



INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR

AFGHANISTAN: REGIONAL SECURITY AND GLOBAL STABILITY

MODERATOR:

**LIEUTENANT GENERAL (RET.) JAMES DUBIK
SENIOR DEFENSE FELLOW,
INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR**

SPEAKERS:

**KIMBERLY KAGAN,
PRESIDENT,
INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF WAR**

**PETER BERGEN,
DIRECTOR, NATIONAL SECURITY STUDIES PROGRAM,
NEW AMERICA FOUNDATION**

**LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOEL RAYBURN,
FELLOW,
NATIONAL DEFENSE UNIVERSITY**

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 16, 2011

1:00 P.M.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

*Transcript by
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.*

ROBERT FEIDLER: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Bob Feidler and I'm with the Reserve Officers Association. Welcome, thank you all for coming. And it is another great pleasure for us to – associated with the Institute for the Study of War and Dr. Kagan and another – I think, Dr. Kagan, we've now done six or eight programs together and they've all been spectacular. Thanks for everything you do at the institute.

KIMBERLY KAGAN: Thank you.

MR. FEIDLER: I am going to give you just 20 seconds of commercial and that is that we have a defense education forum at ROA. We've put on many, many programs throughout the year. You're welcome to attend all of them. They're almost all free. We do them here on the fourth floor below us.

There's a big program coming up on 24 March dealing with Iraq – I'm sorry, Iran, and its threat to Israel and its neighbors. Should be a terrific program. It'll be an all-day program – starts at 8:30 in the morning and no charge. Please feel free to come.

It's a particular pleasure today to introduce our moderator for the program, Lieutenant General Jim Dubik. Jim is the real deal. He's been an airborne ranger, back infantry, soldier all his life: 25th Infantry division commander; I Corps commander; deputy commander, TRADOC; finished up a 37-year career as the commander of the Multi-National Security Transition Command in Iraq and the NATO training mission in Iraq. Well-known for his work in counterinsurgency, security work, police work and I'm very privileged to have Jim as a neighbor.

And so this is an admin announcement: Be sure we turn off all our phones or put them on vibrate. And with that, I'll turn over to General Dubik.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL (RET.) JAMES DUBIK: Thanks, Bob. Welcome, all, today. We'll just say a couple words about the Institute for the Study of War – not very many because on your way out, you can pick up one of these brochures, if you haven't already, to see the work that the Institute does.

Dr. Kagan founded the Institute in 2007 because she realized there was a gap between the perceived understanding of Iraq and the actual facts on the ground. And in good American fashion, she wanted to do something about that. She knew that policymakers were acting on perceptions and not facts. And she knew that there was a lot of misunderstanding and that misunderstanding and those perceptions having a negative effect on policy decisions.

So, not to wait around, she formed the Institute, got some great researchers to start – I was not among them; I was in Iraq at the time – and started working tirelessly to analyze the situation in Iraq, the surge at that time, its effect, where it was working, where it was not. And in very short order, the Institute reputation was established.

I joined on my retirement in 2008 and did so because I was impressed with the work, remain impressed with the work and impressed with the group of people that Kim has gathered together.

In way of introduction of our panel, we have a great panel today and open that discussion. I know the discussion will be lively. First, Dr. Kim Kagan, as I said, the founder and president of the Institute for the Study of War. Military historian who has taught at West Point, Yale, Georgetown, American University; author of “The Eye of Command,” “The Surge: A Military History” and the editor of “The Imperial Moment.” She also authored a good number of essays, op-eds featured in a whole host of journals and newspapers.

Dr. Kagan is now semi-permanently deployed. I can’t figure out another way to say it. She goes to Afghanistan for extended weeks, comes back for a week or two, goes for a week – extended weeks, comes back for a week or two. Never really sure when she’s coming back; I don’t think she knows when she’s coming back. But she goes to serve General Petraeus.

She was on the joint campaign assessment team in 2008 in Iraq. She was on General McChrystal’s joint campaign assessment group and has just gone. Personally, I first met Kim at the receiving end of a series of very insightful, incisive, direct and difficult questions about the development of the Iraqi security forces. So I know her quality from both ends: as a coworker, as a subordinate now and on the receiving end. Kim, thanks for being here.

Second, Dr. – or Mr. Peter Bergen, director of the National Security Studies Program at New America Foundation; CNN analysis (sic); journalist; author; of course, very famously produced the first television interview with Osama bin Laden and has been reporting about al-Qaida, Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, counterterrorism, homeland security for a long, long time for a range of newspapers.

He has a recent book, which, I reported to him, I think is just flat awesome. If you haven’t read it yet, you’re missing – I don’t get anything for this. (Laughter.) If you haven’t read it yet, you’re cheating yourself a (professional ?) educational experience. Of course, he’s also written “The Osama bin Laden I Know” and “Holy War, Inc.”

And last, Lieutenant Colonel Joel Rayburn: Army lieutenant colonel, 18 years’ intelligence, political, military affairs; just back from Kabul, where he served also as an advisor to General Petraeus; helped stand up the anti-corruption taskforce. I’ve known Joel for a while in both theaters of war. And I can say without any doubt that the senior leaders that I know look to Joel for his precise and very broad understanding of things military.

So Joel, Peter and Kim, thank you very much for being here today. I’m going to start questions by asking a broad question of each of you and if you could start, Kim, and go Peter to Joel.

How do each of you see the next six or eight months in Afghanistan? And, from your perspective, what do you think the key or critical challenges might be?

MS. KAGAN: General Dubik, thank you very, very much for the kind introduction and for your work with ISW. It's a pleasure to have you on the team and I hope you're a more polite moderator than I am a questioner when I come to visit places foreign. And I really, really appreciate what you've done today.

In order to think about the next six months in Afghanistan, we really do need to take a little bit of stock of where we are and where we have been. Over the past year, there has been a tremendous counterinsurgency campaign underway, made possible in part by the surge of troops that President Obama authorized in December of 2009 and – which has, actually, been an aggressive campaign to retake terrain that had previously belonged to the enemy.

We were fighting two enemies in Afghanistan – well, we're fighting many enemies in Afghanistan configured into two large groups: a group of Taliban in the south led by Mullah Omar and the Haqqani Network in eastern Afghanistan, led now by Sirajuddin Haqqani.

The reasons why we're in Afghanistan are clear and they remain clear: mainly, to ensure that Afghanistan no longer is, can become, will become again a safe haven for al-Qaida and other terrorist groups that will use Afghanistan as a platform for reconsolidation, for regional instability and for international attack. That's the mission; that's the goal; that is the focus.

And in order to accomplish that particular mission, it is very clear that it is necessary to, on the one hand, prevent the return of the Taliban to power – something that I actually think was perhaps in the cards back in 2009, as the strategy review was underway.

And also, we need to create a legitimate and stable political order – legitimate: seen by the Afghan people as legitimate – such that they will participate in a system of governance that suits them, lay down their arms and in general, work to create stable and enduring solutions to the kinds of local problems that are dragging conflict and allowing Afghans to gravitate toward the insurgency.

That's our aim; that's our objective. And those are the tasks at hand. I'm going to leave it to my colleagues to talk a little bit about the military campaign underway.

What I definitely want to say, however, is that over the past year, a huge amount of terrain has been taken back from the Taliban in southern Afghanistan and it's made a material difference to them. And therefore, as we take a look at the next six months, the first thing that we have to notice is that we've set the enemy back some.

And as is the case, the enemy is fighting for places that it needs to have, that it wants to have, that are strategically and tactically important to the enemy. And therefore, one of the things that we are going to see throughout Afghanistan is a really active campaign by enemy groups to retake areas that the International Security Assistance Force has worked and fought very, very hard over the past year to clear Taliban and to clear of enemy groups and really return to the people of Afghanistan.

So what that means we're going to see on the military side is a pretty violent next six months. The summer campaign season really – driven by the agricultural year in Afghanistan, among other things – really doesn't get going until the March timeframe. And so right now, we're really in the – a little bit of the calm before the storm. We are going to see an increase of enemy attacks.

And I think what's so important, as we understood in Iraq, so too in Afghanistan: An increase in enemy attacks is definitely bad. You know, nobody finds that pleasant. But it is not necessarily the metric of whether or not we or they are succeeding. We actually need to take a more holistic view.

And that really brings me to my next point: What's the point of taking away terrain from the Taliban? What does it actually do for us? And what does it tell us about how Afghan political life might change over the next six to eight months?

And this, I think, is the larger question. It looms very large, certainly when one sits in Kabul and, indeed, anywhere in the country. The truth is that there is within Afghanistan a system of government that has long been able to govern the country. It's not an ungovernable place. It is a place with a history of identification as a national entity and a place where there has been a tradition of governance.

What has happened, however, over the past 30 years, is that those traditions of governance have been eroded and taken very much out of balance so that although there are mechanisms for local self-government that still exist – sometimes anemically, sometimes robustly – in local areas throughout the country, those are not well married up with the system of central authority that was designed through the international community in conjunction with Afghans at the – during the Bonn process back in the early days.

And so what we have is a very hyper-centralized executive within Afghanistan and a rebalancing that's necessary between executive power and local, normative governance: traditions of elders gathering together and holding the central government accountable for the appointment of officials, while the central government provides some funding but also access for those people to a variety of services and, indeed, to the kinds of goods that a government can provide.

Right now, with this relationship between the center and the localities out of balance, we see a lot of discontent within local communities with their government. That is, at heart, a driver of insurgency. It's one of the reasons why Afghan people passively support the insurgents.

They're not, on the whole, big fans of the Taliban. They've tried that experiment; that experiment has not been tremendously successful. What they do find, however, is that their government frustrates them sometimes. And they are trying to hold it accountable in some way.

So the biggest challenge that we have moving forward over the next six to eight months is to increase the accountability of the Afghan government and to increase it in a way that it's not accountable to us, the international community, but, rather, accountable to the people of

Afghanistan. They're the ones who actually matter in this. They're the ones who will decide when and how the insurgency ends.

This, I think, is the greatest challenge that we face. And over the next six to eight months, what I would certainly expect to see is a great deal of friction and politics as the national politicians really work to figure out how they would like to organize this political order. And as the local communities work to organize themselves, we see friction at these points where those things intersect.

And one of the things our troops do in Afghanistan and the members of our civilian forces is, really, mediate the dispute between center and periphery and create, in localities, a survivable form of government that can actually reduce the power and virulency of the insurgency sufficiently to allow an expanding growth of security in a variety of areas.

That's what we've begun to see in areas in central Helmand. It's what we've begun to see in areas in Kandahar province. But there are many areas where this kind of relationship is not yet rebalanced and where there is insufficient security, actually, to see Afghan – the Afghan government and its people actually interact in a way that is proper, stable and enduring.

And that's the last thing that I really want to say, is that we have to make sure, over the next six to eight months, that we are aiming toward an outcome that is stable and enduring. It is not enough to keep the Taliban out temporarily. It is not enough simply to create a political system that will last as a bandage for two years.

What we need to do is help create an Afghanistan that is sufficiently stable and sufficiently resistant to insurgency and civil war, that we don't see a repeat of what happened in the 1990s, which has been so devastating to U.S. and, indeed, world national security. Thank you very much.

LT. GEN. DUBIK: Peter?

PETER BERGEN: Thank you, General Dubik, and thank you to Kim Kagan and ISW. And it's great to be on this panel, also, with my good friend Joel Rayburn.

General Dubik asked about challenges for next year. I mean, three that sort of leapt to mind as we were talking about this – one is U.S. domestic politics. As you know, 64 percent of Americans are against the war right now.

Two, what's going on in Pakistan is – Pakistan has an inflation rate right now of 15 percent. It's likely to go up to 25 percent next year. The politicians are not going to make the kinds of choices required to change that situation – the hard choices. Anti-Americanisms, always rampant, has just reached stratospheric levels over the Raymond Davis affair.

One small piece of good news is the Pakistani general who recently for the first time took ownership of the drone program and said, yes, in fact, American drones are killing mostly

militants, which is the first official acknowledgement from Pakistanis that, A, they know about the program and, B, that it's doing more or less what we say it's doing.

And another, final challenge – it's more of a black-swan-type challenge or maybe a gray-swan-type challenge – is a Mumbai II. When I say a “Mumbai II” – any form of mass casualty attack in India traceable to Pakistan basically will obviate many of the things we've just discussed here because Pakistan would move back all its forces back onto the Indian border. It has about a third of its forces on the Afghan border right now. Any kind of potential operations they would do in North Waziristan would obviously be over and, in fact, against the Taliban in general.

So those are some sort of challenges. Some news inflection points: As a journalist, I mean, obviously, there's one coming out pretty soon that's going to be an important one, which is March 21st, when Karzai announces which districts are going to be transferred to Afghan control, which will be a very interesting moment because, as you know, right now, of Afghanistan's 34 provinces, only one, which is Kabul, is actually under the control of the Afghan police or army.

So if that number is large, that'll be a good thing. And if it's very small, it will be a less good thing.

Another news inflection point will, of course, be the July 2011 drawdown. I think we all know that it's going to be very token. But nonetheless, I think news attention will refocus.

And right now, news attention and folks are – for obvious reasons, it's drifted away to Japan and the Middle East, which, in some senses, is not a terrible thing for what's going on in Afghanistan. Already, Americans didn't really care very much. If you look at the news coverage of Iraq versus the news coverage of Afghanistan, I think of all the big events in the Middle East and Japan, only 4 percent of American news coverage was about Afghanistan, which is a very, very low number given the fact that this is our biggest military endeavor.

So just to – as Kim did – just sort some table-setting, I think that it is interesting that six in 10 Americans oppose to war, yet six in 10 Afghans are in favor the U.S. international presence in Afghanistan, which is a paradox – or a seeming paradox. And how can it be explained?

Well, one, of course, so many things have gone right in Afghanistan. I spent a lot of time there through the civil war under the Taliban. And so I have some experience of what most ordinary Afghans know, which is they know that the civil war – when I read about a rocket attack in Kabul, it's – you know, during the civil war, there were hundreds of rocket attacks every day.

And as I was discussing with Joel in the cab on the way over here, people leaving this meeting are more statistically likely – more likely to be murdered than they are to be killed in the Afghan war. And since that seems counterintuitive, let me put some numbers on it.

The murder rate in Washington right now is 22 per 100,000. The number of Afghan civilians killed in the war last year was 2800 according to the U.N. figures just released. Interesting contrast, by the way, 4,000 Afghan civilians – Iraqi civilians were killed in the Iraq war last year despite the fact that Iraq has a smaller population than Afghanistan.

So the war in Afghanistan just simply isn't that violent. And I'm going to New Orleans tomorrow. The murder rate in New Orleans is about six times higher than the death rate in the Afghan war. This is not to trivialize the fact that the war has gotten worse, but by historical standards, an Afghan – and just by just world standards of conflict, this is not a particularly violent war. So that's why six in 10 Afghans think not only that – are in favor of international forces, they think their country's going in the right direction.

And polling taken just earlier this month by Rasmussen, which polls on this question regularly in the United States, just how many Americans thought the country was going in the right direction. Any takers? (Laughter.) Well, the answer is 33 percent. So double the number of Afghans think their country's going in the right direction.

So there's a gap between how the American public are perceiving the war and how Afghans themselves see the war. Lieutenant Colonel Rayburn, I'm sure, will get into this in more detail in terms of the military, but it is a fact that Helmand has essentially become the – (inaudible) – over the last year or so.

And in fact, when I was there in September of '09, in Nawa, which Rajiv (sp) has written so much about, yeah, we went there but hoping that there would be a lot of action. And Nawa turned out to be, you know, positively boring; the Taliban had been so defeated. And that was some time ago already. And of course, in Kandahar, we've seen reverse of the Taliban.

Two data points on that that are important. One, the BBC polled on: Is your security better in Helmand today than it was a year ago? The number went up from 14 to 67 percent in the last poll taken at the end of last year. And then ICOS, which is an NGO you may be familiar with, which is extremely critical of Western policy in Afghanistan, says that based on their own survey, residents in Helmand and Kandahar think their security is getting better.

That, of course, opens the question of reconciliation because insurgents, generally speaking, won't make deals when they're winning. And as Steve Coll has said – has written in The New Yorker, for the first time, there are now direct contacts between the Taliban and U.S. officials.

The biggest, of course – the huge game-changer in Afghanistan is President Obama putting December 2014 on the clock. You know, this – to me, you know think about the millions of column inches that were devoted to the surge decision in the fall of 2009. To me, this is a much bigger decision and it's gone almost without comment because it doesn't fit with a narrative of the peace – the Nobel Peace Prize-winning president, the weak-on-national-security Democratic Party.

But imagine if a Republican president had said, we're going to be in large force in Afghanistan for another four years, the liberal side of the Democratic Party would be going nuts. In fact, they are already going nuts to a certain degree, but it would be much larger. Now, 2014 is the single biggest game-changer I think that we have.

We know from detainee interviews the Taliban have, you know – they realize that they've got four more long years fighting the United States. Very, very important point. It puts – it allows other political parties to rise up to challenge the Karzai mafia that now dominates. Four years is quite a long time and if – one of the problems in Afghanistan, historically, has been the lack of political parties to really challenge Karzai's dominance.

That is changing. I mean there was people that I'm talking to – trying to form a real national opposition to challenge Karzai. And another area that I think is a cause for optimism. Afghanistan is – you know, has essentially one economy in the last – two economies in the last 10 years. One is aid and one is opium. And historically, it's only had one other form of economy, which is essentially taxes for goods that are transferred through the country.

Now, with the minerals story – and I recommend the very detailed 49-page report that has received no attention from the press for some reason by the Task Force for Business & Stability Operations that came out in January, which really lays out in great detail what mineral wealth lies beneath the feet of Afghans.

And \$900 billion, based on both remote sensing technology from satellites and also geologists working on the grounds. Afghanistan can become a world leader on lithium, which you know is the most important constituent of batteries. A massive copper deposit was found right next door to the Chinese top copper deposit, an entirely different one. The Chinese have already paid \$3 billion for the first one.

J.P. Morgan has done the first deal for \$50 million for a gold mine in Northern Afghanistan. And so given the fact that four more years is on the clock, the mineral wealth and deals can be exploited.

A final point on this: Michèle Flournoy in her testimony, I think, hinted that there's some – clearly, we're moving towards a strategic partnership for Afghanistan. And when I was there in December, somebody said a very interesting thing to me which I think is true – an Afghan foreign ministry official. He said, look, we can become South Korea or we can become Somalia. We don't really have a choice between the two.

And if you think about where, sort of, South Korea was after the Korean War, it was in probably worse shape than Afghanistan is today. They want a strategic partnership with us that is real. And of course, for American – there are some American domestic problems about the kind of partnership we might have.

But I think at a minimum, some statement of intent will come out over the next three months. We'll move, perhaps, at a more likely, some sort of phased forces agreement. And I think a lot of Afghans would like us to have a treaty with them. Of course, 66 votes in the

Senate is not easy, but I think that we are moving very much in the right direction and we're moving in a direction that Afghans want.

LT. GEN. DUBIK: Great, thank you, Peter. Joel?

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOEL RAYBURN: Thank you, sir. It's an honor to be here alongside three people that I admire so well and have done such good work over the past few years. Let me start with a disclaimer by saying that I'm not here to speak on the behalf of the Department of Defense or General Petraeus or any other agency or individual but myself. So they're not to blame.

As the military panelist, I'd like to – I'd like to take a look at, on an operational level, the situation in Afghanistan. And since General Petraeus yesterday did a very good job of laying out how he thinks, from the four-star friendly side, the International Security Assistance Force is doing.

And since he was able to describe yesterday how he, as a four-star commander and three-star commanders General Caldwell and General Rodriguez, with their partnerships with the Afghan security forces, how they're doing, I'd like to sort of reverse the image for a moment and take a look at how we think the Taliban are doing as a military force, considering that the Taliban, as a state in exile, government in exile, has since about 2003 attempted to field an army in strategically significant areas of operation in Afghanistan in order to achieve certain strategic objectives.

And if we can consider that Mullah Omar and the senior shura members are at the four-star level, let's say with three-star commanders in Chaman near Kandahar and in Miranshah near Loya Paktia, just on the Pakistani side of the border, how are they doing from the four-star and three-star levels at achieving their military objectives in Afghanistan?

So if – I'd like to walk around the map a little bit in a clockwise fashion and just see if they're – how they're doing on accomplishing their missions.

Let's start in the north, where since late 2009, the Quetta shura in particular attempted to stand up and field an army connecting pockets – isolated Pashtun pockets to, sort of, radicalize, militarize them and then try to recreate a multiethnic jihadi front along the north, particularly from Mazar-i-Sharif to Kunduz over to the northern approaches to Kabul, approximating the northern jihadi front that existed against the Soviets in the Afghan war in the 1980s, where Ahmad Shah Massoud was the major commander.

So how are they doing? And this was the – as we had signaled our intent to go into the south, this was an attempt to steal a march on us, go around and create another front that would occupy our time. Well, it seems that that effort has failed and that – but the Taliban and the locals acknowledge this and the Quetta shura has largely abandoned the attempt to string together a multiethnic front in the north.

Why is that? Well, we had some infusion of ISAF troops there, additional ISAF troops, but the Afghan security forces were increased in power in that area. And it just didn't get traction with the locals. The north is very heterogeneous, and the idea that Pashtun pockets were going to be able to pull in Tajik and Uzbek pockets and turn them into jihadis against the Americans in the Afghan state just didn't take off. And it's largely been abandoned.

What it did leave, and it – so there's no longer really a strategic insurgency problem in the north. There is still a lot of mopping up to do. There's a lot of reintegration of some local Taliban fighters to be done. But what does exist in the north and what the Taliban did succeed in doing is polarizing ethnic communities.

So ethnic tensions are running very high in the north, and you have what one senior Afghan official described to me and a group last month as the preconditions for Balkan-style violence if there aren't further measures taken to stabilize the north, which could be a strategic risk but not an insurgency risk.

Let's move, now, out to the far west, in Herat and the areas that extend from Helmand province along that section of the Ring Road up north until it connects with the northern axis. And here, the Taliban, who have pretty much been offshoots of the Quetta shura, have attempted to interdict the Ring Road and they've tried to destabilize the area around Herat.

And having just come from Herat last month, you know, we can all – people who go there know that Herat is very stable, that this effort too hasn't really taken off. And it's been isolated in Pashtun – sort of remote Pashtun pockets that have been too dysfunctional, too disorganized to mount much of a challenge to the Afghan state, especially instead the pole of power that's centered on Herat. So that's not really a strategic threat there.

There has been some evidence of Iranian lethal support to Taliban groups in the far west, and so the wild card there would be that if the Iranian regime were to take a strategic decision to increase its lethal aid and try to organize those isolated Taliban pockets, that that could turn into a strategic threat.

Let me move now to what has been ISAF's main effort in RC-Southwest and RC-South – so Helmand, Kandahar, and so on. These are the provinces that approximate traditional Zabulistan, if you – if you look into Afghan history. Zabulistan, which was its own country at times in Afghan history, and which has formed the core of the territory that Mullah Omar and the Taliban states centered on the Quetta shura have tried to reestablish since 2002.

So how are they doing? How are the Taliban doing as an army in Zabulistan? What are they trying to achieve? Well, they've been trying to – they've been trying to – they've been trying to create sanctuaries where they could – where they – where they could dominate and use the poppy crop to keep the Afghan state weak and out, preferably, and they could keep the population either coerced or sympathetic to the Taliban cause.

Well, it has to – you have to say that in Helmand province, in that portion of Zabulistan, they are – they are failing. And they're – and things are just – things are going to get worse for

them over time. The infusion of the Marine forces, U.S. Marine forces, into Helmand province certainly last year has had an operational effect there in taking back the Helmand River valley from Taliban control.

The Helmand River valley, from Sangin in the north to just short of the Kajaki Dam, all the way down in the south to the poppy cultivation areas, along that river valley now today, there is no significant stretch of the valley that the Taliban control, either the river itself or the major roads that are – that are astride – that are astride of the river.

This is a huge turnaround from just about two years ago when we – when there was a very low density of ISAF forces there, and Afghan forces there. The Taliban controlled large swaths of territory to the extent that they were able to recruit foot soldiers from there, and they were actually able to tax the people. And in many places, they were the government, and they were the judicial system.

They have lost the vast majority of that – of that state and military infrastructure. And so whereas in the past, if you think of the Taliban, strangely, as an army where when the winter – when the winter comes on, everyone from the rank of captain and higher goes to a different country, leaving lieutenants and sergeants in charge until they come back in the spring.

Now, when the captains and higher come back to restart the war in spring, they're going to find that their foot soldiers, many of them have disappeared; their lieutenants, many of them have been rolled up or killed; that their weapons depots and their ammunition depots have been confiscated; that the IEDs that they left in place, the local villagers have tipped coalition and Afghan forces on where they are.

It's going to be very difficult to mount the same kind of operational challenge to ISAF and Afghan forces with that stuff gone, so just – in addition to not having the means to coerce the population into supporting them, and to – and creating a safe haven, just because of the greatly increased density of forces and the infrastructure that they've lost.

The same thing is true, I'll say briefly, in Kandahar province where on the Arghandab River, which serves – which contains the western approaches and the northern approaches to Kandahar city, that areas that were Taliban strongholds, that the Taliban could – at one point up to, say, last year in some places – the Taliban could, in broad daylight, have checkpoints on major roads, and where they could attack any major road any time they wanted to.

The infrastructure that they need in order just to be able to do that level of damage has been taken away. It's going to be very difficult for them to operate without first putting it back. And it's going to be difficult for them to do that when they've lost the people, and when there are so many more ISAF and Afghan forces preventing them from doing it.

Now, none of this has been accomplished easily. In the Helmand Valley, in Sangin, which has been one of the most violent places in Afghanistan recently, it was done at great cost. The 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines, for example, as of last month had been in place for just a little over four months, and have taken casualties on a World War II scale – 200 casualties in one 700-

man battalion in the space of four months. It was very intense combat, very hard fought. And it remains – you know, to quote General Petraeus, it's fragile and reversible.

But we're talking about – we're talking about ISAF forces and their Afghan partners taking territory that had been uncontested in the hands of the Taliban for several years. The same thing is true of the western approaches to Kandahar, where Colonel Kandarian's brigade of the 101st Division as of last month had taken over 500 casualties in the fight for the very difficult Taliban-controlled districts of Zhari, Panjwaye and Zangaban (ph).

If I could move over briefly to the northeast, in traditional Loya Paktia, what the Pakistanis would call Loya Paktia, or Paktia, Paktika and Khost – the P2K provinces – where the Haqqanis have been attempting since they were ousted in 2001 to come back and reestablish effective control, and to also – to set up sanctuaries from which they can project power toward Kabul and destabilize the Afghan government. How are they doing?

Well, as an army, the Haqqanis are having the same difficulty operating in Loya Paktia that the Quetta shura has had in Helmand and in Kandahar. They've come under – while there's been not as great a density of ISAF forces, additional ISAF forces in Loya Paktia, although there have been some, there are two lines of operation.

First, our special operations forces and the Afghan special operations forces have put the Haqqani network under pressure that they haven't seen since 2004 and 2005. And that has really crunched their networks, and it's made it much more difficult for them to project power across from their sanctuaries in Pakistan toward Kabul. They still do it, but it's more difficult for them to do it. And they incur a higher cost. That's one line of operation.

The second line of operation is that our special forces guys, and the Afghan special forces, have partnered together to stand up Afghan local police units in the places along the border that the Haqqanis need to be able to project through in order to get to Kabul.

And this – as of last month, there were a little over 1,000 Afghan local police forces in the – in the P2K border buffer zone. And that's just going to go up. And that becomes a very serious threat – not just a military threat, but a political threat – to the Haqqanis who need the – who need to coerce, intimidate, or otherwise gain support of those border tribal groups in order to be able to get to go back and forth from Pakistan to Afghanistan.

Now, lastly, when you go to the far northeast where we have – we've sort of famously gone into valleys and come out of valleys that were far remote mountain valleys where militant groups are trying to set up sanctuaries. Well, as everyone knows, we have, since 2009, been sort of pulling back from some of the more remote valleys in the far northeast in order to be able to use our forces elsewhere, such as in the south. And we call that an economy-of-force mission.

The risks that we incur in doing that is that at precisely the time that we've been doing that over the last year and a half or so, the Pakistanis have been pushing from some of the tribal agencies on their side of the border Pakistani militant groups, the TNSM and others, up toward

the border. And some of them have sought refuge across the border in Afghanistan, in some of those remote valleys.

And it appears to me that they're trying to carve out small sanctuaries that they can use to train and equip and reconstitute and launch attacks back into Pakistan at the same time that they're mixed in with some militant cells that have been affiliated with Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, since the far northeast has been his area of influence in the past.

And so those militant groups can form a local threat, I think, to the face of the Afghan state in the far northeast – in Kunar, in Nuristan, those provinces in districts to the north of Jalalabad.

But does that pose a strategic or an existential threat to the Afghan state? I think that's – probably not. So going back around the map to sum up, in the north, does the Afghan state face an existential threat? I don't think so. I think that threat has passed and the Taliban – the Quetta shura has abandoned it.

In the west, they won't unless the Iranians decide to create one there. In the south, the Quetta shura I think is on the ropes, militarily speaking. And as an army, it will probably, during the course of this year, become so difficult for the Quetta shura to field and fight an army in the south that they'll be faced with the decision of whether to continue to try and fight as an army or whether to adapt and morph themselves into a terrorist group, the way al-Qaida in Iraq switched from being an army in 2006 and '7 to being a terrorist group in 2008, '9, '10 and now.

And that's – and there are a lot of costs that they would incur in doing that, and losing the support of the people and so on. Moving back around to Loya Paktia, do the Haqqanis represent an existential threat to the state? I think they still do because they still have the capability with some, perhaps, ISI support of projecting power to Kabul and trying to destabilize the Afghan government through spectacular attacks.

But through 2011 and into 2012, that's going to become almost prohibitively difficult for them to do. And they, themselves, then might face a strategic decision on whether they try to continue doing that or come out some sort of reconciliation.

I think generally speaking – as my last note, since I've gone way off the seven minutes – I think what we're seeing generally is the filling of a security vacuum in Afghanistan. We have to say, if you look back at the beginning of 2009, when the Obama administration came into office, since that time, we and the Afghans have added more than 200,000 counterinsurgents to the battlefield. And when you think about the operational effect of an additional 200,000 counterinsurgency, if you don't think that adds up to a strategic military effect then you're crazy. And we're seeing the effects of that now.

If those forces are left in place long enough – and the Afghan side of it is just going to increase. They're adding new soldiers, new policemen every week. So the pressure on the Taliban armies is just going to increase through 2011, 2012. And I have to think at some point that that will add up to a political effect. And with that, I'll turn it back over to you, sir.

LT. GEN. DUBIK: Thanks, Joel. I'll ask one more question and then open to the floor and we'll probably take two or three at a time so we can get as many in as possible. First, Peter, if I could ask you to maybe amplify a couple of your points, first on American domestic issues.

We have announced and we have talked about, as you mentioned, Michèle Flournoy talked about a long-term partnership. But will American will and American financial support allow that or are we too late? And then the second part of your Mumbai II – is there anything more we can do to kind of mitigate that Pakistan-India tension to take that strategic flank out of the picture?

MR. BERGEN: Right. Well, thank you. You know, Peter Feaver, who was on the Bush National Security Council, did a lot of academic research to show that Americans are not casualty referrers, they're just (favor ?) referrers. And so it's not about the casualties, it's about the outcome that's perceived.

And so if you go back to 2002, just on this polling question of, do you think the war was a mistake, it was only 9 percent. Now it's 64 percent, up from 41 percent a couple of years ago. Clearly, it's changing. However, I think that it's soft opposition to the war. I think the opposition to the Iraq War was quite intense. It was a much bigger political issue.

I think that if there is – I mean, the one big game-changer would be if all the optimistic things that we've been saying in the spring of – next – you know, in coming spring offensive, the Taliban come back, basically I think we can forget about the whole project, because the whole premise of this has been that they won't come back, right? That we've put so much pressure on them, we've put so many resources.

And that, I think – then the American public would correctly say, well, why are we doing this, because essentially everything that's been said, we've given. We've doubled down, we've put 200,000 counterinsurgents in the field in the last two years. So that would be the point at which the American public would say, enough.

And so on the Mumbai thing, I – you know, the one thing that – I mean, the Indians have made it abundantly clear to us, starting with telling Holbrooke that he wasn't going to have the India portfolio, that this is the third rail for them. They will –

(END)