

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT  
CSIS Event

**“Making the Case for Sustained U.S. Engagement in a  
Transitioning Afghanistan”**

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FEATURING  
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Daniel F. Runde:

OK, let's get started. I'm Dan Runde. I'm a senior vice president here at CSIS. I really appreciate you all coming out today. We're going to have a conversation about making the case for sustained U.S. engagement in a transitioning Afghanistan as there has been – some of the work I'm most proud of here at CSIS has been the work that I've done with my colleagues on Afghanistan. I did a paper last year with Ambassador Wayne, who's with us today, talking about finishing strong, seeking a proper exit for Afghanistan.

And we looked at – if you look at over the last 18 years and you look at any number of different metrics, whether it's health, or education, or economics, or taxes collected, or democracy, or the status of women – I can go on, and on, and on – there's been enormous progress over 18 years. We don't think about that and it's not covered in the media. And I think we do a – I think, frankly, our media needs to do a better job of covering the progress in Afghanistan. What bleeds, leads. And so the problem is we get all this – we get the steady diet of drudgery and everything is terrible. And it's not – that is not a complete picture of the situation in Afghanistan. It's wrong.

The other paper I did was with Ambassador Rick Olson, which was, OK, so let's say we pull the plug. Let's pull all the troops out. Let's pull the plug on – we have three buckets of support for Afghanistan. We have door kickers, we have American troops on the ground who are boots on the ground, where sort of most of the political energy in this country is about. The second is the check that we write to the Afghan military. And then we have a third check that we write for things like girls' education, and agriculture, and foreign aid, OK? Over time, our foreign aid budget had dropped and over time we've dropped a little bit on the check that we write to the Afghan military.

But we still need to sustain those investments. And over time, significantly, the amount of American boots on the ground have dropped a lot. So most of the fighting and dying are done by the Afghans, not by the United States of America. So but if we decided we're going to bug out, we're going to pull the plug on all of those three things, what would that look like? How bad would that be? Because I don't think that's happened – that conversation is not happening in Washington. When I talk to Pakistani military officials I say: Is it a win for Pakistan if you get 6 million Afghan refugees showing up in your country? You have two now, you good with six? And they never say, oh, that's a win for us. That sounds great. Sign me up for that.

And I would also say the following: If we have a catastrophe in Afghanistan and we pull the plug, the Mariel Boatlift with 100,00 Cuban Americans or the Boat People – the so-called Boat People from Vietnam, which were several hundred thousand people, will look like a Sunday picnic in terms of the massive refugee and migrant flows from Afghanistan. It could be 10 million refugees that we will have a moral obligation to, I think, frankly, take on. So frankly, the check we write for foreign aid, which is small, the check which we write for the Afghan military, relatively small, and the very tiny footprint of American soldiers on the ground is a very small price to pay for the progress and the stability.

My final point is, and then I'm going to introduce the congressman – is as follows: That we went into Afghanistan because of 9/11. There was one group of bad guys in Afghanistan at the time in 9/11. It was al-Qaida. Today there are 18 bad guy

groups. We want to prevent Afghanistan from being the Harvard University of bad guys. That's one of the reasons we're there, in addition to all the other reasons – because of the moral obligations, because of the progress in the country. But ultimately, it's about preventing it from being the Harvard University of bad guys.

I'm really, really glad to have Congressman Michael Waltz, a freshman congressman from Florida. First Congressman elected as a former special forces officer. Oversaw the Afghan file for the Pentagon. Was a senior advisor to former Vice President Cheney. Was a Fox News contributor. Was a successful entrepreneur. Cares deeply about these issues. Is a member of a number of important caucuses. He's a member of the Taiwan Caucus. He's a member of the Shipbuilding Caucus, which I'm all for. I hope – are we going to get to 350 ships, I hope, Congressman? OK. But also is a member, most importantly for this conversation, of the Afghan Caucus.

Congressman, I'm so glad you've taken time out of your busy schedule to be with us for this really important conversation. Thank you. Please come up. Please welcome the congressman. (Applause.)

Rep. Michael Waltz: Well, thank you. Thank you to CSIS for putting this event on. And I'm thrilled I could escape the Hill – (laughs) – even for a little while. You know, it's – believe me, there's never a dull moment these days over on Capitol Hill, for sure.

And just to add a little bit what Dan said in terms of my background, so, you know, our perspective and our experiences drive so much of how we – you know, how we approach our current position, but how we approach this issue in particular. So, yes, I'm a Green Beret. A lot of folks don't realize that both SEALs and Green Berets have reserve units. Which meant I had to have a day job. Which meant my day job for many years was conducting – was really driving Afghan policy in the Pentagon and in the Bush administration, and then also on the private sector.

So I had to be one of the only, you know, sometimes, like, idiots in Washington that actually had to go do the strategy that I was recommending, because I literally would go from the Pentagon, to deploy, then go back, you know, to the White House, and then deploy again. And the fun part was sitting in the room and seeing the president of the United States say: This is what I want done. Getting out there and seeing us do the exact opposite. And then coming back and going: Hey, boss, I know you said do this and we're doing that, and really that disconnect.

That formed the basis of a book I wrote about that experience called "Warrior Diplomat," which I'm very pleased to have the forward from Peter Bergen, who is here with us today, that tries to just capture all of those different kind of experiences, and all of those different perspectives from all of those angles. So how are we now, 19 years on? And where is it all going? And from my perspective now in Congress, where is it all going, and how should America look at now, by almost double, our longest war?

Well, first, I just want to add to your kind of metrics, Dan, that one that I do also think, in addition to health, women and other issues, in terms of whether we look at this as a success or a failure, is that we haven't had any more 9/11s from – you know, we haven't had a major terrorist attack from Afghanistan, emanating from

Afghanistan or Pakistan, since 9/11. I think that, in and of itself, is an often-overlooked major success.

If you look at how our strategy was constructed and what it was in response to, I'm – you know, I got into this argument, actually, with Sal Khalilzad and with others who were calling our effort there – with the inspector general and others, you know, really describing our effort there as a failure, where I do think it depends on what metrics you use.

So let me take a step back and I just want to tell you some experiences that I had. I want to tell you about an Afghan elder named Ghafoorzai that really brought this home to me in terms of why we need to be engaged in Afghanistan and why we're going to be engaged there, one way or another, for the foreseeable future, for multiple generations.

Folks, we don't have a choice. I think the debate is how we engage and what that looks like, not whether. We have to move beyond the are we still there at all. It is an easy and cheap talking point to just say, well, we just need to bring the troops home; this is an endless war; we're done.

And in my experience with Ghafoorzai, who was an elder in eastern Afghanistan of the Mangal tribe in Khost, I was with him in 2009, spent the entire year developing a relationship with him. My teeth were brown, I thought from having so much tea with him. He had about 1,500 Arbakai militia that were on the fence. I wanted them working with us and not the Haqqani. They were under a lot of pressure to work with the Haqqani and the Taliban.

Bottom line, you know, just before our final meeting, we won him over. That's what Green Berets do. And just before our final meeting, our final ceremony, pledging his work with us, I was in my headquarters. And if you remember President Obama's 2009 speech, where he announced the pledge, and we were quite excited, then in the same speech announced its timeline and its withdrawal.

One of my warrant officers standing next to me – I mean, we were just kind of aghast, because we were about to leave on this mission for this final ceremony with Ghafoorzai in the mountains. He said, sir, can you imagine Franklin Delano Roosevelt announcing D-Day to the entire world but then announcing its withdrawal or its timeline in the same speech, what the Germans and everyone else will do?

Well, the results were predictable and sad. We got up in the mountains, expecting a huge ceremony. I got a very cold reception. I didn't – no tea, no nothing. I finally got to the bottom of it and Ghafoorzai said I can't work with you anymore – that quickly, in a land where a high illiteracy and basically no media, had already heard that the Americans were going to abandon him.

And as the – you know, the entire effort fell apart. And I was walking down to my vehicle – out to my vehicle. Ghafoorzai followed me out and he turned me around – and I'll never forget it – and he looked at me. He said – called me Commander Mike – said take this back and tell everybody that you can, all of the Americans that you – that you could deal with, he said, until you're prepared to have your grandchildren

stand shoulder to shoulder and fight with my grandchildren against these extremists, you'll never be successful here.

And it just brought home to me what we're dealing with. We're dealing with a multigenerational war against extremism. And this is but one battlefield.

You know, the other thing that Ghafoorzai – that I learned from him, just very quickly, was the long-term nature of this fight, but also really what it's going to entail to get at the heart of extremism. When we first started meeting, every meeting he kept talking about his secret weapon. Oh, Commander Mike, I've got this secret weapon. It's going to – we're going to take down the extremists. And I'm sitting there, I've got my – you know, my guy with me from the agency and my team. And after, we're walking out and going, good Lord, what is this? Does he have surface-to-air missiles? I mean, what does he have?

And so after about the fourth or fifth mention of the secret weapon I said, Ghafoorzai, look, we can't – we can't move forward – this relationship can't move forward till – you know, we have to – it has to be one of trust. What is this secret weapon? (Laughs.) And he said, OK, Commander Mike, I'll show you my secret weapon. And he sends his guys in the back. I hear a bunch of murmuring in the back. Do you know what it was, what he brought out? It wasn't a missile or some type of antitank mine; it was his daughters. And they come out, teenage, actually young women, uncovered, which was very rare then. He was sneaking them – smuggling them off to school, one to be a doctor, one to be a lawyer, in India. And for those of you who know - I mean, this is deep in the mountains in northern Khost – that was pretty darn dangerous. And they were going by land back and forth through Pakistan, through the FATA.

So you know, that brought home to me really, truly, we'll have our kinetic pieces, Dan, as you mentioned, and we'll get that – we'll have – we'll get that settled, but we have to have a broader strategy. You know, we have to – I mean, there is an economic piece to it, but listen, the bottom line, not to oversimplify: Where women thrive – if you think about it, where women thrive in business, where women thrive in the economy, in civil society, in politics, extremism doesn't. I mean, it's really – it may be a problem, but it doesn't thrive. And so for me we have to get girls' education and women's empowerment out of the kind of feel-good humanitarian realm. It's a national security issue, and we have to put that kind of emphasis behind it. And I think we have to explain that differently to the American people, and that's something that I squarely and fully take on.

And that's not as – you know, as that – I see a lot of head nodding. That sounds like, you know, just a blinding smack of the obvious here in D.C. I have to tell you, when I'm in some of my underserved communities in rural Florida and they hit five potholes on their way to a dilapidated school at home, that's not easy then to explain why all of this money is going to build schools abroad. But when you directly tie it to the safety of their daughters – you know, when their daughters are struggling in an underserved school and then we're talking about throwing money to – at people around the world, that's not an easy explanation. But you have – we have to tie it together. And that is something that I fully take on because I do believe that we are safer here when girls are educated and women are empowered abroad because of this extremism problem.

Look, you're going to have a great panel after this. We can go on and on. I get incredibly frustrated about describing the problem there, and describing how difficult it is, and describing all of the mistakes – me included; I was part of the process – have made in this effort. I mean, you know, 19 years, \$1 trillion. Look, the president has – he has every right to be frustrated. Multiple presidents have been frustrated. The enemy chose well in a place to make his stand.

We could go down – you know, look, from my own experience, you know, the shift of assets to Iraq out of Afghanistan too soon in the early days. I think putting NATO front and center for a mission they weren't prepared at the time to do, to be truly expeditionary. The narcotics fueling the insurgency before we realized it. I can go down this list. The endemic corruption. The lack of corporate knowledge. I write about each one of these. This isn't – not pushing a book, but I mean, we have all written books about – and we should – about capturing these issues. The fractured chain of command. I don't believe that we are organized appropriately as a government here. We have all of those civilian capacities and entities that can't be expeditionary in a warzone, so you have young lieutenants from the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne trying to – trying to rebuild cities. The shifting strategy.

And I think most of all the ongoing problem with the sanctuary in Pakistan. No counterinsurgency effort that I know of in history – Peter, I don't know if you know of one – has been successful when the enemy enjoys unfettered sanctuary next door to rest, refit, arm itself, and continue the fight, and until we deal with that effectively, that is the white elephant in the room when it comes to this issue.

So I'll just leave you with this. Just because it's hard, just because we've made mistakes, just because money hasn't been spent as effectively as it should, doesn't mean we don't still have to do it.

I'm sure there will be discussion today of the Pentagon papers. We're, apparently, going to have hearings of the Pentagon papers. I will remind everyone that was a lessons learned document, which is absolutely what we should be doing – learning the lessons and then improving what we're doing there.

But, again, I think we have no choice but to do it better. As long as half of the world's terrorist organizations are existing in that border region, the United States will have to be engaged. And then, you know, in terms of my message on these current talks, folks, it can get worse there. We can cut a deal with our enemies in a way that pulls the rug out from the existing government, and if Afghanistan descends into chaos and back into civil war, we then lose our local partner.

And then, finally, in terms of just the length of the effort, you know, there was once a country in Asia that had no government, no military, no police force, no real economy to speak of. Its population had been enslaved for several decades, and the situation was an utter mess. That country was South Korea, which we all know now is one of the top 20 economies in the world.

A lot of problems with that analogy, but a lot of folks also don't realize there's a lot of similarities, too. The South Korean army in the 1950s had a higher illiteracy rate than the Afghan army does today. It is a great example of low-level, which I know you're going to talk about in this panel, sustained engagement over time. Not can. We have to get Afghanistan to a better place and the other battlefields on

extremism because, at the end of the day, their security is interwoven with ours. This is a broader fight against extremism, which we can't swing away from because we have great power competition, and if we think it's expensive now, and it is, how expensive will it be if we have to fight our way back in after losing our local ally?

And so to my friends on the right and the left who decry every casualty, as they should, that we take there, how much will it break all of our hearts if we are taking casualties fighting our way back in after we abandon our local ally or after we create a situation where, again, it devolves back into chaos?

So with that, I will stop. I think it's clear where I stand. The last thing I'll leave you from a congressional standpoint is the South – I mean, excuse me, the South Vietnamese army didn't collapse when we pulled our advisors back. It collapsed when Congress cut the funding, to one of your pillars there, Dan.

So I will continue to fight for engagement. We need to right size it. It needs to be sustainable and it needs to be something that we can have in the long term. But, again, we don't have a choice. We have to be there and we have to be engaged.

Thank you so much. (Applause.)

Mr. Runde: Thanks, Congressman. That was really great. Thank you.

Rep. Waltz: All right. Thank you very much. Yeah.

Mr. Runde: Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Congressman.

Please give him one more round of applause. I think he's just – we need people like him. Thank you. (Applause.)

I'm going to ask my panelist colleagues to come on up. OK. We've got a really distinguished and interesting group of panelists, and I'm not going to go through all of their biographies here but I think we've got the right group of folks to help us address this issue of making the case for sustained U.S. engagement in a transitioning Afghanistan.

Rina Amiri, thanks for being with us. You were born in Afghanistan.

Rina Amiri: Hi. Yes.

Mr. Runde: And could you first tell us how do you see things going in Afghanistan? Use the microphone, and remind folks a little bit about your background, just briefly.

Ms. Amiri: Thank you very much. Yes, I am from Afghanistan, just about every generation that I can trace back, and my family came as a result of the very beginning of the instability when the king was overthrown. And I watched my country descend – my homeland descend – (off mic) – became an activist, and ended up working with the former king of Afghanistan in the late 1990s, with his office, where they were – the king was bringing together a coalition of actors to try to – (off mic) – for the Taliban. No one anticipated that the Bonn Agreement would take place and the circumstances which would force – (off mic) – Afghanistan. I remember going to there and just – (audio break) – (comes on mic) – for a long time about Afghanistan.

Afghanistan, the graveyard of empires. Afghanistan, the country that was not amenable to any type of foreign intervention. And Afghanistan, that had been in conflict in perpetuity, which was not the Afghanistan that I knew or my family knew. In fact, we knew Afghanistan to be a place of peace and had become a place of war for three decades. But before that there had not been the type of conflict that had gone on throughout my lifetime.

That is – I went back as a private citizen and was recruited by the U.N. And in the ensuing I guess two decades – (laughs) – I’ve changed hats various times, from the U.N. to working with civil society for a stage; then I went – I was recruited by the U.S. government, where I worked with the former ambassador, Richard Holbrooke. Now I am in the think tank community and I go back as a private citizen. And so I’ve had the privilege of seeing it through a number of different lenses.

And in terms of where Afghanistan is right now, I think there’s two lenses. There’s the lens that’s in the U.S., which is that it’s hopeless and it’s a – it’s a failed effort, that so much money has been squandered on the country and it has failed. And the metric for that is the number of troops that have been there, the amount of money that’s been spent, and the fact that there is not – that there isn’t a cessation of war and violence.

There’s another lens, which is the lens in Afghanistan, where people are tired of war, do – are suffering immensely from the four decades of conflict, but at the same time it’s a place of tremendous resilience and hope. The people that I engaged have grown up in the midst of war and have learned to thrive, in some respects, in spite of it. Yes, it’s a country where progress has been incredibly uneven, where there is a lot – there’s poverty, there’s injustice. But there’s a whole new generation of people in Afghanistan that have really taken advantage of the last two decades of support. The people that I speak to are artists, are entrepreneurs, are people who are heading symphonies in Afghanistan. They’re parliamentarians. They’re young women and men. They have a hunger. They have a thirst. They have an optimism. And if you don’t believe me, look at some of the surveys that are out there. The Asia Society – the 2019 Asia Society, many people were struck that Afghanistan was still optimistic about its future despite where it is right now. So I – that’s where I will leave you with at this point.

Mr. Runde:

OK. So, Rina, let me just take advantage of your presence and the fact that you were born there, your family’s there, and you have continued to stay engaged on Afghanistan. So tell us one or two – so certainly you talked about the survey, but I want you to leave this audience with a couple of hopeful things that you’re particularly struck by, that you’re optimistic about. You’ve talked about the survey, but there are some specific things – either the progress of women, or is it education or the economy? Talk about a couple of specific things that you’re optimistic about in Afghanistan.

Ms. Amiri:

Thank you. Yes, in terms of where society is, you know, when I first went to Afghanistan, one of the first places I was – when I was recruited by the U.N. I was sent to Kandahar, which was the heartland of the Taliban. And when I was – I was the only woman on the U.N. team, and my entire U.N. – my colleagues were quite horrified that there was a woman in their midst. But it was an Afghan woman who came into my office and struck – or pulled her burqa back, stuck her hand forth, and said, OK, finally, there’s a woman I can work with. I’ve been in virtual prison for six

years, and now you are here. There's an emergency loya jirga. I want to participate. I want you to find a way to help me and other women who are tired of being in the situation that we've been in for six years now. Help us. And I ended up working with women, and not just there but throughout Afghanistan.

And I – so I guess one of the biggest success stories that I want to talk about, because it's very – it's something that's personal to me and I think it's of strategic relevance – is where women are right now. That woman went on to become a member of Parliament. She went on to be an incredibly important actor. But alongside of her there's a grassroots movement in Afghanistan that – and throughout Afghanistan's history at various stages there were sort of a small group of elite women when the politics allowed it. Now we have a grassroots movement throughout the entire country of women activists.

That's the great success story of Afghanistan. Women parliamentarians, women who are – who have participated in the Olympics, the women's Chamber of Commerce. I think they made over 700 million contributions to the economy. Media. One of the freest medias in the region. The constitution – one of the most progressive constitutions in the region. Yes, a lot of it is in on paper and it's not implemented, but the aspiration is there. And the legal framework is there. And the economy – you know, everyone thought that 2014 Afghanistan would fall apart with the – you know, with the transition. The economy right now it's growing, and it's projected to grow more. It's incremental, but it's growing right now. Institutions are still fragile, but they're there. And the country – again, going back to some of these surveys – is developing greater and greater confidence in the institutions that are there, so.

Mr. Runde: So in 18 years I think the economy – the formal economy, the licit, formal economy has tripled in size since 2001. I think that's the number. Someone can correct me. And I think the number of girls in school was a grand total of zero in the year 2000. Think about that, zero. And the number you have today is about 3 ½ million girls in school, mas o menos?

Ms. Amiri: Yeah, a third of the population of school – of those going to school are girls.

Mr. Runde: Yeah. So something like 3 ½ million girls are in school today. Now, you could say, OK, that's overcounted, and the statistics are a little bit off, and sometimes they can't get to school, it snows sometimes. So we can quibble whether it's 3 ½ or 3 (million), but it's a lot. And let's – can we all agree it's up from zero, is a lot. Like, that's a thing, right? So, OK, so we can all agree on that?

OK, so I'm going to have a homework assignment for each of the panelists, which is I'm going to ask you some questions but then I want – I'm going to come back to all of you and say: I want you all to prepare for – let's say we bug out and we pull the plug. And I want you to do the intellectual exercise that Ambassador Olson and I did, saying: OK, what does – what does the horrible, nightmare scenario look like? Because I think we think in full technicolor in Washington. We get into this sort of easy we're just going to bug out and we'll just forget about what the consequences are.

So I don't want to have this – the nightmare scenario consequences conversation. But the homework assignment for these panelists are, after we have the first round

of conversations, I'm going to come back to each of you and I'm going to ask you the – I want you each to give me in full technicolor how damn bad it would be if we pulled the plug on all the ways in which we're supporting Afghanistan, OK? So that's not the conversation we're going to have now, but we're going to come back to that later, OK?

Ambassador Wayne, thanks for being here. You're a senior advisor here at CSIS. You were the quarterback on assistance in Afghanistan. You were one of the most senior foreign service officers. You left the foreign service after 40 years. You've been ambassador to Mexico, Ambassador to Argentina, you were assistant secretary for economic affairs. But for this conversation, you were the quarterback for assistance. And you're somebody who has been a conscience here in Washington, a voice of conscience on the Afghan cause and the Afghan situation. So thank you for being here. Thank you for being a partner here with us at CSIS on this really important issue.

So could you talk a little bit about your experience in Afghanistan? And can you talk about some of the progress that you've seen because you've stayed current on Afghanistan? Thanks for being here.

Earl Anthony Wayne: Sure. Thank you, Dan. Thanks to everybody for being here.

Let me start off. I was two years in Afghanistan, from 2009 through 2011. And as you know, there have been a number of reports recently in The Washington Post quoting a number of people, unnamed people, of which I was one of the ones who actually was interviewed for those comments. Everybody was making those comments pretty regularly all along. This was no surprise to me to read these articles, because there was widespread discussion of what we weren't doing well, what we should do better.

The problem was not that people were trying to hide these comments, it's that there was no real good mechanism in the U.S. government for incorporating lessons learned and applying them back to us being involved in that situation. And there are a lot of reasons for it, as the congressman mentioned. But the bottom line was that there was a lot of knowledge out there. The inspector general collected that, and that was good. But we weren't really passing it on from generation to generation. And part of the challenge was that we did have so many generations of Americans that served there.

We went mostly for a year at a time. And that was certainly true for the civilians. Sometimes people did come back, and the military got into a rotation after a while. But even in those units that rotated back, there was a change in those units. And so one of the things – this is just more a general, systematic lesson from this, and for all long wars that we might get into. Even if there are good strategic reasons that we still have a long war, is that you have to learn as you go along.

It's not that we didn't learn anything, we just didn't learn enough in doing it. But we did have, as Dan pointed out, as the congressman pointed out, as Rina just said, there's been a lot of progress that's evident. And I saw a lot of that while I was there in the different social areas, in health, in maternal health, for example, in education and the number of people going into schools, in the livelihood of civic society which was very vital. And a number of people with cellphones

communicating, sharing news, learning things they never had before. They weren't that well connected before. So there were a number of positive signs.

But I think the most important contribution of this period of time is the new generation that has been educated not only out of the country – a number of them had the opportunity at some point to go out – but in the country also, that actually have a whole different knowledge base than their predecessors. They are ready to start governing. One of the challenges in Afghanistan is, are they going to get a chance to start governing? Because there are a number of the older generation of leaders who do not have that out-of-Afghanistan focused opportunity to learn that still have a lot of power. And that transition is still going on.

And then if you think about it, if you get to a peace agreement – which I very much support moving to a peace agreement – I'm sure there are a lot of very smart Taliban, but what's their education been? It's been education in a struggle, in a fight. They might have learned a lot, and they could be good contributors, but they're not going to guide Afghanistan's economy to prosperity. They're not going to easily and effectively see better ways to run the public services and deliver services on a countrywide scale. So there's a tremendous amount of value to this younger generation. And as I say, probably our greatest contribution as an international community and as the United States is to help that generation learn and assume power in that situation.

So I fully agree also with some of the comments Dan and the congressman have made about the key determining factor of considering terrorism and stability as we think through where we go from now. And I also am very happy the congressman mentioned South Korea. The changes we've seen there. And how long have we had troops in South Korea? It's a big investment, but it's an investment that's paid off dearly. And just to mention, where else do we have troops after a war ended? We have troops in Japan, and Germany, and the U.K., and Italy, and other places. So the presence of troops is not necessarily a signal that there is strife continuing. It's a signal that there is a security interest of the United States to have troops in a place.

Now, we have to debate that and discuss that. But there are good arguments to be made in Afghanistan, but also in other fragile states, that it makes sense to have a reduced and sustained presence. And so we can talk about that. But I think one of the key things that we do have to keep in mind is that as we work our way through getting to peace negotiations, getting to an agreement, we have to foster a regime, a situation that's going to be stable and not allow terrorism to grow again. Now, that can be in two forms – one, a government that actually permits terrorists to operate, and the other is a government that can't control all of its territory and has spaces where terrorists can operate and use that as a base of operation. And I think we have to be thinking through what kind of an agreement will minimize that possibility or what kind of continued leverage, possibly presence, should the United States really have to prevent that from happening again.

The best outcome would be a stable and capable government with which we could cooperate in the future. And I think we should be working for that. And I think the people of Afghanistan, as Rina said, there's great desire for peace in that country. The challenge is going to be to take – use that desire for peace to press the leaders on all sides to actually negotiate a serious agreement that can create a sustainable peace.

And I want to underline sustainable peace. If – I mean, right now, as you know, the Taliban and the United States are arguing about what is a reduction of violence, what it would be defined, how long it would be, that would be enough to be a confidence-building measure to actually get into inter-Afghan talks – very important, very delicate.

But we have to remember that if we – even if we – if we get through that, it's going to be a prolonged and difficult and dangerous set of negotiations. This is 40 years. People don't trust each other. They don't have confidence in each other. There's a tremendous amount – it's not just negotiating intellectually the structure of a government. You're going through real healing at the same time in this society, where there's been so much suffering on all sides in all parts of this country. That's all going to be going on at the same time.

And so even then, if you get to a peace settlement, you're going to have a sustained period of implementing it. Think of peace settlements. You don't sign the paper and all of a sudden tomorrow it happens. You're going to have all sorts of checks and balances and mechanisms to make sure that settlement works in practice.

There are going to be some people who don't want it to work in practice, likely from various different places that will try to undermine that. So what are you going to do to sustain it? And at the same time, how are you going to work to reintegrate fighters, to create new jobs, to do that social healing that has to go on, to bolster an economy that has had a difficult time throughout our whole period growing when it wasn't being sustained by the war economy?

And you're not going to have a war economy, so you have to shift to new kinds of production. And there are a number of possibilities out there that could provide this kind of employment, from the agricultural sector to the services sector to – you know, eventually to extractives and to mining and other things. That takes a little more investment. But there are some possibilities to do that. But you're going to have to guide this country to do that. And if you don't have a government that's capable of doing it, and if you don't have an international community that's still involved and supporting that government, you're not going to get there.

If you look at the World Bank studies, which they've done some very good studies of how long, even in the best of circumstances, Afghanistan is going to need international assistance, it's pretty daunting. It's another 10 years at least. And that's with – that should include also not just money, but sort of support. And that doesn't just mean U.S. advisers. It means international advisers that can help work through some of these difficult problems, maybe coming from countries where they also have had to resolve conflict; but anyway, a very difficult situation.

And I was going to say anyway, so I'll go ahead and say it now, if we get this wrong, the costs – I fully agree, the costs are going to be high. And as the congressman mentioned, as Dan mentioned, if you get a return, there are a lot of points at which this could return to civil conflict within Afghanistan. That raises – it does raise a prospect of millions of refugees. It raises the prospect of the civil society, which is our greatest progress, greatest thing we can be proud of, helping supporting the development of, being terribly harmed and Afghanistan having a greater brain drain than it has already experienced over the years, and having a return to these

ungoverned spaces where radical groups can operate. And that could be immensely costly.

I think we really want to avoid that and we want to develop, as the congressman was saying, a long-term strategy that envisions these different paths forward; the best path forward, no doubt, a peace agreement, an implementing process that actually builds confidence, builds effectiveness of a government that has an Afghanistan come out of it that reflects the major strains of belief in that country working together.

Doing that is wonderful – not going to be easy; a lot of places along the way where we could get off of that. We need to be prepared for all of those branches, because it is in the strongest strategic interest of the United States that this, again, not become an ungoverned and chaotic place. And I hope we get there. And I salute all the people working very hard to get us there, including our negotiators, who are hard at work right now.

Thank you.

Mr. Runde:

Thanks, Ambassador.

Peter Bergen, thanks for being here. I'm an admirer of your work; read your books. You've written some important books about Afghanistan. You famously interviewed Osama bin Laden. You wrote a book called *The Osama bin Laden I Knew*, which I recommend. But you've written – you just had a new book come out about Trump and his generals that came out last month. You're a senior – you're a senior officer at the New America Foundation, which is a nonpartisan think tank. You're also a contributor and had a longstanding relationship with CNN. You've had a longstanding relationship with Afghanistan. Thanks for being here.

Can you talk about your experience with Afghanistan? You've had a longstanding relationship with the country. And talk about the progress. And then I hope you'll also talk a little bit about the Washington Post articles and hopefully put those articles in perspective. Thanks for being here.

Peter Bergen:

Thank you, Dan. And thank you, CSIS, for doing this important discussion.

So I'm going to answer the question – another question you asked, which is what does it look like if we just pull the plug? Because we don't have to – we've already done this. We did this in 1989 when we closed our embassy in Afghanistan after the most successful CIA operation in its history, which was enabling the Afghans to defeat the Soviets. We closed our embassy. We zeroed out aid to one of the poorest countries in the world and we basically turned our back in it. Into that – into the vacuum came a civil war, then the Taliban, then al-Qaida.

So we've already run this experiment. We don't have to speculate what it might look like. And we did this again, by the way, in Iraq in 2011, where we pulled out completely. A Shia sectarian government took hold, sort of angering the Sunni population. And ISIS, of course, in 2014 rolls up almost to the gates of Baghdad. These are not exact analogies, but they are real-world analogies about what actually can happen, not speculation.

My association with Afghanistan goes back to '93. I was there during the civil war. And the civil war right now is really a picnic compared to the civil war that was happening in the mid '90s. Kabul was like Mogadishu in the "Black Hawk Down" kind of incident. I mean, there was block-to-block fighting. The Afghans destroyed Kabul. It wasn't the Soviets. And then, of course, the Taliban came into power because essentially they offered some form of peace. Of course, it was peace – sort of Stalinist peace, in a sense. And the Taliban destroyed what remained of the Afghan economy. They had no plan for governance, as Ambassador Wayne said.

I remember visiting – I was there during the Taliban time. You go into senior government offices. There are no computers. I mean, remember the Year 2K problem, where, you know, everything was going to crash? Well, it wouldn't have been a problem in Afghanistan because there were no computers to crash. I mean, they literally had no idea how to run a government. They thought if we make society pure that everything else will sort of take care of itself. And, of course, that didn't happen.

Now, flash forward to today. I was in Kabul in December. And I want to talk about the American University in Afghanistan, because I think it's an incredibly important story. And the university is in danger of having its funding pulled, which would be an extraordinary failure, I think, on behalf of the U.S. government.

So the Afghan university – the American University in Afghanistan has the highest proportion of Fulbright scholars in the world. Just think about that for a minute, in a country where girls weren't educated until relatively recently, in one of the poorest countries in the world.

And, you know, the Taliban, of course, see the American University in Afghanistan as a very big problem, because it's exactly what they don't want, which is educating this new generation that we've discussed. Seventy percent of the Afghan population is under 30. Fifty percent are obviously female. Fifteen percent are Shia, who the Taliban terribly repressed. So that's a vast majority of people who do not want the Taliban and all of its works.

And the Taliban understands that the American University is exactly – is very threatening to their ideology and their position. And so they went in in August in 2016, they conducted a very complex attack on the university. They killed 15 students and professors and people who work at the university. And I went to the university and interviewed three of the students who were – two were severely wounded, one was quite badly wounded. Two of the ladies went back, got their degrees, graduated. And one of the – and also, one of the men who was also badly wounded went back, got his degree.

So despite all the threats of the Taliban against this institution, these students went back to get their degrees. They are pro-American. They are pro – you know, they want to embrace the modern world. This is kind of the promise of Afghanistan that I think that Rina, you know, eloquently talked about. This is a generation that doesn't want to go back to the Taliban.

I'm going to respectfully slightly disagree with the ambassador about the peace talks. I think they were very badly constructed in their first iteration. Hopefully they'll get better in the next iteration. You can't have a peace agreement if you

exclude the government – the duly elected government of Afghanistan. We were treating the Taliban – I think the United States made a huge category error with the Taliban, always treating them as a potential government in waiting as opposed to saying, actually, the real reconciliation we can have in Afghanistan is having a – supporting their electoral process and putting as much – we put all this energy in these Taliban negotiations as opposed to saying the most important thing is to have readily free and fair elections in Afghanistan. And we excluded the duly elected government from these negotiations. Of course, they were quite rightly irritated. And hopefully in the next iteration that won't be the – that won't be an issue.

And then I want to leave – last night President Trump had the State of the Union, and of course he talked about the endless war in Afghanistan, trying to end it. Now, I think the president, along with a lot of other people, tends to conflate two very important things, and one I think that Ambassador Wayne, I think, was very eloquently raised, which is there is a big difference between an endless war and our persistent presence. We have had a persistent presence in South Korea, as the congressman said, since 1953 – one of the poorest countries in the world, now one of the richest. It is a very different matter from having a relatively small group of U.S. Special Operations forces to do counterterrorism missions and a relatively small number of U.S. Special Forces to train, advise, and assist the Afghan army, a relatively small number of intelligence assets, and a relatively small number of people training the Afghan air force. That's what we need. That's a persistent presence. That doesn't require a great deal of blood and treasure.

And when we talk about all the money we've spent on Afghanistan, bear in mind that that \$1 trillion we often talk about is – in fact, we paid most of that money to ourselves. We didn't pay that to the Afghans. And almost never raised in these discussions is how, when you talk about this money, that was money we paid our soldiers, our contractors, our companies. Of course some of it blew up – some of it went into corruption in the Afghan body politic, which is, you know, a great shame. But the fact is, is that, you know, it's not like we've been sort of ultra-generous to the Afghans. A lot of that money just was redirected to ourselves.

And finally, on the Washington Post question that Dan raised, I mean, the Washington Post piece is a very good piece of journalism – it probably will win a Pulitzer – but it's a very partial piece of journalism. It doesn't – and I'm not even critiquing them. That wasn't the story they were doing. And as Ambassador Wayne said, I mean, the idea that, yeah, the Afghan security forces are corrupt, I mean, like, anybody who's paying the – an iota of attention to this over the last 19 years would know that. Yes, there's a big, big drug problem in Afghanistan. I mean, all these things were well-known. They were talked about at the time. But you know – and of course, the Post pieces do not engage with the issue of cellphone penetration, women's education, all – the economy, that Rina discussed, all the things that are the other side of the picture. It would be like doing a story about Chicago but only focusing on the South Side.

Mr. Runde:

Right, exactly. That's a good way – (laughter) – exactly.

Peter, just – let's just spend a minute on – let's set our sights a little bit further – and I think this is also a question I want to ask each of the panelists, for them to think about – is let's think 10 years into the future. Let's say we had peace and let's say we continue to have social and economic progress. What does a – what's a happy

scenario for Afghanistan look like? Because if I was sitting at CSIS 20 years ago and we talked about Colombia, we'd say, oh, it's – you know, the FARC is at the gates, this is going to turn into a narco-state. It didn't happen. Or if we went back 25 years and we talked about some of the Balkan states like, I don't know, Croatia, I was on a – I went to – I did tourism in Croatia. The "Game of Thrones" is filmed in Croatia. Well, 25 years ago things weren't so great in Croatia, right? Country brand – Indonesia. Twenty years ago, they were shooting people in Indonesia. Now, people, it's the It country in Southeast Asia. Country brands change. Afghanistan's country brand can change. What does that look like in a scenario where things go right? And so if people say, oh, Dan's being crazy to say that, well, then I would just say, well, tell me in the case of Croatia, in the case of Indonesia, in the case of Colombia is that crazy? It's not crazy.

Mr. Bergen: Yeah.

Mr. Runde: So how – what –

Mr. Bergen: I mean, there is no – there's no country in the world that suffered a totalitarian war inflicted by the Soviets where a million of the population were killed and a third of the population were made homeless, at a time when the population was 15 million, and then had a civil war in which a hundred thousand more people were killed and then had the Taliban. I mean, combination – this combination is unprecedented.

Mr. Runde: It's unprecedented.

Mr. Bergen: So Afghanistan has very deep problems. There's no doubt. What could it look like? It would be a, you know, a Central Asian country, you know, hopefully, with a sort of moderately-sized economy at peace with its neighbors and itself. I mean, that's really what we're hoping for. Is that possible?

I 100 percent agree with your FARC analogy. I was in Colombia in the mid – in the early '90s. I mean, you know, Pablo Escobar was destroying the Colombians' estate from the inside. I mean, he was, you know, kidnapping everybody, all these prominent political family members, attacking the Supreme Court. The place would seem to be dematerializing. Go there now. While I haven't been there, now I'd love to go. You know – (laughter) –

Mr. Runde: It's great. I went fishing there last March and I recommend everyone go to Colombia on vacation. It's awesome.

Mr. Bergen: We're still dealing with the fallout of the American Civil War today in this country. So these things are not like this, obviously. You know, the U.S. military talks about phase four, which is the phase after the war. We're still dealing in the – Eliot Cohen made this point some time ago, which I think is a brilliant point – we're still dealing with the phase four of the American Civil War.

So, you know, these things take time, and it would be – it would be – you know, you don't want to be Pollyannaish, but I think there are a lot of things going right in Afghanistan and a lot of things – some real things are going wrong. I mean, the thing that was striking to me being in Kabul in December is it looks like Baghdad in 2008. You can't orientate yourself because everywhere there's these 20-foot-high

walls. For a good reason, because the Taliban had done a very effective job of mounting, you know, large-scale terrorist attacks in Kabul. Now they're going down a bit because of these negotiations. So there's a long way to go.

But one thing I – one very important point. The most important thing we can do in Afghanistan is what we say about it as much as what we do about it. Our problem has been constantly changing the message. If we say – if we left one Marine guard outside the U.S. embassy in Kabul and said, you know what, that guy's going to be there for, you know, the duration, forever, for as long as it takes – it's not the number of troops, although that is important. It's what we say about them.

If we're constantly saying, yeah, we're leaving – we're thinking about leaving – the Obama people did that. Trump has sort of done that. This is very damaging to morale. It affects the Taliban calculus. It affects the neighbors' calculus in Pakistan. It affects the Afghan government calculus. It affects the Afghan people calculus.

And one thing that costs very little is just to have a message that actually resonates, which is we plan to stay there for the long term because we understand, for all the reasons everybody's discussed, that it's important for our national security and, of course, we do have some kind of moral responsibility to just not abandon them.

Mr. Runde:

Yeah, I have a vision of how – when I was there last February I had people say to me, are you – are you really going to abandon us, and I had women, you know, basically, implying, like, are you – are you good with, you know, condemning us to a 12th century nightmare. And I wasn't good with that and I said, I'll do my best not to make that happen.

But I think that's part of the Technicolor what we got to connect the dots on. Like, if there's a full pulling of the plug, like, that's part of this scenario. And I think most people are not going to be – I don't think most people in the United States are going to be good with condemning millions of women to some kind of 12th century nightmare.

OK. Jim Bever, thanks for being here. You were a Foreign Service officer at AID. You were a mission director in Afghanistan. You ran the Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan – OAPA – at AID. You were a mission director in Egypt. You served all over the world. You're particularly – you've been particularly invested in the Afghan cause. We talk often, I think, about Afghanistan and you've been – remained involved on Afghanistan since you've retired from AID. I wanted somebody from AID on the panel to talk. Thanks for pinch hitting. We advertised this as Earl Gast. Earl Gast had a health issue come up and so Jim agreed on 18 hours' notice to step in. So thank you, Jim, for doing this. You're a pal.

So, Jim, could you talk about – I want you to give – just double click a little bit more about the kinds of development progress that have happened in Afghanistan. I think you and I are in the biz, and we know that development progress doesn't happen in 20 minutes and it doesn't happen in three-year cycles; it happens over a decade or longer. Talk about that.

Jim Bever:

OK. Thank you very much, Dan, and fellow colleagues up here. It's good to see you again.

It's poetic or ironic justice that I'm sitting here on behalf of Earl Gast because quite a few years ago I was the one on the senior staff of the administrator of USAID who looked around the senior staff table when we needed a new mission director and I saw Earl Gast sitting there at the table that Friday morning. And I asked him afterwards, I said, Earl, I know you've done Iraq; your country needs you again. (Laughter.) And he said – he kind of looked at me and he said, I got to check with my boss at home. And Monday morning he came in at senior staff and said, I'm yours, I'm going, and he was there 30 days later. So my hat's off to Earl, who couldn't be with us today.

I come at this from a background of having lived almost a decade in South Asia. My first USAID assignment was in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan in 1984. We were there, basically, under the Reagan administration with some guaranteed funding levels because, primarily, the stresses on Pakistan that were coming from the Soviet invasion and occupation next door in Afghanistan. And then I served in India as our deputy AID director during – from May 1998 until May 2002, which those of you who know that history know that is exactly the time when Pakistan and India launched their nuclear weapons tests publicly and almost came to nuclear weapons blows in May of 2002. And then I served as the mission director in Afghanistan, arriving in September and then again October/November in Afghanistan with a very close confidant of Paul Wolfowitz and Secretary Rumsfeld and the president named Zalmay Khalilzad in his first ambassadorship, before he went on to Iraq. So that's kind of my context on the inside.

So when I retired from USAID I was acting head of our legislative bureau and I was asked – we had arranged to brief a senior appointee of the president – nominee of the president. And that person asked me, so, Jim, what does success look like in Afghanistan? And I asked him, how much time do you have? I can talk about this all day. But I can sure immediately tell you what failure looks like. And if we have time, we'll get into that a little bit more. Those of us who have been there and lived there and have Afghan friends and colleagues can see it in our – in our nightmares, actually.

So I want to take a little frame for you, which is I first got there, actually, in early 2002. And if you think forward, it's now been – that little baby girl that was born in December 2001 when we dispersed the Taliban or January 2002 is now 18 years old and is voting age, OK? Think about that for a minute. That's how long we've been engaged in the most recent engagement. Let's look 18 years into the future, and that's really what we're talking about here. Can we look 18 years into the future?

So when I got there, it was lack of everything – lack of everything, except fighters. We had – there were plenty of fighters. We had lack of U.S. foreign assistance funds. When I got there we had cobbled together basically \$100 million. We had just gotten Vice President Cheney to agree to a billion-dollar aid program. The government was weak and fragile. There were some bright stars, and the one who really stands out in my mind – although with a lot of respect as well for Ashraf Ghani, who at the time was the finance minister, and Hanif Atmar, who was in charge of the rural development ministry – was a woman health minister named Suhaila Siddiq. That woman, who was trained in Moscow by the Soviets, she knew how to lead us donors. It was awesome to behold. And she knew about systems, and she knew about trusting the local NGOs. And I always wondered, where was

that woman throughout my career elsewhere? So my point is, though they were weak in lots of levels and very fragile and thin, they did have some good leaders, and they still do today.

Travel in Afghanistan was a nightmare. For those of you who lived there at that time, if you would go from Kabul to Kandahar it could take you three days of travel – breakdowns, you know, lethal/fatal damage risk to you personally. You know what the school situation was like. You know what the clinics were like. I think to have a child, to be pregnant in Afghanistan in those days in certain parts of the country was like playing Russian roulette with your life, not to mention the child's. One out of four were – children at that time were dying in childbirth.

So these are some of the improvements the American people, along with other donors, tried to make over time, as well as investing in media, which had gotten a good start and still is strong, and we should not take that for granted; investing in justice and getting women into the justice system on the judge side, which was one of the first things we did and is still a challenge; and investing in education. I mean, my background is infrastructure, energy, and stuff like that. But I learned in Pakistan and I learned in Afghanistan that the only gift that keeps on giving is education. And our colleagues have already mentioned education. The congressman mentioned education.

And I think it's reflective of the unbelievably resilient Afghan people. I have traveled and worked in many countries in my 35-year career with AID, and before that I have never met people on this Earth who are more resilient than the Afghan people. And they are blessed with a character and a history of being some of the world's best traders. They manage to produce agricultural products, especially dried fruits, nuts, and so on. They used to lead the world in dried fruit and nut exports. And minerals – you all know about minerals. It was one of my proudest things, was we got U.S. Geological Survey to work there and really identify what, frankly, the Soviets and the Russians knew long ago when they invaded Afghanistan, that the way they would pay for their occupation would be extracting their minerals, their oil, their gas.

So I'll just stay that at this stage I happen to be somewhat cautiously optimistic about the future of Afghanistan. When you look at its real resource, which are its people and how tough they are, and you look at its resources including minerals and the chance for a mineral economy 18 years from now, I'm bullish on them.

But I'll leave you with my epiphany, which was early on in my time there – I think I'm the only U.S. government officer that ever went down the Kabul-Kandahar highway. Our diplomatic security guys would not take me, but I was responsible literally to the deputies committee and my administrator and the national security adviser and the president to get that highway built in time for their new constitutional convention in December 2003. And in Qalat, in Zabul province, we were hosted by the governor, who later sadly was assassinated. But we had Special Forces there. We actually had some Taliban folks there, because in those days President Karzai was reaching out to try to bring Taliban into his tent. And on the way out from that lunch my security guys were escorting me to my convoy, and one of the Taliban leaders reached out to me and grabbed my wrist. And my security guys reacted, and I said, no, no, no, no, let's see what the man has to say. And he

said, you American, you remember, you all have all the watches; we Taliban have all the time.

And that gets back to the point that was made here earlier and by the congressman. What this country has to get in its head is that it's all about strategic patience. It is in our people's interest to be there and to stay there. So I'll close – I'll stop at that point.

Mr. Runde: OK. So, OK. So I have one question for you, Jim, which is, don't – you're in the biz. So if you've had cohorts and two decades of investment in education, and you've had several million girls go through the school system K through 12, doesn't that radically change the nature of the society and how – the status of women in that society irrevocably?

Mr. Bever: I hope it does. I have to believe it does. There's nothing more powerful on this Earth, and most men here will agree to it, than a determined woman.

And I – my worry, to be honest with you, is that in a new government that might include the – potentially the Taliban, who will get which ministry and which Cabinet responsibilities, and who will oversee the rules of the game and the fairness of the execution of that peace agreement. For example, as Tony referred to, the ones who are probably least able, actually, to defend and protect themselves, unfortunately, would be many of those women, the educated women even, but particularly those who are living in the Taliban traditional strongholds of the country.

Mr. Runde: All right. So who – I want to call on several folks here. Who's from Afghanistan, has got Afghan cred, OK? So I want to hear from – (laughter) – we've got Afghans. I want to call on some Afghans. So this gentleman here. Let's get a little gender balance going on here, OK? This woman back there and this woman here, OK? We're going to do three from people with Afghan ties, OK? Name, organization, keep it short.

Q: Hello. My name is Saeed (sp).

I recently came to U.S. after working five years with the U.S. embassy in Kabul using my SIV, and I just want to say a little bit about the time when the Taliban was there. We were studying in a – in a class destroyed by civil war, only studying religious studies seven out of 10, and were, like, in a situation of receiving, like, five bread for 24 hours for 10 member of the family, which was really, like, a hard situation. And then when the U.S. soldiers were, like, coming through the streets, we were running behind them and I could not imagine of myself working in U.S. embassy after 13 years. So that was the progress and that was the opportunity I got through when the U.S. came. Like, I did my – I completed my school, I did my bachelor degree, I did my master degree, all in Afghanistan. And also, my sister right after started going to school, that can educate her kids. Like, I just want to say a few examples. The destroyed palace by civil war was actually rebuilt by a women Afghan group that were educated during this 18 years. And you know, a private university by the name of Arurahown (ph) is lead by a strong woman from Herat. And so many Afghan women in leadership institutions.

So my comment here is, like, now imagine if things go back and a thousand people like me, a million Afghan youth who studied hard, who has – who are thinking of leading the future of Afghanistan would just leave alone at once, what would happen? They may not get a chance to go to other countries, but they would – the fight would be – would be quite hard.

I'm really sorry, just one last thing.

Mr. Runde: No, that's it. Thanks.

Q: OK. Thank you.

Mr. Runde: Thank you.

Let me give it to this woman here. I want to get to as many comments as I can. Thank you. This woman here, please.

Q: Hi. I'm Wanya Ayat (ph). I'm from Afghanistan. I'm a Fulbright scholar. I graduated from the American University of Afghanistan. (Applause.) I'm doing my master's here at New York University, and right now I am an intern at the Wilson Center.

So I just want to say that I really appreciate your comments, and I'm so happy that we are having this conversation because as a young generation – as a young person who is very worried about their country, I want to say that we have so much hope but we are so worried that if the U.S. leaves what's going to happen to us.

Mr. Runde: OK. Has the Taliban changed?

Q: I don't think so. That is the problem. I'm worried that we are bringing these people on the peace table, but I'm worried that they haven't changed and I'm worried that they are saying only words, and once they come to the power the women will go back to their cages.

Mr. Runde: OK. So I think – so I worry about the Taliban issue, but I worry that the Taliban are bad credit cards that have been maxed out here in Washington. I think we have to think about, like, the consequence if you guys have a civil war. Do you agree with me that you could see 10 million people leave your country?

Q: Yes. Yes.

Mr. Runde: OK. So let's just all get that in our heads, that we got – we have 65 million global refugees and internally displaced people. Add 10 million just if we have another civil war. A lot of them will go to Iran. Two or three will go to Iran. Six will go to Pakistan. So that'll be on them. And they'll deserve it because they've been playing a dirty game. And I've told them this. And if it fails – the other thing to remember, and I'm going to say this publicly. If the Afghanistan project fails, we will hold the Pakistanis partially responsible. And they're going to have to eat it. And they're going to have to host 6 million people. They've hosted two. I don't know any Pakistan military official or ISI official who think it's a win to host 6 million of your people. So thanks for your comment.

I want to hear from this woman up here please, Owen (sp). OK, then I want to hear from a couple gringos, OK? (Laughter.)

Q: Thank you, everyone. I'm Marina Fazil (ph), an Afghan American freelance journalist.

You've just mentioned that it's all about strategic patience. Can you please elaborate to the American electorate, while politicians are trying to win hearts and minds in this country, what is a very concise way that you can describe to the American voter why it is in their strategic interest to stay invested in Afghanistan? You mentioned forecasting 18 years from now about the mineral wealth of Afghanistan. Please bring this on a tangible level for the majority of the Afghan voters – American voters, rather, in terms of their foreign policy. Thank you.

Mr. Runde: OK, any gringos? OK. OK. This woman here and this guy with the – with the button.

Q: Thank you so much. I'm Susan Ayari from Creative Associates.

And was yesterday chatting with Earl in preparation for this talk. And there's one thing I'd like to say. I'm the director of the Afghan Children Read project. It's a USAID-funded project implemented by Creative. And in three and a half years, the Afghan government Ministry of Education have been able to do what many countries have not been able to do. They've established a policy for early-grade reading that is going national. They have revised their grades one through three textbooks for reading in Dari and Pashto that in three and a half years were validated by the minister and are going nation.

And this is huge. Kenya, it took them seven – seven and a half years to get to this point. Egypt really failed in its ability to bring early-grade reading to scale. And so I think education's everything. We've all mentioned it, you know, and a foundation of young children being able to read is a critical key to their continued education, to the health of the girls who become educated, for their own families and their children. And then one last quote from a father of a little third-grade girl: I'm illiterate and I live on a daily wage. But I have always provided all facilities to my daughter's education, because I know the value of education. And I promise my daughters that my support will be with them until they graduate from university and achieve their dreams. And this is a father from Nangahar.

Mr. Runde: OK. So you're in the biz and I'm in the biz. So let me go back to my question to Jim, to you, which is we've educated now 6 million girls. Doesn't this irrevocably change the nature of Afghan society for the better?

Q: Absolutely. And, you know, when I go there – I'm on my way there in two weeks – and I'm with my project staff. You know, the women who work on that project, first of all, are so proud to be associated with this project and to have a voice in changing the future for children in Afghanistan. But also, everyone working on that project, they're heroes. They take a risk every single day, coming into the project office, going home often. They stay late, they stay until after dark. And then they're at risk for being robbed. But they are so committed to this work because they know it's foundational work for the future of Afghanistan.

Mr. Runde: I'm an enormous fan of Creative Associates. And one thing about heroes? Charito Krivant is one of my heroes. So thanks for being here. Please pass the microphone to my friend over here. Last question. Sorry, guys. Then we got to get the panelists to respond to what's been said.

Q: Doug Brooks, Afghan-American Chamber of Commerce.

And my question's to Ambassador Wayne. I wonder if you could just give us sort of three baseline points you would look for in a peace agreement with the Taliban.

Mr. Runde: OK. So everybody here, panelist, gets two minutes or so to kind of respond to – there's been a lot put on the table by some really thoughtful folks out in this audience. So I'd like each – the panelists get two minutes to kind of respond. Pick and choose what you want to react to.

Rina, let me start with you.

Ms. Amiri: I wish the populace thought as this room does, because I think you get it. And unfortunately we need to do a better job, I think, to try to get these messages out to the broader population, because one of our failures – and I think – and now I'm speaking as an international – is to really provide a narrative as to why the U.S. and Afghanistan – we're speaking so much about what's at stake for Afghanistan, but there's also something at stake for the U.S. and for the region. For the U.S. in a region where you have three nuclear powers – India, Pakistan, China – and Iran, which is very much pushing to get it, you have an ally. You have a country that is – that's still very favorable towards the U.S. And to give that strategic position up in a region where there aren't opportunities for too many do-overs – this would be the second do-over – it would be a real squandered opportunity.

Two, thinking about the region, there's wishful thinking that if Afghanistan falls apart that you could just put a lid over it. You can't. This region is incredibly unstable. Six million refugees, even if Pakistan – Pakistan doesn't have the capacity to absorb 6 million refugees without its – something that Afghans often say is that we have a nation but not a state. Pakistan has a state but not a nation. And it's a very – it's in a very precarious place. The whole region is precarious. Having Afghanistan implode is going to be to the detriment of – to the region, and globally in terms of migration.

And I think we need to start framing as to what is vital about Afghanistan much more strategically and not simply have one-year plans. That's what we've done for the last 18 years. That's what, I think, has fueled corruption in Afghanistan, because no one believes in a future – it's hard to believe in a future if it's renewed every year. So I think what we need to make a compelling case of why a more strategic narrative is going to be important for the U.S. Thank you.

Mr. Runde: So we had a chance – we've had a chance for a do-over. Let's not screw it up, is one of the message, right? And I remember that film "Charlie Wilson's War." This is a family think tank so I'm not going to remind everybody of the last couple lines, but I think if you go back and see the end of the movie I think you'll remember what Charlie Wilson said at the end, right? So let's not mess it up. I'll leave it there.

Ambassador Wayne.

Mr. Wayne:

Well, let me mention a couple things that are essential to be reflected in the peace agreement. How they're going to be reflected really depends on the negotiators sorting this one. One is how you deal with power sharing in the near term and how you move toward an actual election system that validates who actually has what support in the country. Secondly, you need to maintain effective security forces. At a minimum, from our point of view, that needs to be against those who would carry out – for use against those who would carry out international terrorism. But there are going to be other disruptive forces in the country. There are going to be some people that don't support an agreement, probably from the Taliban and probably from members of what you might call the non-Taliban coalition. So you have to have effective security forces. And of course, public security is very important to all the Afghan people.

Secondly, it's going to be very hard to hammer out an agreement on justice. What is the difference between the justice systems that each party in this negotiation will be able to sort through? Education for all, in principle. That means really expanding education because it is not now available to everybody. But making sure that continues, including girls and women. I think also there needs to be a provision that would allow for continued international participation in the process on all sides – on the economic-development side, and as needed on the security side. And I think really important are going to be the checks and balances that are in there on the implementation of the peace process. How are you going to react and act if one party or another or a part of the government actually doesn't continue to respect the peace agreement? What do you do? How does that – how do you deal with that situation?

So those are just a few things that I think will need to be in there. Thank you.

Mr. Bergen:

These are really just two observations. One, both Trump and Obama have a lot more similarities than their rhetoric would suggest. And one of the similarities is they both see themselves as elected to get out of America's, quote-unquote, endless wars. But when they're sitting in the Oval Office, the math looks a little bit different.

Now, President Obama wanted to draw down to zero at the end of his second term. In the end, he left 8,500 troops. Guess how many troops President Trump is planning to leave right now? Eighty-five hundred. So they both came to the same conclusion, which is the only thing worse than, you know, leaving – the only thing worse than staying in Afghanistan is leaving Afghanistan, for all the reasons we've already outlined. And so I think it is extremely unlikely, actually, that any Democratic president or any Republican president would turn off the lights, for all the reasons we've just explained.

But I will make another observation. The United States was founded as a sort of anti-empire project. And that very deeply kind of informs, for instance, what Rina just said about our one-year plans. We don't think of ourselves, in our own sort of self-conception, as committing for the long term. So you get a bunch of one-year plans, a bunch of one-year tours, a bunch of people who don't speak the languages.

And the fact is we are going to be committed to Afghanistan, probably for decades, and we should just sort of – you know, realize that fact. And it's for our own

security. And it is a project which many things have gone wrong, which we all know about. And The Washington Post, I think, did a good job outlining them. But many things go right.

And I think, you know, the news business is not – we don't cover hurricanes that don't happen. We cover hurricanes that do happen. And so the news business, by definition, it tends to focus on bad news, because that is news. It is harder to do the good-news stories. And I don't want to be Pollyannish or Donald Rumsfeld in 2003 about the Iraq war. But there are a lot of good-news stories.

And I think that everybody – I agree with everything that's been said on this panel in terms of the necessity of staying in Afghanistan, both for our national security but also, importantly, I think, we have a moral obligation. And I think, you know, that's a hard thing to sell as sort of necessary, appeal to the voters. But when we overthrow a government, we do have a responsibility for what happens next. We've done that in Iraq, in Libya, in Afghanistan, and often we've done a very poor job of the day after.

And I think that we can learn from our mistakes, the lessons learned, and spend much less money, with a much smaller commitment of troops, with a better strategy and the right message, which is we are not going to leave.

Mr. Runde: OK, Jim.

Mr. Bever: Thank you.

I will address your question about the minerals first. I come from the Midwest. And most intelligent American citizens who know something about the history of their own state will know that mineral extraction and development was extremely important for most of their states, whether it's Colorado or New Mexico or Arizona or California or Washington or Alaska or Florida.

And if you look at economies around the world, whether we like it or not, extractive-mineral resource development and the industry that goes with it and the transportation that goes with it creates enormous jobs and multiplier effects. I'm speaking as an economist. And so I think, whether it's Canada or Australia or Chile – you know, I could go on – most Americans, when they stop and think about it, OK, hmm, that's not a handout; that's a hand up. We get that. We get that.

So I'm confident that – and that's mostly private sector. Now, in Afghanistan it's going to take years, maybe another 18 years, to get the security right and to get the investments in. But they've got it. They've got what they need.

The second is strategic balance. And I'll finish on this. And I saw the need for strategic balance elsewhere in my career, whether it was West Bank-Gaza Strip during the first intifada and then again in the second intifada, or whether it's Egypt during the Arab Spring. But in the case of Afghanistan what comes to my mind is Japan. December 1941 the Japanese military – in that case, their government – attacked the American people and we lost three and a half thousand Americans, mostly soldiers but some civilians.

I don't know a lot of Americans who would take issue with what the strategic patience value is of continuing to maintain a few handfuls of thousands of soldiers in Japan 80 years later, especially with the rumblings and the sword rattling that's going on in northeastern Asia right now.

So when I think about the Taliban, which, of course, was not a government group and, particularly, al-Qaida, which is what attacked us – a small band of guys with a couple hundred thousand dollars killed three-and-a-half thousand of our Americans – I don't think the American people will have a problem with strategic patience when our own interests are at stake.

Thank you.

Mr. Runde:

Please join me in thanking the panel. (Applause.)

(END)