have problems in their chain of command. Sort of that's what we have to stay focused on. And against that force, they are credible, and that's good news. So, we will be able to gradually transition.

We may take some risk with that in terms of transitioning more rapidly in some places. It may take a little bit more risk than what we had planned to take. So, it would free up some other NATO forces that we could generate some combat force ratio to deal with the Haqqani network.

How we use terrain is an issue. And the degree of risk we take with it.

**MCCAIN:** Could I make one additional comment about this decision? It wasn't an accident to me that President Sarkozy within hours announced that the French would be withdrawing. The British now are talking about it.

All of the other allies are -- because they see the United States. How could a freely elected leader of a nation that you're in coalition with, say, "Well the Americans are leaving, but we're staying"? And I think that's important.

And the second impact is: What now do the Pakistanis believe? What now does Karzai believe? What do the other countries in the region, but particularly those two, believe about our staying power?

And when you have to stay in the neighborhood, and it's a tough neighborhood, sometimes you begin making adjustments to conditions in the neighborhood after the United States leaves. That is very, very worrisome.

**LIEBERMAN:** Yes, I -- I agree with John. That's why I think that the discussion -- the president made some statements in his remarks about the negotiation for a longer-term strategic relationship with Afghanistan. But that has to happen in the foreseeable future, not just to reassure the Afghans, but to put our enemies in the -- in the region on notice that we're not departing. Because what they'll -- what they'll focus on, and they already have -- you can see it in actions that have occurred since the president's statement -- are the fact that we're beginning a withdrawal.

I -- I want to add this other point about the domestic scene here. I was -- I've been thinking that, you know, the old notion that nothing succeeds like success. It's also true that nothing fails like failure. And just two comments I'll make about that.

One is that we've been succeeding in Afghanistan. So, and -- and that's part of why the polling numbers here in the U.S. and in Afghanistan have actually gone up. Quite interestingly, if you look at some of the recent polling on the president, and we know his numbers have gone down because of the domestic economy. Actually the three areas in which he has favorable ratings from the American people are Iraq, Afghanistan and terrorism. Now, terrorism probably affected by the recent killing of bin Laden.

So, it's really important that we succeed in Afghanistan for our national security. But insofar as we are in the midst of a time in American history when the American people are down on ourselves and less optimistic than we characteristically have been, nothing will fail like failure here. In other words -- and nothing will succeed like success. Not only over there, but over here in the American people's sense of our own ability to protect our -- our security.

So, that's why the risk taken in the -- in the precipitation -- wrong word -- the precipitous, the acceleration of the drawdown is a risk that has a lot of consequences both over there and over here.

O'HANLON: Senator McCain, if I could ask a little bit more about President Karzai and how you view more generally the state of Afghan politics. And one thing I'm -- if you don't mind my adding one parenthetical -- I've been impressed with some of the Afghan ministers and governors. We talk about Karzai, and we helped write a constitution that gave him all this power. So, we were sort of present at the creation for some of these issues.

But nonetheless, how do we deal with Afghan politics with President Karzai? Are things as bad as they sometimes look? Is there a basis for finding a more pragmatic, cooperative relationship? Do we have to wait for 2014? Do we try to work more with the reformists at the ministerial and governor level? How do you think about that problem?

**MCCAIN:** I think it's that and Pakistan are the two obvious obstacles to success. I've known General -- President Karzai now since the fall of Bagram, the night that it fell. And we met with him and I've watched him over the years.

I've been very disturbed by a number of the comments that he has made, particularly when he calls United States "occupiers." I know he knows better. I know he knows better. I've known him too well and too long.

And part of it is, I think, again, his trying to make sure that he remains if we leave. But I also think that he is sometimes speaking to his domestic audience and sometimes I just frankly am confused by it and deeply disappointed by some of the things that he says. This latest Kabul Bank scandal is very serious. It's very serious. And we have not seen the end of that -- of that scandal. And that could impact the IMF's willingness to give them funding that -- that they need.

He reminds me of the story of the two guys in a small town, and it's Saturday night. And



the guy says to the guy, "Well, where are you going tonight?" He says, "I'm going to the poker game." And the guy says, "Hey, you don't want to do that; that's a crooked game." And he says, "Yes, but it's the only game in town."

So, sometimes I kind of view President Karzai as the poker game in that small town. But I do think that he is very interested -- if I could finally say, and I'm trying to make my answer shorter. I do believe that President Karzai is very interested in a long-term relationship with the United States. And that means some kind of joint basing arrangement or some kind of security agreement. I think that could really have a very big impact on President Karzai and I hope we could move forward with that proposal. There's the outlines of it already in being. Right, General?

**KEANE:** Yes, no doubt about it.

One of the things we should be encouraged by is Ambassador Ryan Crocker...

**MCCAIN:** Yes.

**KEANE:** ... is heading towards Afghanistan. And for the viewing audience, Ryan Crocker is the ambassador who was in Iraq during the surge period with General Petraeus. And we don't turn things around in Iraq without a Ryan Crocker. I mean, that's just the reality of it. He's probably the most effective diplomat we've had in this region of the country.

He's coming out of retirement. He was on his way to retirement when he took the job in Iraq. He's extraordinary. He knows we need a political strategy in Iraq. He's -- he's comfortable with the military strategy, but he knows we need a political strategy. He knows we need an economic strategy to sort of get there and get to 2014 with a better election. Not just at the national level, in the constitution there's provisions for election at the district and also the provincial level.

Right now they're all appointed. So they're all part of the patronage system. We've got to have elections at that level so they -- the people can hold those officers accountable. The most significant political change, I believe, that took place in Iraq was in January 2009 when we had provincial elections. That enfranchised the Sunnis to run certain provinces, obviously the Shiites are running most of the provinces. But most importantly, all of those people are coming up for election again and they're being held accountable by who? By their own people.

We move -- we move Afghanistan in that direction in an area where decentralization of government is the history, not centralization. And this is very important to the political future and stability of Afghanistan.

**MCCAIN:** Joe and Lindsey and I were in Helmand province, the province the governor invited us to his house. Do you know what he called his house? Marine House, Marine House. He said, "Welcome to Marine House."

I mean, our military's developed a relationship at the local levels that is really beyond -- I mean, it is remarkable what our people have been able to do.

**LIEBERMAN:** It's true. U.S. military has in some ways become as good as any diplomatic group that we've got working in the world.

The other thing, I want to come back to a point Jack made because this gets lost in the discussion of Afghanistan over here. Obviously when -- when you have a force as large as ours and ISAF in Afghanistan, the locals bristle a bit. Nobody likes another army in there.

But in the choice between us and the Taliban, it's very clear where the hearts and minds of the Afghan people are. They've lived under the Taliban. They know how insanely extreme and brutal they are. And so, notwithstanding any of the political verbiage we hear from Kabul, it's very clear to any of us who've been there, but also just read the opinion polling such as it is from Afghanistan, that the Afghan people don't want the Taliban to come back into ascendancy.

And that ultimately should make us feel that we're -- give us some sense of confidence that we're on the right side. And that also should help with public opinion here. I don't know if I finished my thought, but I think the -- the reaction in Congress to Afghanistan, which is growing increasingly restless and skeptical, probably has a lot more to do with the general economic condition of the federal government than it -- than it does with what's happening in Afghanistan. Because again, we're succeeding, and we can't let victory fall out of our grasp.

O'HANLON: If I could just press on that a little bit, though, my last question before we go to the crowd.

Can we be successful in Afghanistan even though we are having tactical military progress, if we don't improve our relationship with President Karzai? Are there enough work-arounds? Or do you hope that, as Senator McCain was saying, that there are, you know, ways we could imagine that relationship really improving potentially pretty soon? And then I have just have to throw in, and it's a big topic, but same question essentially for Pakistan. Can we be successful if the Pakistanis don't help us more? And what's the practical amount of progress you might realistically even aspire to over the next 12 to 24 months?

**LIEBERMAN:** Yes. Well, everything in life is relative. So, I'd say in response to those two questions, I'm more optimistic about improving our relationship with President Karzai in Afghanistan than with the Pakistanis, as important as it is for us to do that. Without belaboring the point, to me, Karzai is a capable and complicated leader in a very complicated political situation. I think General Keane really got to the nub of it. We've lost his confidence here.

And -- and Ambassador Crocker really has to try to regain the kind of trust that will also allow us to say, "Mr. President, we absolutely need you to stop doing this or start doing

that." And I think Crocker's got a proven record of being able to do that in difficult circumstances.

So, because the reality is, I mean you know we all talk about the constitutional process. There are worries that Karzai will want to stay on, notwithstanding the constitution, for another term. But the other thing the constitutional process makes clear is that Hamid Karzai is going to be president of Afghanistan until 2014. Those are three critical years, and we simply have to improve our relationship with him. And I believe we can.

**MCCAIN:** I believe we can also with President Karzai. And I, again, a major step in that direction would be an enduring, strategic relationship between our countries. Pakistan, you know, when Leon Panetta testified about they had notified the ISI about the IED factory, and they watched it by satellite empty out. And then the army came. That -- that kind of story is so disappointing, you know, particularly when we're talking about IEDs, for obvious reasons.

I believe that we need a set of benchmarks that -- expectations that we should have for the government of Pakistan. And I wish I could give you a very good answer. But I would think -- I think it's important in our calculations to point out we tried the no relations route. We tried it for 10 years. That movie didn't turn out very well. So, I think that we have to do everything that we can to see that the Pakistanis, particularly the ISI, appreciate the fact that the American people over time, no matter how I feel, are not going to support the expenditure of billions of our tax dollars if we perceive that they have some elements that are working against us. That's just -- I'm a politician. That's just a political reality. And somehow we have to make sure that they understand that. But the option of breaking off all relations, again, we've seen that movie before.

**KEANE:** You know, on Pakistan -- let me -- obviously it's a country of strategic consequence. Frankly, much more so than Afghanistan is, you know given the size of that population and given the growing nuclear arsenal that they have, and the fact that there's a raging insurgency inside the country destabilized -- destabilized the country. And this is radical Islam who wants to take over that country, would have that nuclear arsenal. None of that could we permit to have happen.

So, we have to have a strategic partnership of some sort with Pakistan. But I think it -- it's got to be grounded once and for all on the truth. And that's got to be the basis for this relationship. And sometimes I'm not sure it is.

The truth is the ISI aids and abets the sanctuaries in Pakistan that the Afghan operate out of. They provide training for them. They provide resources for them. And they provide intelligence for them. From those sanctuaries every single day Afghan fighters come into Afghanistan and kill and maim us. There's a direct relationship with ISI's complicity and the deaths of American soldiers and the catastrophic wounding of those soldiers.

The chief of staff of the Pakistani military is complicit. He used to be the director of ISI. He put the guy in there who is in charge now, and he has full knowledge of what I'm just describing. This partnership has got to be based on that harsh reality. There are two ammonium nitrate factories in Pakistan. Eighty percent of the explosive devices that are used to kill our soldiers, kill Afghan security forces and kill Afghan people, come from Pakistan.

All of what I just said to you, when we confront them with this, they lie to us. They lie to us just like the Soviet Union used to lie to us. But we have to have a relationship, in my judgment, that is based on the harsh reality and the truth, and we go from there in developing this relationship.

O'HANLON: Thank you.

Let's go to you. Please identify yourself and -- Stephanie (ph), are you asking me to call on someone specifically? Or just telling me where the microphone is?  
(CROSSTALK)

O'HANLON: OK. So, please identify yourself and pose a question to one of the three panelists if you could.

Let's start up here. Yes, ma'am, in the plaid shirt? I guess you need a microphone, so.

**QUESTION:** Hi. I'm wondering if the three of you can comment a little bit on the macro picture? You keep saying, Senator Lieberman, you said we're winning in Afghanistan. Senator McCain, you said it's a tough neighborhood to be in. And my question is: Why is the U.S. in this tough neighborhood? And what exactly is the U.S. winning? What is the mission that we are winning? Thank you.

**LIEBERMAN:** I'll begin. I mean we're in the -- we're in Afghanistan, certainly, because it was from Afghanistan that we were attacked on 9/11. And we have a -- to me a priority purpose there, which is to make sure that the Taliban or any like group does not come back into control of Afghanistan and have it be a base for another attack against us or our allies. And in that sense this is one of the fronts of what is really increasingly literally a global war against violent -- or with violent Islamist extremism.

The other reason we're there is that this is a strategically significant part of the world, that is the whole region: Pakistan, India, Iran, getting pretty close to the Stans and into Russia. So the stability of that area is critical to -- to the world. And so that's -- to me that's -- that's why we're there.

And what winning constitutes is what I said, keeping -- having the Afghans self-govern and self-defend without a radical Islamist government tyrannizing them and their neighbors.

O'HANLON: Another question. Yes, purple shirt, please?

**QUESTION:** Good afternoon.

Mr. O'Hanlon, you mentioned in your recent speech at Brookings that there's going to be a troop movement from the south to the east probably, and that we are going to begin to focus on eastern campaigns. As a general question for all three of you, is the campaign that is going to come in the east once we have secured the south going to be similar tactically in terms of troop movements, troop levels? Is it going to be the same clear-and-hold strategy that we've taken in Helmand and Kandahar? Or are we going to see a different use of tactics and a different approach there politically?

Thank you.

**KEANE:** Well, I don't think any one of us knows for sure what -- what the rest of this campaign is going to be -- look like after the implications of one third of the force being removed. So, I think we need to leave it up to the generals to what they're going to do. But I do know this. We're an extremely experienced force, and we're very innovative. And our use of combat resources at times is extraordinarily brilliant. And I'm convinced we've got the intellectual capital to mitigate this as best as humanly possible.

And I don't think any one of us will be able to foreclose on what the actual tactics of this campaign look like, or should we get into the specifics of it because it's -- it will fundamentally change from what we have been doing. Not in terms of the overall strategy, but how we mitigate the fact that we're going to have 30,000 less forces to conduct it.

**MCCAIN:** You know, Secretary Gates said -- made a comment that this would cause a transition from counterinsurgency to counterterrorism. This is now the Obama-Biden strategy. This is not Petraeus's strategy or any other military leader that I know of. So, I am confident that General Allen and the other leaders will try to make the appropriate adjustments if possible. But I just don't -- I'm -- I hope that I am wrong. I hope and I'll pray every night that I'm wrong. But I think it's going to be extremely difficult to carry out a successful counterinsurgency strategy.

And we went through this debate in Iraq. They wanted us to withdraw most of our troops and kill Al Qaida from a distance. They wanted to break up Iraq into three different countries. Whatever military armchair general there was, it was a different strategy. And so, I'm afraid that this is kind of a repeat of the debate that went on in regards to Iraq. And unfortunately it's got a different result.

O'HANLON: Another question, please? Yes, sir?

**QUESTION:** Sir, I was wondering about mitigating strategies. We had for a number of years difficulty raising the cap that NATO -- the NATO committee had on the Afghan national security forces. Finally a couple years ago we got it up. It's 300,000-some now. One of the mitigating strategies may be raising the cap again. And I wondered, first, what your assessment on the NATO side, whether that would be something that may -- may come up and then, Senators, on the political side, whether there'd be will to use our money, which of course to pay for the -- for continued increase of the Afghan national security forces?

**KEANE:** Well, I clearly think that's going to be on the table. And I really believe probably where it will come from will be the Karzai government, and particularly the defense minister, who's always had concerns about the number of Afghan national security forces, as you well know. And I think with precipitous withdrawal of these forces, I would imagine that that request will get put back on the table to do that. We have the capacity, with the assistance of NATO trainers, to -- to bring those numbers up if we want to do it. Obviously, the cost is -- is an issue here, as it is on other things that are facing our government. And that would be something the senator would have a better feel for than I do.

But I think that will be on the table. And I think it probably will come from that government as a consideration. And certainly our commanders will be thinking about it.

**MCCAIN:** There's an enormous war weariness out there amongst our fellow citizens. It's very understandable. And we recently saw a number of Republicans in the House of Representatives say that we have to cut defense as well. As you know, General, one of the first things that goes is foreign assistance and anything to do with money flowing out of the country. So I am -- I am very concerned about our long-term ability or willingness, not ability, but willingness to fund the Afghan national army.

It's our job -- it's our job to go to our constituents and explain to them what's at stake here and what the consequences of failure are. And -- but there is an intense war weariness, coupled with the traditional tension in the Republican party between the Eisenhower Republicans and the Taft Republicans, the internationalists and the isolationists. And that -- that battle has been well joined.

**LIEBERMAN:** We have a similar, in case you haven't noticed, tension in the Democratic party between the -- let's see...

**MCCAIN:** Scoop Jackson.

**LIEBERMAN:** ... the Jackson-Truman-Kennedy Democrats on that side. And I don't know who they are on the other side, McGovern and maybe others.

Here -- I give you a little -- a little piece of perhaps hope here about this. Although everything that's been said about the difficulty of any appropriations, particularly money that's going out of the country, is accurate in terms of the current climate.

But some of it -- let me put it this way. Some of those who've been most skeptical about our growing commitment in Afghanistan have argued over the years that what we really should be doing is investing in the Afghan National Security Forces. And, you know, the numbers are pretty clear.

It costs remarkably less to train, equip and put on the battlefield and Afghan national

security force member than it does a U.S. soldier. As the number of U.S. troops goes down, and therefore our expenditures in Afghanistan go down, hopefully there will be some support for maintaining what we fought and sacrificed to achieve at a much lower cost by supporting the Afghan forces.

So, that's certainly the argument we'd make.

O'HANLON: Any questions? Yes, sir?

**QUESTION:** I'm a retired Green Beret, a veteran of the Afghan conflict. I was there in '02 when we stood up Khost and Paktika. I ran the unconventional campaign there. My concern is, sir, I totally agree with the arbitrary throwing a number on the wall, 2014, particularly with the administration change there. It just seems like we're creating risk where none needs to be with that.

What I don't hear is what's good enough for this conflict to remove the general purpose forces, recognizing that special forces is going to be there for generations to come. When this conflict, this war transitions from what it is now to theater security cooperative engagement, what our normal cocomps (ph) do to engage with our allied and our countries of interest with both soft and our non-kinetic approach. So, what I'd like to hear is when we talk about success -- you know, nothing's more successful than success, what is good enough in this case? Because it's doubtful we're going to have an Appomattox or a carrier deck of the Missouri to end this to the American people.

So, if you could articulate a little bit about what's good enough for this, I'd really appreciate it.

**MCCAIN:** I don't think our problem was 2014. In fact, I think that that's an achievable goal. Our problem was when the president announced in 2009 that there would be a withdrawal in 2011. And then our additional problem is to pull those troops out before we had two full fighting seasons. That was the plan all along, and that's, as General Keane has described it more eloquently than I, basically dismantling the strategy that we believe was on the path to success.

The only description I can give is what Joe just gave. It -- I don't think it'll be some kind of negotiated settlement with the Taliban until they are convinced that they can't win on the battlefield. I've never heard of a combat in history when people who thought they still had a chance of winning decided they would quit.

But I do believe what you'll see is kind of what we're seeing in Iraq, a very stumbling, problem-ridden, factionalized kind of democracy that still it -- it stumbles along with two steps forward and one step back. But it's no longer a threat to the national security interests of the United States of America. And it achieves a certain stability in the region that prevents Afghanistan from becoming a cockpit that all of the surrounding nations would be engaging in.

**KEANE:** Well, the only thing I would add to that is these kind of protracted, unconventional wars, I mean, they truly test the mettle of democracy because the end-state of the war is completely ambiguous, and how you define progress is ambiguous. Just think of this. Our generals come forward to the senators' committee and they, as opposed to talking about taking capital cities and making progress with the visions that obviously the American people could tell this is progress. If you're moving back that's probably not a good thing. So, if you're seizing a capital, that's probably a good thing. And we come forward and we talk about the levels of violence as a way to describe progress.

Now, here's another one. The -- the drivers of instability. I mean, and you're -- the viewing audience, an American citizen, listening to that and trying to understand: What is he saying? Does that make any sense?

But these are ambiguous types of war that we're fighting, the nature and character of it. We have to educate our people about these wars much more than what we frankly do, in my view, in terms of what is a definable end state and how do you effectively measure progress.

Why are they so frustrated? Why do these things last so long? These are discussions we should have, but we choose not to have them, sadly.

So, here we are. What is good enough? What is good enough is the Afghan national security force have the capacity to cope with the violence that's there. Right now they cannot.

So, what are we doing, to use that ambiguous term? We are bringing the level of violence down by separating the people from the enemy, as you well know, and aligning those people with us to the point where the enemy cannot come back. And the Afghan national security force can cope whatever level of violence there is in a particular district or province.

It's subjective. They'll use a rheostat to determine what that is. And we're going district-by-district and province-by-province.

Now, this force that's doing this, much of it did the same thing in Iraq. So, we're very experienced at doing it, although the culture's different. The enemy's different. But a lot of the principles are the same. And we'll move along on that -- on that road.

I do think, as I've said, we may be willing to take a little bit more risk with that now, given the force reduction that the commanders are dealing with. And I used to tell people there will be episodic violence in Iraq years after our forces are gone. And what you have to look at that is can the enemy sustain that level of violence where it's a threat to the legitimacy of the regime.



The answer in Iraq is absolutely not. It's not. That's not the case. And that should be the same thing in Afghanistan. And these are subjective judgments that are -- that are being made. But the good news is we have very experienced people who are fortunately making these judgments.

O'HANLON: We have time for one or two more questions. Or do we need to finish? One or two more?

I think I'll take two more together and then just ask the panelists to respond and wrap up as they wish. So we'll take two more.

Yes, in the white jacket in the middle? And then I'll take one other question, please. Yes, right here in the green and black shirt. We'll take those together.

**QUESTION:** Good afternoon. I don't know if you gentlemen have had a chance to take a look. Yesterday, the White House released its new national strategy for counterterrorism, replacing the 2006 U.S. National Strategy to Combat Terrorism. For those of us who observed for the past 10 years and have been working on this, it looks to be a retrenchment and more importantly a focus specifically on surgical counterterrorism operations, as opposed to a much bigger and broader, which has been the case of the War on Terrorism. It specifically takes out bellicose language such as "global war on terrorism."

Given the fact that we're so reliant on our partnerships with other nations, rooting out threats, and more importantly this idea of who's going to be our partner in ISAF in Afghanistan, I would love your comments as to how do we build and maintain the confidence and collaboration of our partners that we've built for the past 10 years.

O'HANLON: And then the other question here, please?

**QUESTION:** I am from Afghanistan. And thank you, first, for a wonderful panel. I would like to have a remark on Senator McCain's comments. You mentioned that President Karzai is after a long-term relationship with the United States in terms of military.

As an Afghan, as somebody who grew up during the Taliban regime, I do believe that, yes, the Afghans are for a long-term relationship with the United States. We do not want the U.S. to commit the same mistakes that they did in the 1980s. And we hope that the U.S. have a long-term strategic partnership in terms of development and security with Afghanistan.

And I have two quick questions, one question for General Keane. You mentioned about the Afghan national army, that it's doing really well. But from the Afghan side, they have always been complaining that we lack equipment, we lack modern weapons in terms of tanks, especially the air force. So if you have any remarks in that regard.

And Senator McCain, you have mentioned about Pakistan, that they have playing

double-deal policies with Afghanistan. We all know that. And recently, there have been a lot of attacks in eastern Afghanistan, rockets, and last night the attack in the InterContinental Hotel. They believe it that it was from the Haqqani network from Pakistan.

And here from the U.S., we are technically rewarding them in terms of giving them billions of dollars every year in aid. So, what is your remark and comments in that regard?

Thank you so much.

O'HANLON: General, do you want to start with whichever of those three questions you'd like to address?

**KEANE:** Well, I'll start with the military aspect of it.

Listen, the defense minister in -- in Afghanistan has always wanted modern airplanes and he's always wanted an armored force. Quite frankly, to deal with the threat that we currently have, our judgment is we should not spend the money on that.

Now, understand this. In Iraq, the money came out of the Iraqi treasury to fund most of the Iraqi military capability. In Afghanistan, the money largely comes out of the U.S. Treasury. So, we clearly have a say in what that force should look like and what we should spend American taxpayers' dollars on.

So, our priority has been and will remain for the future to put a force on the field that deals with the threat that we are currently facing. We all see, as military practitioners, that at some point the -- it makes sense for the Afghan army to be a standing military capable of defending itself against its neighbors with modern weapons. But we see that clearly much down the road from where we are now.

**LIEBERMAN:** I'll respond to the first question because it falls somewhat within the homeland security jurisdiction, my committee, the committee I'm privileged to chair. So, I -- and by way of disclosure, I haven't read the counterterrorism strategy that was announced yesterday, but I've seen some briefs on it. And there are some good parts of it.

It is a -- it has a focus on homeland, self-radicalized or externally radicalized people who are in the U.S. There's no question that the terrorist threat has both expanded globally and also expanded within our country, as opposed to the kind of attack we had from outside coming in on 9/11.

I continue to be bothered, and this will go on forever I'm sure, by the refusal of the administration to use the terms "violent Islamist extremism." They continue to want to say "violent extremism." And there are, of course, other forms of violent extremism than Islamist extremism.

I mean, there's, you know, white supremacist extremism. There's animal rights extremism. There's -- but the extremism we happen to be in a conflict with that has cost us a lot of lives and threatened our security and cost us a lot of money is with violent Islamist extremism.

The second part -- I mean the precis that I have seen that troubled me a bit, and maybe this is what you were saying, is that the -- the focus seemed to be a bit too much on Al Qaida. Now -- now, maybe when I look at the definition of Al Qaida and affiliated groups in the report itself, and I ask for that -- I give that caveat that I haven't read it, I'll feel differently about it.

But we're fighting more than Al Qaida. It was Al Qaida that organized the attack on us on 9/11/01. But we're fighting an ideology. I mean, ultimately this, like many wars we've been in, as the Cold War, is about differing ideologies, differing views of the world. I mean, what we want for the future not only of America, which we're defending our -- where we're defending our freedom, but of Afghanistan, is quite different than what the Taliban with all its extremism and repression wants. And I -- I think we miss something if we just focus on Al Qaida.

In fact, there's a decent argument to make that certainly Al Qaida central, if you will, the Al Qaida that had planned the attack on us on 9/11, has been badly wounded. It is, insofar as -- we hesitate to use words like "victory" and "defeat" anymore, but Al Qaida is losing.

And what's left in -- in the -- in Waziristan or the Al Qaida leadership is greatly weakened. It's -- it's -- it's gone over into Yemen, as you know, and that's something we have to worry about, Somalia, et cetera.

But -- but even if we eliminated all of that, there's Lashkar-e- Taiba. There's the whole Taliban operation. There are just a series of offshoots. And -- and we can't -- that's why this is going to be a long war, and victory will not, as you said, you know, be ratified on a -- at Appomattox or on the Battleship Missouri.

And I just want to say, I don't want to end on a pessimistic point, but this is why also the talk of reconciliation in Afghanistan seems to me to be something that has to be taken with a very large grain of salt because reconciliation suggests that there's going to be a moment where the president of Afghanistan -- let's say Karzai is going to sit down at a table with Mullah Omar and the Haqqani brothers and General Allen and they're going to sign a peace treaty. Don't hold your breath until that happens.

What's more likely to happen is that we're going to, as we're doing now, and that's why we're worried about what we've talked about, we're going to wear down the Taliban fighters and increasingly the fighters are going to give up. And they are going to be reintegrated into Afghan society.

And, you know, Iraq, which we thought we had lost not so long ago, now to me looks

like a success. I'd -- I'd say -- I'd use the word "victory" because I'm, you know, I'm old fashioned. But victory there means that most of the Iraqis are living free, self-sufficient lives. The economy is thriving. They have a cultural life, recreational life, and they're defending themselves.

But as we see in the paper, extremists -- Islamist extremists will continue to blow themselves and other people in Iraq up. And so the victory is not going to be as satisfying as it's been in other conflicts we've been involved in. But it is a victory over what could've been there and what could've been and was actually in Afghanistan not so long ago.

**MCCAIN:** Back, and I think it's appropriate to talk again about Pakistan because I think - I think our prospects for improving relationship with Ryan Crocker and a lot of things with President Karzai, I'm guardedly optimistic. As I've said, I've known him for many years.

But in the case of Pakistan, I'm very concerned, particularly when you're dealing with a government that is -- I don't know if "dysfunctional," but certainly not an effective civilian government. Their influence over the military, as we know, is not significant, to say the least.

So, we really can't -- can't allow without trying to change the situation and the one that General Keane described just for the sake of the young men and women who serve. And all of this is vastly complicated by their nuclear inventory. This is -- this makes it obviously far more critical than it otherwise would be.

Generally in warfare if the enemy has a sanctuary, your challenge is measurably much greater. And that obviously is something that we don't want to have to continue, certainly to the degree that it is today.

As far as what the latest papers that the administration's put out, I think part of it is a recognition Americans are war-weary. I think it would -- I do not imagine a scenario right now where we would commit significant numbers of ground troops.

You look at the reaction to Libya when there was clearly, in my view, a requirement to stop Gadhafi from going into Benghazi and slaughtering innocent people as he promised he would. And that seemed to be greatly controversial amongst some of our colleagues in the Congress.

So, I think it's a recognition that we're going to have to engage in a lot more of the kind of warfare and activities that General Petraeus is now moving over to. I think there's going to be a lot more special operations. I think there's going to be a lot more enlargement of our special forces capabilities in all our branches of the military. And I think that it's -- that it's going to call for more partnerships. And I'd just like to mention Australia. I think that with the rising challenge of China, and I do not predict conflict, but there clearly is a challenge over in the South China Sea and in Asia on the

part of the Chinese.

Relationships need to be improved. For example, the Vietnamese are now our new best friends, which show if you live long enough, anything can happen. The port visit of the USS McCain into the port of Da Nang last September astonished me to some degree. But -- but also with our Australian friends I think we ought to explore joint operating bases. And we are going to have to move our attention to the Pacific region where a lot of the action is going to be in the 21st century.

O'HANLON: Please?

**KEANE:** Can I just add to that question?

I think that's -- if it is as you described it, and I'll accept your word for it, then it is too narrow a counterterrorism strategy. Because when you -- when you see what we're dealing with in terms of what the terrorists want and what their ideology is, the only way you can attack that -- I mean, the use of violence is a form of dealing with it, but it will never defeat them in and of itself.

And what defeats them eventually is the moderates' rejection of the radicals. And therefore we have to use all the elements of national power in changing some of the conditions in the region.

Right in front of us we have the Arab spring. So, we have people on the streets seeking political reform, social justice and economic prosperity. Their model for that is not the Al Qaida jihad model. Their model for that is what? The United States of America is their model.

So, we have these moderates on the streets who are a strong minority seeking this kind of justice from their government. And it's an absolute repudiation of the Al Qaida, radical Islam and the jihadists.

And what we should be doing as much as we possibly can is to influence those regions and in those countries, some of which are strong allies of ours, in terms of political reform, social justice and economic development and -- and prosperity.

O'HANLON: Please join me in thanking a fantastic panel.

(APPLAUSE)

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