



# Ambassador Ryan Crocker on Afghanistan

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**Welcome/Moderator:**

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ASHLEY TELLIS: Well, good afternoon, everyone. I'm Ashley Tellis, a senior associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. And it's a real pleasure to welcome you all to the endowment this afternoon to hear a very special guest, Ambassador Ryan Crocker, who has come back to Washington after another iteration in the diplomatic service in Afghanistan.

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I first encountered Ryan almost a decade ago, and I don't think he even knew it. I had just finished a stint in Delhi with Ambassador Bob Blackwill and was getting ready to return to Washington. And we decided as part of our transition that we would visit Afghanistan, go to Kabul, because we were both coming to take jobs that would involve some work connected to Afghanistan. And so we went to the chancellery for two or three days of extended meetings with the staff there in 2003—this was the old U.S. chancellery that had suffered terribly during the—during the wars.

And one day during those two days of meetings I walked to the ambassador's conference room. And in the ambassador's conference room there's a series of photographs, photographs of all ambassadors—U.S. ambassadors who had served in Afghanistan. Because they'd moved into the chancellery so quickly, the photographs were put up but not necessarily the names of the ambassadors. And so I was just looking at that gallery of heroes, trying to make sense of who I could identify and who I couldn't.

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And just when I was doing that, Bob Blackwill came up behind me and put his finger on Ryan Crocker's photograph and said: Forget about the rest, this is the all-star. (Laughter.) He makes it to my A-team. And I thought that was, you know, Bob being Bob. But when I came back to Delhi and actually decided to check Ryan out, I discovered very quickly that he had a long and illustrious career as America's premier specialist in the Middle East.

And if you look at the places that he served, it's like a who's who of places that are important to American interests—Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria, Pakistan and Iraq. I finally met him in person actually before he was going to Pakistan. And we spent a half day briefing him. And everything that happened in that half day—his wit, his acuity, his perception, his intelligence—everything complied into that description that Bob Blackwill had used several years ago when he first described Ryan Crocker to me.

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Ryan finished in the last years of the Bush administration as our ambassador to Iraq, presided over a transition that was extraordinarily complex and difficult, and retired from the Foreign Service with the highest title of career ambassador, came back to Texas and worked as the dean of the Bush School. And I think, at that point, he was looking forward to a real transition and a life that would be his own. But fortunately for the United States—I'm not sure I'd say fortunately for him—the president called again. And in very difficult moments, President Obama asked him to come back to national service which, being the patriot that he is, he did.

He left the Bush School and went back to Afghanistan as America's ambassador in a moment when we were beginning yet another transition. And this afternoon, we have been very blessed to have him come to Carnegie—to make this his first stop on his return from Afghanistan. And he'll speak to us about what the transition in that country holds, what the prospects for success are and why Afghanistan, after all is said and done, still matters to the United States.

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So ladies and gentlemen, please join me in extending a very warm welcome to the man President Bush once called America's Lawrence of Arabia—(laughs)—Ambassador Ryan Crocker. (Applause.)

RYAN CROCKER: Well, thank you, Ashley—I think. Ashley notes that before I went to Pakistan in 2004 as ambassador, he very generously spent much of a day with me to give me some perspectives on part of the world with which I was not very familiar. My career had lain to the—to the west, almost exclusively in the Arab world. Pakistan clearly was a different phenomenon. And I've always been grateful to you, Ashley, for that. I'm particularly grateful for the fact that because of the depth, the range and the acuity of your briefing, I can blame every single mistake I made—(laughter)—in Pakistan and in Afghanistan on you personally.

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The circumstances of the time require me to begin on a somber note. My good friend and colleague, and a friend of many of yours, along with three of his colleagues, recently returned from Libya to Andrews after their assassination in Libya. Chris Stevens was one of our best and our brightest. We have a lot of great Foreign Service Officers, and we have very few who are equally adept at managing the complexities of Washington as they are at managing the complexities of the region. And Chris was one of that very small tribe. Like so many of us, I feel his loss very deeply and personally.

And it is a reminder that diplomacy in the hard parts of the world—and those parts are growing regularly—is not about pushing cookies in pinstripes. It's about risking your lives and the lives of those who ride with you on these missions. I was an ambassador six times—Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria, Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan. And in three of those six countries, half of them, a predecessor of mine was assassinated. So again, I don't need to tell this audience, but your Foreign Service is, has been and will continue to be very much not just on the front lines of diplomacy, but on the front lines of conflict.

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I was—it was suggested to me that I talk a bit this afternoon about the future of Afghanistan and U.S. interests. Ashley, of course, in his unique and inimitable way broadened that significantly. But it doesn't matter, because I'm no longer in government service, so I'll just talk about whatever the hell I feel like talking about. (Laughter.) This will be a collection of reflections and I do hope to ensure there is ample time for questions since, as I look around beginning in the front row and proceeding in every row back, I realize there is more expertise in this room on this subject than I could ever hope to bring to bear myself. So I am grateful for the opportunity, but I approach it with due modesty.

First, let me begin with some perspective, which is something that we, Americans, are not overly brilliant at. We're all about today and tomorrow. That's the spirit that built this great country: Don't bore me with the past, you know, I'm here—I'm here to make America and if it takes longer than the day after tomorrow, I'm going to move on to something else. So we tend to lose track of how important history is elsewhere in the world and how it shapes the present and informs the future.

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Out in the region where I've spent my career, as William Faulkner famous said once, hell, you know, the past isn't history. The past isn't even past. And so it is in Afghanistan and the region around it. Our relations with Afghanistan up until 1979 were characterized by kind of a—I wouldn't say benign neglect, because we were engaged, USAID, from the 1950s—before there was a USAID Point Four—but our interactions were limited, really not just up until the end of World War II, where our interactions throughout the broader Middle East were quite limited.

World War II and the birth of Israel, the Cold War, confrontation between the United States and the Soviet Union in particular, put us front and center certainly in Iran and the Arab states. That didn't really carry over to Afghanistan. In spite of its poverty and some of its hardships, it was—it was a nice assignment, not too much going on. That began to change a bit after the fall of the king in the early '70s. It changed rather significantly more with the ascendancy of the communists. And, of course, it changed dramatically with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979. Then we noticed.

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And as someone who has practiced in the foreign policy arena for decades, I just would remind you that when administrations face complex situations, they come not as single sorrows but often in battalions. The Carter administration in late 1979, of course, was also wrestling with the repercussions of the Iranian revolution, the takeover the American embassy in 1979, the Mecca shootings, the sacking of our embassy in Islamabad with the loss of two Americans—all of that November '79. And then, of course, in December the Soviets were in Afghanistan.

A number of you have been there. For those of you who have not, life in the National Security Council or indeed in the State Department doesn't quite play out exactly like "West Wing" did. We put together, some of you recall, a—shall we say, a complex alliance. If there was a single unifying theme that brought together the anti-Soviet Afghan elements, it was the notion of a jihad against the godless invader. That was probably the single point of unity among the disparate groups. And externally, of course, we worked with particular closeness with the Pakistanis, but also the Saudis and other Gulf Arabs.

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And you know—you know what? It worked. In 1989, of course, the Soviets had had all the pain they could stand in Afghanistan, at a time when it was clear to their leadership that their problems at home were somewhere beyond serious and approaching critical—couldn't afford it anymore as opposition grew. So the Soviets were defeated in Afghanistan, a victory for the United

States in what turned out to be the closing years of the Cold War. And what did we do? We said, hey, we won. Let's go home. And home we went.

We, of course, were not engaged with conventional forces on the ground in the Afghan campaign, but we were very heavily engaged by a variety of means. That engagement stopped, not just in Afghanistan, but also in the region, particularly in Pakistan, where in the space of little over a year Pakistan went from being, as they put it, the most allied of U.S. allies to the most sanctioned of U.S. adversaries.

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That, of course, was through the administration's decision not to renew waiver requests for the Pressler Amendment on Pakistan's nuclear program, which we had known all about since the mid-1970s when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto publicly announced it, but we found it expedient to just say, well, we've got other more important issues. Well, those issues went away, and so did the Pressler Amendment waivers, and so did all economic and military assistance for Pakistan, except for some very narrowly circumscribed areas mainly to do with narcotics control.

And the rest, as they say, is history—a very predictable history as the seven main jihadi groups, with no Soviets left to fight and to serve as the unifying factor among them, preceded to engage in an absolutely vicious civil war which any informed observer could reasonably predict. Kabul changed hands—Ashley, how many times did Kabul change hands, quickly?

MR. TELLIS: Three.

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MR. CROCKER: With enormous devastation, but it wasn't our issue.

In the mid-'70s, of course, a new movement saw light in the south in Kandahar—the Taliban. And taking advantage of, again, a number of factors—international indifference, war weariness and disgust on the part of the Afghan population, Pakistani support who desperately wanted to see someone bring some kind of stability to a country on its borders—managed to take control. Clearly, their ideology was not harmonious with ours but, hey, we could live with it. We've lived with other disharmonies around the world. We had a series of efforts to engage them.

And while these efforts were under way, an increasingly inhospitable East Africa for Al Qaida made a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan look increasingly attractive. So their relocation took place in the 1990s. East Africa bombings, some really token missile strikes subsequently that rearranged some rocks and it was business pretty much as usual—until 9/11. And then all of a sudden we cared.

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My modern story with Afghanistan actually goes back to that day. Some of you, of course, have much longer and more continuous narratives, but I've got the mic, so this is my story.

(Scattered laughter.)

[00:20:02]

I was on a US Air Shuttle, the 8:00 A.M. shuttle from Reagan up to LaGuardia, newly appointed Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern affairs, and I had the portfolio of a country called Iraq in August 2001. So my job was to go up and convince the Chinese, the Russians and the French that our way was the right way, and I figured that would take half a day. It was while we were making our approach into LaGuardia that we could see smoke coming out of the first tower, and just as we landed, all of our cellphones went off—we actually had cellphones in 2001—with the news that the second tower had been struck, and it was then clear this was not a misguided private aircraft or some other accident of navigation; it was an attack. I was stuck in traffic on the Queensboro Bridge when both towers went down.

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Three and a half months later I was part of a small U.S. contingent raising the American flag over the opposite end of Ground Zero, Kabul, Afghanistan, the still badly shattered American embassy, following a very quick military campaign that ousted the Taliban. I didn't spend those intervening three and a half months unoccupied; I was on one of the first planes out of Dulles after they reopened airports following 9/11, bound for Geneva and conversations under the U.N. flag with the Iranians. Those of you who are deeply into esoteria—and I would not suggest you admit who you are; just get counseling (laughter)—may have heard of the Geneva Group. This had been in existence for some years. It was a forum to talk about theoretical futures for Afghanistan and refugee issues that brought together countries with significant political or refugee Afghan populations like Italy, Germany, Iran, and the U.S.

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It never was taken seriously, at least by us, until after 9/11, and then the Near East Bureau took it over. I was sent to head our delegation and immediately began discussions with the Iranians on, OK, as they said it, we warned you; now look at what you've got; what are we going to about it? Those discussions led up to the Bonn Conference. Again, as you know, the selection of Hamid Karzai to lead Afghanistan had as the core of its consensus a U.S.- Iranian understanding in which Lakhdar Brahimi was very influential and for which Jim Dobbins, my former colleague and friend, deserves enormous credit.

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During those pre-attack discussions—and you'll remember the air war began in early October—the Iranian thrust was, you know, what do you need to know to knock their blocks off? You want their order of battle? Here's the map. You want to know where we think their weak points are? Here, here, and here. You want to know how we think they're going to react to an air campaign? Do you want to know how we think the Northern Alliance will behave? Ask us. We've got the answers; we've been working with those guys for years. This was an unprecedented period since the revolution of, again, a U.S.- Iranian dialogue on a particular issue where we very much had common interest and common cause. And as I said, it was our cooperation—and I don't mean to diminish or minimize that of other actors; I already mentioned Lakhdar Brahimi and the United Nations—but the entire international community rallied around the composition of the Afghan interim authority.

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Our conversations continued. And lest you fear that I am going to give you every week between late 2001 and current time, be assured—just, again, setting the stage here, because we so often leap to the present without remembering there is a past that everyone except us has a focus on. We actually - you know, it—Geneva, Paris, New York—we were—we were very portable, ourselves and the Iranians, and Kabul, because my senior Iranian interlocutor got himself posted to Kabul as their chief of mission about the same time I showed up as our chief of mission. And again, we were able to talk about where al-Qaida might be in Iran and what they might do about it, not without some effect. We talked about development, who could build which roads. We even got into such issues as standardizing the composition of asphalt for roads that would adjoin. And we talked about how we might work together to reduce the influence of warlords with whom each of us had respective influence.

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But then came the “Axis of Evil” State of the Union, January 2002. I remember fairly clearly my next encounter with my Iranian colleague. Those things in life that are least pleasant stay with you the longest and with the greatest clarity. And it was not a happy encounter. That was the time—and he was gracious enough to inform me—that the Iranian government chose to export Gulbuddin Hekmatyar back to Afghanistan. We narrowly missed him at the time, and we are still missing him—in the kinetic sense, believe me, not in the sympathetic sense. (Scattered laughter.)

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This was also the point—and here I am indulging in conjecture; it’s great to be a free man; I can do that—this was also the point, I think, where the Iranians made a strategic decision, which is can’t work with those sons-of-bitches; told you all along, can’t do it. And I think that up until that time, the notion that, well, maybe we can find common ground on certain issues and see where they go, maybe, was held in the IRGC, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, and including by its leader, Qasem Soleimani. That—to the extent that it was there, I could only see its reflections in the individuals that I was talking to. It certainly wasn’t there after January of 2002, although talks continued, but with increasingly less result and with increasingly less authoritative representation on the Iranian side.

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I mention all of this to illustrate something I’ll come back to, which is the law of unintended consequences. In the international arena, and particularly in the complex parts of the world where so many of us have chosen or been blackmailed into serving—(scattered laughter)—it’s not just, you know, obvious stuff that anybody with a high school education, if they’d looked at it for half an hour, would have figured it out; it’s the unintended consequences, and not of second and third order but of 20<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> order, that when major actions are set in motion—and no action is more major than a military engagement, and sometimes diplomatic engagements—decisions to go and then decisions over what to do then set in motion currents and forces that the most astute among us cannot begin to predict. So when these decisions are made, it is not simply a question of thinking through their implications carefully; it is asking the question, how much risk am I ready to assume? How much of the unknown and the unknowable am I prepared to absorb to deal with that which has already struck me or may strike me? You know, again, a certain degree of modesty and humility

on the part of those of us who advise or make policy in terms of what we can presume to know and predict would well serve the national interest.

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Again, I was yo-yoing about a good bit at that time, taking some leave of absence from my Iraq responsibilities, but not all that much. I was in northern Iraq in December 2001, suggesting to our Kurdish friends that it would be nice if they did not start the war before we were ready— (scattered laughter)—and actually getting the call as I crossed the border saying, gee, we kind of need you to be in Afghanistan, you know, a week from Friday. Came back from Afghanistan in the spring, immediately went back to northern Iraq. So, you know, a case of badly divided attention that is all, of course, Ashley Tellis's fault.

You know, a lot of—I will remember my arrival in Kabul, just a few days after New Year's 2002. I have seen devastation before. I had never seen anything that looked like Afghanistan at the beginning of that year a decade and a half (*sic*) ago. Kabul itself, when we finally got there, looked like parts of Berlin in 1945: whole city blocks obliterated, no power, no water, no services, no security forces, no nothing. You know, we didn't do it. Taliban did a little, not a lot. Soviets didn't really contribute much. It was that Afghan civil war we chose to ignore and the incredible devastation that the allies of the anti-Soviet jihad wrought on their own country and citizenry when there was no longer a unifying force to unite them or an international presence and commitment that said, let's look for other ways.

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President Karzai, then-Chairman Karzai, had gotten to Kabul about 10 days before I had, after the Bonn Conference in December, and he's been there ever since. And again, as the history of Afghanistan gets written, rewritten, revised, redacted, and otherwise colorized, I hope that due attention is given to the role of Hamid Karzai because he has literally personified the post-Taliban Afghanistan from that time until this and, God willing, until the 2014 election.

Several things struck me about him: first, his incredible courage in taking on a job that was somewhere beyond impossible, as he struggled to come up with someone who might be capable of actually running a province that wouldn't plot a coup at the same time or steal whatever little may be left to steal, while he was doodling around on a breakfast napkin trying to design the new Afghan flag.

In addition to his courage and determination, I was also struck by something that still strikes me today. In my view, Hamid Karzai is a committed Afghan nationalist, by which I mean, he thinks in national terms. He knows his base lies with the Pashtuns, he knows the future of Afghanistan lies with all of its significant populations, be that based on sectarian, ethnic or gender identity, feel that they have a home and a future. And he worked from that day to this in a five-dimensional chess game to try to maintain and foster those balances, again, against extraordinary odds. It is, again, a question that Afghans and friends of Afghanistan need to be asking themselves as we look ahead to the 2014 elections. There are not many people who think like that in Afghanistan—more now, certainly, than there were a decade ago, but still a minority.

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So, beginning of 2002, there we are. We're on the ground. International consensus behind an interim authority. So now what? Yeah, Crocker, now what? You're out there; figure it out. I did not arrive in Kabul with a detailed set of instructions as to what the administration wished to have accomplished in those initial months. In fact, I arrived without any instructions, just, go figure something out.

This was, again, regime change on the cheap. If that sounds a little familiar, maybe it is. My first rule when moving into conflict or immediate post-conflict situations is latch up tight with the military commander; he's got the guns. You know, guns can be very useful in staying alive. You know, I couldn't find one. Well, you know, yeah, we've got a special forces commander who covers the northern part of Afghanistan from Karshi-Khanabad up in Uzbekistan; we've got a special forces commander out of Kandahar who covers the south; we've got a Marine expeditionary unit commander who's got his brigade plus—and guess what, they were all O6s, colonels. None of them reported to each other, none of them really had a requirement to coordinate with each other, and they certainly didn't have a requirement to coordinate anything with me or even pick up the phone when I called, which I couldn't do because, of course, there were no telephones.

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We did not have even an approach to unified military command in Afghanistan until Major – Then-Major General Buster Hagenbeck arrived with the headquarters element and one brigade of the 10<sup>th</sup> Mountain Division in late February 2002. And even then, not everybody was reporting to him. There's a great British officer named John McColl; he was the first commander of what is now ISAF; major general at the time, and not finding an American counterpart, I said, well, you know, you're a commander, you know, you speak English, we led a successful revolt against you. There must be something in that; let's talk. And, you know, we kind of looked at all those warlords and militias out there, the absence of any kind of ability by the chairman—Chairman Karzai to extend authority and said, you know, can't we do better than this. How about if we sort of put a reinforced company plus in each major population center, backed up by an air mobile brigade that could deploy anywhere with very heavy firepower in a matter of an hour or two.

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You know, we plussed up a brigade and a little bit more, but our reach, our influence, our capacity to influence events and maintain security goes up exponentially. So we co-authored this, sent it off and in record time, we got very similar instructions back from our respective capitals, which was, basically, go sit under a tree until that idiot idea passes. (Laughter.) We are putting nothing else into what has been a successful campaign. I will let you fast forward from that date until the announcement of the surge in December 2009.

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Let me say just one preliminary word about the insurgency, then I really will fast forward. The insurgency surprised me, not because it came, or it came when it did, but because it took longer to develop than I thought it would. I was present for Operation Anaconda—again, you can mention that to your councilor, when you see him, about the Geneva talks—or her. That was our first large-scale effort to mop up Taliban and al-Qaida remnants in the mountainous east. General Hagenbeck had lots of advice from every echelon above him, the wonders of VTCs that actually

worked then—and we all wished they didn’t—lots of advice, lots of superior commanders—most of whom weren’t in his chain of command, but that didn’t slow him down—but very few forces, and what we found in Anaconda is, we had a much larger, much better armed and prepared and tenacious enemy than we thought we did. We also didn’t have some of those useful things like tanks. Not a good idea to carry out major ground operations if you don’t have armor—just a civilian, you know, what do I know? We had to borrow tanks from the Tajik Northern Alliance. T-54, T-55s aren’t much unless they’re against an adversary who hasn’t got anything, so they seemed useful to us, and my job was to negotiate their passage through Pashtun-controlled areas with Tajik crews and supporting infantry to help us on objective Anaconda.

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And that almost didn’t happen, because the Pashtun leader of the area, who later met an untimely death—or timely, depending on how you look at it—or way too late, depending on how you look at it, refused passage, and said if they tried, they would be destroyed. And it took an all-night negotiation to say that, basically, you come after these tanks, we are going to come after you. And if you haven’t been on the business end of an F-16, you’re going to have about a half a second to experience it. And they said, oh, oh, OK. So, you know, we prevailed in Anaconda, kind of, sort of. You know, by the time we had enough power up there to make the outcome decisive, most of whom we were fighting had exfilled.

Now the other thing that was an uh-oh moment for me back then—again, late February, early March 2002, was, particularly in the early days of the campaign—heck, the filtration went two ways. We were picking young Afghans up who were trying to cross our lines to get on the fighting side of them, to join their compatriots in the fight from the center. And that’s when I thought, you know, there could be trouble down the line. What do I know? I’ve got to go worry about Iraq.

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So again, you know, hindsight is 20/20, it’s always beautiful, but I do remember having that concern that, as we have seen and our predecessors as Western powers have seen for hundreds of years, the conflict in a given foreign country, in the eyes of our adversary, hasn’t even really started until we think we have gained a decisive victory. We saw it in Afghanistan, we saw it in Iraq. The French saw it. Morocco, Algeria; the Italians saw it in Libya. The Brits throughout the region, over and over and over. We operate on different timelines, none more profound than this. Our enemies’ capacity to wait, our capacity to think, got her done here, let’s move on to the next small country that needs help.

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OK. Again, a lot more background than you needed, but it doesn’t get told off and then—I just thought it might be useful to review—God, actually, you’re going to kill me—in part because of what today is. Avid New York Time readers—also a subject for therapy—(laughter)—you know, they’ll have seen an op-ed piece today recalling for us that this is the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Sabra-Shatila massacres, and it notes in passing that a young foreign service officer named Ryan Crocker was the American diplomat who walked into those camps and discovered and reported that massacre. The Israeli invasion of Lebanon, going back to my 20<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> order of consequences, set in motion a chain of events we could not—or they—possibly have dreamed of. No one could

have imagined when they crossed the line of departure in June of '82 that you would have a Sabra-Shatila. At least, I certainly couldn't. That invasion led to the cementing of the Iranian-Syrian strategic alliance that has persisted to this day, and may be in some jeopardy, one may hope, although what may come after the Assad regime is the subject of another lecture. It may not be good. It also led to the birth of Hezbollah, which has not only bedeviled us and the Israelis, it has killed hundreds—hundreds of both Americans and Israelis—again, law of unforeseen consequences, again, 30 years—30 years later.

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All right, OK, OK. I won't go back. That's it, I promise. OK, so where are we today? OK, first, I believe, since I was out there for a lot of it and saw the consequences, the surge ordered by President Obama, the addition of the 38,000 troops had a huge positive impact on security. Now, as we draw down to the pre-surge number, I think it is extremely important that we take the time that General Allen has recommended for a careful, methodical assessment of where we are, where the Afghans are, where our adversaries are, what does the battle space look like going forward before we make any more decisions. And the merciful element here, of course, is that kind of assessment will carry us past November 6<sup>th</sup>.

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The status of the Afghan national security forces—an amazing achievement in a very short period of time. It's not just a little over a decade; it's really just the last three years or so that we have been engaged in a truly serious effort to build a capable, multifaceted set of security forces, both police and army close to their maximum strength of 352,000.

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And they have shown their abilities in action. You will remember the inadvertent desecration of the Quran in the early part of this year that led to widespread demonstrations, some of them violent. By definition, international forces could not be part of the effort to restore control. The Afghans were on their own. You know, we couldn't even use advisers. It could be simply gasoline on the fire. They weren't prepared for that, they weren't trained for that, they weren't equipped for that, and there is nothing harder to ask of an armed force than to go into action against its own population. Yet that they did, and they did so with—given the circumstances—extraordinary effectiveness. They saved countless lives. They saved American lives, protecting our presence and installations in a number of places around the country. And the loss of Afghan life, while regrettable—a total of 29; that includes Afghan security forces—far less than it might have been. So we saw not a—~~not a~~ dress rehearsal; we saw the curtain go up without a rehearsal, and a very credible performance by Afghan security forces.

Why do I start with this? Because again, if you look back at the post-Soviet era, you know, Najibullah, his government and central authority did not come crashing down when the Soviets withdrew from Afghanistan, did not come crashing down when Soviet advisers were withdrawn from Afghan security forces. They did a very good job holding their own on their own.

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It all came crashing down when they stopped being paid, when the money stopped, '92. Army disintegrated, they followed their ethnic or sectarian affiliations, and the rest is history and not a very pretty one. So, competent—I—certainly by Afghan standards, a committed force, but, you know, it helps to keep paying your troops, and I'll come back to this when I talk about U.S. interests, which I will do very swiftly.

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You know, what else is different from the '90s and the beginning of the 2000s? Well, a tremendous amount. You got to be there to see it. Kabul is a bustling Middle East—Middle—South Asian metropolis. I stumble over that because it really is an intricate combination of both. Streets are packed, traffic is horrendous, stores are open, schools are open. You know, we've gone from 900,000 kids in school when I got there, all of them boys, in the beginning of 2002—over 8 million today.

Enormous strides forward in the education sector, as I mentioned, certainly in health as life expectancy is increased, in transportation. Not every road project has been a success, but boy, oh, boy, getting around Afghanistan today is a world different than it was a decade ago. Telecommunications, electricity, all almost immeasurably better than they were a little over a decade ago. Lots of problems, lots of mistakes, lots of missteps, but overall, the progress has been incredible.

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There's an intangible in this too. It's the attitude of people, attitude of women. Boy, you know, you hear that through clenched teeth. Nobody's ever going to jam me back in a burqa. You see it with girls who didn't experience it. But, you know, you walk into a class—whenever I had a bad day in Afghanistan, which would be every day, you can always buck yourself up a little by visiting classes from university down to primary, and, you know, asking the students what do they want to do. You know, virtually all of them had great dreams and wanted to see them fulfilled in Afghanistan. And I was amazed at the number of girls that want to be doctors, engineers, fighter pilots, paratroopers, you know.

There is a new spirit out there among women and among younger people. And the—as we look at 2014, watch that young generation, watch the females, because what you hear from the 20-somethings is, man, you know, our parents and grandparents destroyed this country. We're going to build something that is entirely different. You know, good luck to them. Their grandparents, in many cases, are still, unfortunately, healthy. So there's a lot on the positive side of the ledger that we can talk about.

[00:56:25]

Let me talk about the challenges. And the challenges are also the opportunities. One of them we touched on is elections. I mean, the good news here is everybody wants to be in on it. Everybody's maneuvering, you know, been maneuvering for the last year at least, so kind of like U.S. primaries, do some straw polls, see where your alliances are, check your adversary's strengths, see

what you got on him. In every case it's murder, but he's got that on you, so it's a wash. It's a— (laughter).

[00:57:04]

You know, I've dealt with two Northern Alliances, the Northern Alliance in Iraq, the Kurds, and the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, the Tajik, Uzbek, Turkmen, with some peculiarities, the Hazara, when they could get up there. They want to play in the center. They want to be governors. They like having it both ways. They would like to be kings, but I don't think many of them expect that at this juncture, but kingmakers. They want to have decisive voices in who leads this country and where they lead it to.

And, you know, unlike the Kurds, these are the guys who took Kabul. You know, it wasn't us. It was them. Yet rather than say it is our right to rule this state as president, it's different. It is our right to live as free and equal citizens in this state and to have a role in shaping this state that does take account of how we stood, where we stood and what we did during the dark days of the '90s. You know, again, there are exceptions, but by and large, I think this is a—this is a key point.

What will you be looking at in terms of contenders? You know, I'm not going to name names. Be meaningless at this point, in any case. I think you can see structures to a bit—to an extent. Personalities will count hugely, as they did in '09. But so will coalitions. And I think there's a prospect—there are certainly those who see political advantage in some crosscutting coalitions. Again, not the 20-somethings—they're still too young—but the early 40-somethings, talking about, OK, well, I'm a Tajik; I really need to hook up with Pashtuns, who have experienced many of the things I have, and where we both have more in common with each other than we do with our older generations.

You're not going to see agenda-based parties in the modern sense, you know. Maybe the election after this one, but beyond platitudes, beyond, you know, a chicken in every pot, I still think development has a way to go before that happens.

[00:59:58]

Let me say a word about the role of Karzai. I want to come back to this. Here are my fearless predictions. Since I am utterly irresponsible, I can make any prediction I want. Unless circumstances change dramatically, I am quite confident President Karzai will not seek to amend the constitution or to find some extraconstitutional mechanism that would allow either for prolongation or his re-election. He said it publicly, he said it privately.

[01:00:36]

In a number of conversations I, you know, heard him talk about the future he envisions. The future he envisions is a future, one in which he is actually alive. And again, sitting here where our election losers go into opposition or equally likely, or maybe both, go into highly lucrative business or law practices and make tons of bucks and come back another day, this is a part of the world that coined the phrase, "Two men, one grave." It's you or me. And I see knowing smiles somewhere around. That goes back to the days of Zia-ul-Haq and Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. Zulfikar

Ali Bhutto got the grave, as former prime minister of Pakistan. So losing an election now in embryonic or unstable democracies is a—is no joke.

So I think, you know, President Karzai—I—this Putin stuff just kills me. You know, President Karzai is a lot of things. He is not Vladimir Putin. Afghanistan does not work that way. But he is going to want to see an election outcome that he literally can live with, where a successor will not have him brought up on capital charges, which could happen in a state where the rule of law is not exactly well-established. So, you know, not a kingmaker, but looking to see contenders emerge with whom he can coexist, very likely on the same compound, for security reasons.

[01:02:45]

So the elections, again, a huge, multifaceted challenge and opportunity. It will be the first election of the post-Karzai era, something Afghanistan has not experienced since the fall of the Taliban and worthy of our—not only our close attention, but our deep interest, which is not the same as interference.

Let me say just another word about Hamid Karzai, because I—again, I got to know him immediately after we both arrived in Kabul, developed high respect for him at that time, have maintained the relationship over the years. I used to come over from Pakistan when I was ambassador there from '04 to '07 and explain to President Karzai my view that the Pakistanis and its leadership were not out to destroy him and Afghanistan. He said, oh, yes, they are. And then we'd move on to a more pleasant conversation. I didn't move him a bit, but we maintained a—we maintained a relationship.

[01:03:56]

Karzai as nationalist—it takes two forms. I talked about one of them. And this touches on another challenge, which is reconciliation. President Karzai believes in this. I believe in it. General Allen, who was the architect of the Anbar Awakening and commands now in Afghanistan believes in it. You don't kill your way out of an insurgency. At the same time, President Karzai is keenly aware you cannot have reconciliation with your adversaries and in the process lose your allies. In other words, it cannot be on terms that alienate the minorities because they feel their rights have been bargained away, and you cannot do it on terms that threaten what women in Afghanistan have achieved.

And I think the best indication of where the president's mind is on this was the painful process he pursued to select a successor as chairman of the High Peace Council after Burhanuddin Rabbani was assassinated a year ago, a year ago and two days—three days. A couple of Pashtuns, or individuals perceived as Pashtuns, with great seniority and respect wanted the position. The president decided early on it should be Rabbani's son, Salahuddin. And he eventually prevailed, not without asking that certain Western powers interfere blatantly in Afghanistan's internal affairs, which I happily did. (Laughter.)

[01:05:50]

The two individuals, Afghanistan's elder statesmen, Professor Mujadidi, although ethnically Arab, is perceived as a Pashtun, and the highly respected Pir Gilani, also half Arab, but perceived as

a Pashtun, Karzai felt would threaten and frighten non-Pashtuns. Now, is a Tajik High Peace Council leader going to be instantly empathetic with Taliban who want to cross over? Not likely. But again, it shows where Karzai's priorities are, in my view, which is hang on to the solidarity, the unity that you have. Don't risk it going after what you don't have.

[01:06:50]

We've talked about security and security forces simply to say the threats as we have seen are very much there, whether it be that coordinated attack on Camp Bastion that destroyed a number of aircraft—only 15 or so gunmen, but they clearly knew what they were doing—the high-profile attacks, which haven't worked that well, by and large, as headline grabbers, after the attack on the embassy last year and again in April, and the very troubling green-on-blue attacks.

You know, I'm not there. But I would put the percentage of attackers who have some affiliation with the Taliban rather higher than the percentages I have seen. I think they're finding that a relatively easy to do—and our own vetting in the U.S. military is not that great, let's face it. We got a lot of prison barracks at military facilities for people who never should have gotten in in the first place and didn't get out of boot camp housed in Afghanistan. I think that the Taliban have found a niche. Obviously not the whole story; I don't discount the personal grudge, the cultural insensitivity and the rest of it. But I think we underestimate at our peril a resilient enemy finding a new—a new mechanism with effect.

[01:08:34]

We've talked about reconciliation. The economy—I would just say that I don't think 2014 is going to be as calamitous as a—an economic development as many think is the case, assuming a virtual complete drawdown of international forces. An awful lot of the money spent on contracting has gone offshore anyway. What the Afghans are attempting to do through their extractive industries and elsewhere is kind of build up what they need to do, in any case, and indigenous economic growth capability, let the private sector do what it does best, you know, not steal money—that's the government. God, it's great not to be an official anymore. (Inaudible.) (Laughter.) And generally, you know, just let the economy work. There is a significant amount to work with.

[01:09:49]

Internationally, engagement, engagement, engagement. We had three very important conferences during my tenure—actually four: you know, the Bonn conference last December that was an affirmation of international political support for Afghanistan; the Chicago summit, which was an affirmation of international financial support for the Afghan national security forces in the out years—and this is key—you know, no more 1992s; and then of course the Tokyo ministerial, which focused on economic support. As important as the commitments of the international community were, the commitments to the Afghans also were extremely important in recognizing and agreeing to take on the challenges of regulation, of governance, of corruption and so forth. They are not blind to these issues. And the president was very public on it.

[01:10:55]

So the international dimension going forward—very, very key. We—you know, we know how the movie ran at the end of the '80s and the beginning of the '90s. We just guessed at it in Iraq. You know, General Petraeus and I in 2007, in front of Congress—you know, what the hell did we know? But I thought we told a good story. In Afghanistan we do know. The same adversaries who ran that country in the '90s want it back. And they are as—they are committed; they are resilient; they are tough; they are smart. I mean, after all, we have killed all the slow and stupid ones.

And in my judgment, the Taliban/al-Qaida linkage post-bin Laden, while there may be some Taliban who have a different view—still pretty solid. Taliban get back, stand by for al-Qaida. They may be weakened, but Afghanistan is the field of choice in a way that Yemen can never be, for reasons that those of you who know Yemen will understand. You will never get a homogenous Yemeni view on anything whatsoever in the world, let alone the desirability of having al-Qaida as neighbors. It was different in Afghanistan, and it could be different again.

[01:12:26]

So I would conclude, really, long after I should have—you know, what kind of future? An Afghanistan that is good enough to maintain stability in a precarious region; with security forces good enough not to eliminate every security threat but to be the force of first resort in dealing with it; an Afghanistan with good enough governance that its people look to it for services, expect those services, will never be happy with the level of services—I mean, like, are we?—but sees that government as legitimate both in terms of how it was chosen, but far more important, in what and how it delivers and how it looks after, again, all of its citizenry—that no major element of the Afghan population ever again feel that an Afghan government is persecuting it or worse. I think President Karzai has stood with uneven results because he's had the worst job in the world. I hope his successor can carry that forward.

Why is it important? Two quick points. One of them is just three numbers: 9/11. It did happen; it could happen again. If it did happen again, the most likely way it would happen would be from a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. So you know, it may cost the international community \$4 ½ billion in a year to field a reasonably well-sized and -equipped Afghan security force into the future. That's pretty cheap insurance, given what a 9/11 costs.

[01:14:41]

Second reason, I think, is an argument that should resonate with Americans. If we decide we're done before the Afghans really do take a grip, if they start seriously slipping—we're backing out; the Haqqanis, Commander Nazir, the various flavors of the Taliban are gaining, and gaining and gaining.

Who gets it in the neck? It's all those people we made all those promises to. It starts with the women. You know, I was there when some of those undertakings were made back in 2002. You have women all over government now. You have women running companies. You have women educating other women. I think we as Americans, since we brought them forward to see what would happen to them, would be something that we as a nation would have a lot of trouble living with, at least I certainly hope so, as an American.

[01:15:43]

Likewise, for those 20-somethings and early 30-somethings who want to achieve a different Afghanistan and have it within their capability, if there is enough time for them to do so. So for those reasons, and I can go on, we need to maintain focus, we need to remember the past, we need to make the commitment and the investment for our national security. And I define national security as also encompassing very much our moral and our human values. Let us not lose sight of them.

I have not covered the region, because you would have literally given me the hook, but happy to talk about Iran, the –stans, and, of course, particularly Pakistan. But lest even my introducer fall asleep—(laughter)—I will leave whatever shred of time is left for questions. Thank you. (Applause.)

[01:16:54]

MR. TELLIS: We have a few minutes of questions. I want to give as many people a chance to ask them, so if I could urge you to be pointed and specific. Introduce yourself, and if you can ask a question very quickly. I'll just call upon as many people as time permits. Yes, sir. Could you wait for the microphone, please?

Q: Yes. I am Dr. Nisar Chaudry with Pakistan American League. It's good to see you again and listen to the enlightened conversation. I had been meeting the ambassador every time I visited Islamabad, and even in—(inaudible)—we had a meeting with Karen Hughes and Christina Rocca and yourself came together. We received them there.

[01:17:35]

You had mentioned exclusively about Afghanistan, but the problems in that area are many regional problems. Things are spilling over. And even the stability of Afghanistan and Pakistan has become interdependent in many ways.

How would you shed light on this, that in Pakistan the shrines of Sufis, mosques, civilians, army people—(inaudible)—there are so many killings being done with Taliban. And the same Taliban also—(inaudible)—and their guard of non-Taliban, they are doing the same thing inside Afghanistan among U.S. Army, even NATO forces, Afghan forces, civilians.

So what did you figure out—what is exactly their motive, their intention? How come they are only—they have become killers and they don't have a motive? If you could help us to figure out how do you really connect the stability—interdependence of stability between Pakistan and Afghanistan? (Inaudible.)

[01:18:40]

MR. TELLIS: Ryan, would you mind if I take two or three questions out of—(inaudible)—so that we can get as much coverage as we can?

Yes, sir. The gentleman here, please.

Q: Ambassador, Mike Pevzner (sp) of the U.S. Senate staff. Thank you very much for that tour de force. And you mentioned the dangers of ignoring a situation like we did in Afghanistan. You mentioned the dangers of unintended consequences. Now that you're out of government, what prescription would you give for the United States and the West regarding Syria? Thank you.

[01:19:08]

MR. TELLIS: (Inaudible.)

Q: Tacy (sp) Schaffer: Nice to see you, Ryan.

MR. CROCKER: Hey, Tacy (sp).

Q: You described Iran, and saying something you didn't, you described an adversary that had common interests with the United States. You served in Pakistan, which is a friend that has interests in Afghanistan that really don't track those of the United States. What kind of strategy would help the United States deal with this paradoxical situation?

MR. CROCKER: Well, again, good to see you Dr. Chaudry, and know you're still fighting the good fight, which I fully appreciate is not an easy one these days. You know, there is a great variety of militants loose in the lands of both countries, some of them in—over linkages with each other, some not. But by and large, you know, I do think they have a discernible motive, which is bringing down the established orders in both countries. It is a negative motive. I don't see much—except in the case of the Taliban, who want to go back to the bad old days and the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan—I don't see much of a vision for the future except everyone being dead or gone who doesn't think like them.

[01:20:46]

And I've been saddened by what I have seen occurring in Pakistan since my departure in 2007. The growth and strengthening of an indigenous Pakistani militancy that is aiming, as you put it, at the Pakistani government establishment, military and the population. What this tells me and what I think all three governments are aware of—Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States—is, whoa, it's bad out there. It's bad for all of us. You know, Pakistani soldiers are dying in the northwest—or sorry, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa—still back in the old days—and in the tribal areas in numbers higher than ever before, fighting the same guys who are killing Afghans and international forces in Afghanistan. We've been through the ground lines of communication and the incidents that precipitated it. This is the time for that proverbial deep breath—again, which I think, you know, Marc Grossman, of course, just out in the region—I think all three governments needs to be taken and say, OK, we have huge lists of grievances between and among us. Why don't you just set those aside for a minute so we're not arguing over them while the wolf tears us apart, and how can we fashion a practical, coordinated approach?

[01:22:39]

In my long experience in the region, what we have not done is evolved a working trilateral mechanism that is senior enough to carry weight and authority but not so senior that it can't on itself make proposals or shape decisions. You know, we're talking about, you know, a couple of levels

down. We've done that sporadically; we have not done it in a sustained fashion. And I think this is the time. India and Pakistan, of course, have done it for years at the foreign secretary level, more quietly at the level of national security adviser. Perhaps great successes have not been registered, but great disasters have been avoided. And I would like to see a trilateral mechanism—it exists at the foreign secretary level, it just has not produced anything because I don't think the participants have had adequate mandates. This is the time, precisely for the reasons you state, and that is why we'd like to see all three governments focus on moving forward. And I won't get into the complexities on the Pakistani side. You know them better than I, and we don't have that extra hour and a half.

[01:24:16]

But to Ambassador Schaffer, I guess I'll give you a flip answer, which isn't completely flip, and then a more detailed one. You know, first it ain't—it ain't 2001, 2002 anymore. You know, it was after 9/11 that President Musharraf made his historic decisions on the over-flight routes, the resupply routes, basically to line up with the U.S. in the fight against Taliban and al-Qaida. You know, he took these decisions and implemented them before there was really a whiff of an insurgency. That came—that came several years later. So if you're comparing—you've got to compare in time, where we were '01, '02 with Pakistan, which was in a pretty reasonable place, and where we were with Afghanistan, which—or with Iran, which also, you know, showed promise, both went south in very different ways, in very different levels of magnitude, but that was in subsequent years.

[01:25:24]

I think a real question is, OK, is there a way to return to some kind of discussion with Iran brokered through the U.N.—not Track II, please—I think there may be. Here's why I think it's important. The Iranians have always pulled their punches in Afghanistan. They could have been a lot worse than they have been. The only explosively formed projectile—EFP that killed so many Americans in Afghanistan we've ever found evidence of—in Iraq, sorry—the only one we've ever found evidence of in Afghanistan was an inert one that we believe was left for us to find as a reminder—say, you know, we're only using one hand, and only three fingers on that hand. They're not doing that to say it's because we're fundamentally nice people and we don't want to hurt anybody. I think it is a signal that there, you know, still is, perhaps, something to talk about, and I would like to see us explore that if we can.

[01:26:52]

Now, I got to tell you, I—you know, I have one great quality that I've always brought to the foreign service, which is my inherent expendability. You know, ship him out; if it works, great, if it doesn't work, you know, we didn't lose much. (Laughter.) You know, so I maintained an authority to engage the Iranians. I had it—obviously going back to '01, '02, '03, had it again the whole time I was in Iraq, did so and retained it in Afghanistan. Couldn't find any Iranian ready to take me up on it. You know, maybe it's because I was standing in front of their gates, saying, hey, I'm the American ambassador—(laughs)—want to go out for a cup of coffee?

[01:27:40]

But I think it is still out there, worth creative minds pursuing, and I think we've just found another great project for you and Howie. Good luck.

Syria, you know, I was ambassador to Syria for three fun-filled years. That included the transition from Hafez to Bashar. Our fearless prediction at the time, because I got to know Bashar before his father died, we had a series of one-on-ones which we conducted in Arabic, not because my Arabic is perfect, but it was better than his English even though he studied ophthalmology in the U.K. That's all he did—he went to classes, he studied his lectures, he read his textbooks, he in no way entered into British social life. His English has since become quite good, I think, at his wife's urging, but Bashar is like his father except worse—less flexible, more doctrinaire, less agile and aware that he doesn't have his father's support. So I think this is—it's going to be a fight to the finish. No happy villa for Bashar in Jeddah. I'd like to be wrong on that, but even if there is—we've already seen the signs of it—just like what happened to my friend Chris and his colleagues—the Arab Spring bears bitter fruit, and nowhere, I am afraid, could it be more bitter than in Syria, where we're already seeing the signs of sectarian divisions, tensions and hatreds surface, even with Bashar still in the palace. You know, again, the past isn't past in Syria.

Hama was the day before yesterday, February 1982—annihilation of a city to get at the Muslim Brotherhood. Sunnis will settle scores, and I would not want to be an Alawi in Syria when the Alawite defense formations collapse. I would not want to be a member of the Alawite defense formations when they collapse, and I am very much afraid that other minorities, like Christians, are going to get caught up in this. I would like to be wrong on this, but, you know, I spent a decade between Lebanon and Syria—that would be my fear.

[01:30:37]

Q: Hi, my name's Chu Zho (ph) from China Center Television. The question is about, due to the anti-U.S. protests in—erupting in Afghanistan, so do you think it signals a kind of failure of Barack Obama's policies in the Middle East? Thank you so much.

MR. CROCKER: Yeah, the protests –

MR. TELLIS: (Inaudible.)

[01:30:04]

Q: Mr. Crocker, in your time in some of the very troubled zones, you mentioned at the top of your remarks how it's about a risking of lives, not about pushing cookies and pinstripes. Do you think the situation in Libya, in retrospect, should have had more of a crossover between the diplomatic end and the militaristic end? Paul Courson, CNN.

MR. TELLIS: (Inaudible.)

Q: Bill Goodfellow, Center for International Policy. What are the prospects for, what are we doing to promote a political settlement? As distasteful as it might seem, I think some sort of deal with the Taliban has to be put in place, or else the civil war is going to continue, and even the good enough—Afghanistan good enough that you suggest, I just don't see it's possible. They're

tenacious, they're not about to be defeated as long as they have Pakistan's banking, and I just think that much more emphasis has to be put on a political settlement.

[01:32:04]

MR. CROCKER: Great questions, all. We have seen—and I referred to them—protests in Afghanistan before over perceived affronts to Islam. You know, the—what has just occurred doesn't really surprise me. And I think there's going to be trouble in Pakistan, too. You know, there's kind of a fuse on these things. You know, Libya is a wild card, because we still don't know that much about it. Hell, they don't know that much about it, but you'll get something pretty quick in Lebanon or Egypt, a little bit later in Syria; about this time they've got their hands full, and then later still in South Asia. So I think this is kind of following a progression.

And I think on all of these, again, it's—the Middle East, the broader Middle East, it's complicated. I think part of it is genuine outrage as it is understood. Again, a lot of these people are illiterate. You know, they haven't seen a video. They're not part of political cultures where governments don't actually make videos and authorize their release, but they are made and released against the vehement position of the government, in our case. But if they don't know us, they don't know that, because that's not the way their world works.

[01:33:34]

At the same time, I think, as the Libyan government has alleged—investigation will have to bear it out—you create an environment where people are in the streets or ready to take to the streets, and then, if you're part of the really organized anti-U.S. element, you hijack it, or you put your elements in behind it. You take plan X off the shelf and you use a mob reaction to cover more specific attacks. Again, they'll have to sort it out. The Afghan thing doesn't look like that, but I—it's died down for the moment in the Arab world. We may see it pick up in South Asia.

In Libya, again, you know, we're going to have to see where a joint investigation leads us. You know, I don't know at this point. I think implicit in my remarks is, boy, you know, be careful where you put troops and to what end, and beware of those unforeseen consequences.

[01:35:07]

There was a lot of criticism at the time of the decision to use an air campaign plus some ground supply to unseat Gaddafi rather than boots on the ground. Well, you know, it worked. You could still make the argument that, well, if we had boots on the ground, we would have been more able to determine political outcomes. You know, my instinct is no. Other than those, you know, the really few—the very proud Marines of our FAST teams and our Marine security guards, I hope we reactivate the force of 4<sup>th</sup> Marine Expeditionary Battalion that came into being after the East Africa attacks. It was—as some of you know, I mean, it was a counterterrorism unit in capital letters. It isn't the size of the force, it's their ability to carry out a counterterror protection mission, and they are specifically trained for it, but I think that's as far as I would want to see a military presence go in Libya. There's been some discussion already. Well, great, you've got a FAST team in now. Too bad it wasn't in Benghazi the day before Chris Stevens was, but again, hindsight is wonderful.

[01:36:50]

Thank you for the question on reconciliation. Again, I touched on it, but I was getting the evil stare from Ashley and Jessica. I mean it was just—it was—(inaudible). Yeah, there does have to be a political settlement, but what it can't be, if it's going to be durable in the Afghan context is a settlement between the U.S. and the Taliban. The Taliban will use that to delegitimize an Afghan government. You know, our deal wasn't with these puppets, our deal was with the puppet masters. And it will actually, I think, lessen the prospects for a stable outcome. I mean, what we have to do, as we were doing during my time, and I know we're doing now is, an intense, quiet set of discussions with the Afghan government. You know, OK, who's maybe vulnerable, how can we work this? Who can we talk to? Who can do what? This is a very important topic for a serious discussion trilaterally. As you point out, Pakistanis play a major role here, and as they have now learned, a lot of those guys they have been giving safe harbor to happen to have links to guys who are killing their guys, so we've got something to talk about. That needs to be part of it, because I think you're right. You are not going to get—if you ever can—a reasonable comprehensive settlement between the Taliban and the Afghan government without full cooperation from Pakistan, which has its own sets of concerns that need to be addressed. So again—I said this about 20,000 times, I say it 20,000 more—it's really complicated. That's not to say there is not a direct role for us. You know, I like meeting the bad guys, I mean, it's kind of fun. So at Afghan government request, I did meet with a number of representatives of militant groups who were able to get to Afghanistan and enjoy Afghan protection when they were there. I never asked how they got there; I didn't want to know, but you know, at certain times, the Afghan government judged it efficacious to have the American ambassador sit down with—again, I won't—well, hell, it's not in the press. I mean, with the Hekmatyar group, you know, with the Quetta Taliban, with others. Does it move them? You know, we'll find out. We do have to be fully engaged on this, but it's got to be in support of the Afghans, because otherwise, all you do is add a new element of instability and a new element of threat rather than support for an Afghan government that has its hands full.

[01:40:08]

STAFF: I'm going to—I'm going to let one last question, and then I need to formally adjourn this meeting, so ma'am, why don't you take the last question.

Q: Thank you very much. Molly Williamson, American Academy of Diplomacy. Thank you for your service, welcome home. My question is in the realm of unintended consequences, but perhaps foreseeable consequences. This town is raging in debate about escalating conflict with Iran. It's done in the cloud, of course, of campaign spirit. What risks do you see to our interests throughout the region should escalation continue?

MR. CROCKER: (Laughter.) Why'd you call on her?

Q: (Off mic.)

[01:41:03]

MR. CROCKER: Molly, thank you for your service. We've played tag team through all the worst places in the world for about three decades. You know, there's one thing worse than an Iran with nuclear arms, and that is an Iran with nuclear arms that somebody tried to prevent from

obtaining them by military force. You know, the Iranians have had more than three decades to contemplate what happened at Osirak in June '81 when the Israelis took out the Iraqi nuclear reactor. So they've got three decades plus in which to figure out how to render a nuclear weapons capability virtually invulnerable in its totality to an air or air mobile assault. I don't know what they've got. I'd like to think somebody in the government knows what they've got, but hey, we thought the Iraqis had WMD. But what they got is designed to survive in its essence. I mean, they lose an awful lot of peripherals, but in its essence, that their nuclear program will be able to come through whatever we and the Israelis can throw at it short of an army of occupation. And if anybody thinks that's a good idea, you know, must have missed the chapter on Iraq.

[01:42:53]

You know, a very senior Israeli officer told me—because this, again, whole debate—as you look at the Iraq [sic] nuclear challenge, there are two bad choices, and they both begin with A—attack and appeasement. And his recommendation is that we do exactly what we've been doing through two administrations with international support of varying strengths, which is, you keep the political pressure on, you keep the economic pressure on, you keep going back for tighter and tighter sanctions. You do what you can to make the people feel the pain, you start—or fuel a debate within Iran about, just how smart is this anyway? You know, look what's happening to the quality of our education, our health care, our economic opportunity, and you gradually but steadily raise the price to achieve a nuclear weapons capability while making it clear that, should they, you know, continue on that course, some really unpleasant things are going to happen that their own people may hold them accountable for if we do our public diplomacy right. So I think that's about where I would have it, at least until after November 6<sup>th</sup>.

[01:44:32]

MR. TELLIS: (Off mic)—thank you, Ryan—(off mic)—for making the presentation that you did, particularly for your candor, because there's always the temptation, when confronted with difficult questions that have great political—(inaudible)—to make a presentation like the State Department spokesman—(inaudible)—it's wonderful that you're freed from that constraint, and that you spoke to us on a range of issues, not just on the substance, but also bringing into them your own contribution and your own experience. So thank you very much, and I also want to thank—(inaudible).

(Applause.)

(END)