

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT

Event

“Afghanistan One Year Later: Consequences & Responsibilities”

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FEATURING

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Catholic Relief Services*

Lieutenant General Michael K. Nagata (Ret.)

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Representative Peter Meijer (R-MI)

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Daniel F. Runde: OK, I'm Dan Runde. I hold the Schreyer Chair here at CSIS. We're having a conversation about Afghanistan One Year Later, the consequences of withdrawal and what are our responsibilities to the Afghan people and to ourselves. This is a horrible day. I'm really unhappy about having to do this. I really didn't want to convene this meeting. I would rather than we didn't withdraw. Maybe I've been in the minority, but I think there were a bunch of bad consequences to us withdrawing. But I know there's a lot of different views about this and that many may not agree with me.

I do think that there were some short-term and long-term consequences from this. I also think that this is going to reverberate for a long time, and it had implications all over the world, not just in Afghanistan, but here and in other parts of the world. So I think we're going to have a very long and interesting discussion about this. But I think one of the things I worry about is that because Afghanistan is in a really forgotten corner of the world, it's easy to sort of sweep under the rug and think about other things. We've had lots of other things going on in the world.

And so it's a small place, but it has an ability to kind of, run under the radar in the grand scheme of things, but unfortunately has an ability to come out and reach out and touch us. I remember 9/11 really clearly, and that's why, I think, we were in Afghanistan, and I don't want us to ever go back there in a military way. And I worry that if there's some – if they – if some other bad event were to happen it would force us to have to go back in there, and I don't want that to happen.

So we've got a number of thoughtful speakers. We're starting first with Congressman Peter Meijer, who's got some pre-recorded remarks. Congressman Meijer represents a district in Michigan. He's also a military veteran and served in Afghanistan. So we're going to play the tape. And then we're going to hear from my friend Fawzia Koofi, who's the former vice president of the Afghan parliament, and is a visiting fellow here at CSIS. Then we'll have a panel discussion. So let's roll the tape of Congressman Meijer, please.

Peter Meijer: Hi. This is Congressman Peter Meijer. And I'm honored to be speaking on the one-year anniversary of the fall of Afghanistan, of the collapse of the Afghan government or, as many who worked over the 20-year span we were in Afghanistan, GIROA, the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, and to be speaking before CSIS on this momentous occasion.

I'm in a unique position as both a member of Congress but also somebody who served with the Army in Iraq, so know what it's like to wear a uniform in a combat zone, to have a weapon, to have body armor, to have armored vehicles, air support, medevacs and all of those things that our soldiers and

sailors, airmen and marines can expect when abroad. But also, to have spent time in Afghanistan as a humanitarian aid worker from 2013 to 2015.

So when Afghanistan fell, that was a scenario that we had been concerned about for a while in Congress. Specifically concerned, and this is coming from somebody who believed in the need for us to move towards a negotiated power sharing agreement – that the only way we could achieve peace in Afghanistan would not have been through unilateral engagement on behalf of the Afghan government but, fundamentally, that the only way this conflict would end peacefully was through a negotiated power-sharing agreement that was hammered out, that had clarity, and that would respect all parties to the conflict.

Now, 20 years on and one year post, you know, the end of the American efforts in Afghanistan, 20 years on I think it's important to reflect on where we came from and where we're going. Where we came from, you know, in the pre-9/11 moment was state collapse in Afghanistan that led to the rise of transnational terrorist organizations that could strike at the West.

Now, specifically, that was al-Qaida. Twenty years later, I think we're on the very same precipice of concern about state collapse that can lead to the rise or empowerment of transnational terrorist organizations that can, again, strike at the West.

The presence of Zawahiri, you know, the number-one in al-Qaida, at least from open source reporting, who was in a safe house protected by Sirajuddin Haqqani or at least under the temporary protection of him and his loyalists, is incredibly concerning. Whether or not al-Qaida was actively planning to strike at the United States, I mean, that is a violation in the most obscene and transparent way of the Doha agreement that was signed in 2020.

But, frankly, more importantly, it strikes at the heart of what should our main priorities and main objectives be in Afghanistan today, and that's what I really want to focus on. I'm a big believer that the United States cannot afford the same decent interval that we had in Vietnam, that the question of engagement, the question of choosing who we talk to and where and how, we're not in a position to put ego first. We're not in a position to be acting on a basis of emotion.

We need to be focused on strategic long-term national interests. We need to be focused on great power competition. We need to be focused on understanding and never forgetting why, again, we went into Afghanistan in the first place. We have a vested interest today in making sure that Afghanistan does not collapse, that there is not an overwhelming humanitarian catastrophe that will only empower those who seek to do the West harm.

We have that on the one hand, but then we also have a strong desire, in my view, to make sure that Afghanistan does not return to the fold of actors who are, fundamentally, unaligned or opposed to the strength of the West. I think Afghanistan today is caught in a very interesting conundrum. They have, obviously, a long-standing – among the Taliban and the Haqqani Network they have a long-standing affinity and support network in Pakistan. They also have ties to the Chinese and Russian governments.

But among the leadership there is an interest, at least expressed – now, I cannot claim the degree of sincerity, but there is a degree of interest in engaging with the West in taking on more of a Saudi model and getting to the point where the West recognizes that Afghanistan will not be a perfect Jeffersonian democracy tomorrow but that there's a very big difference and distinction between that and what we currently have, and I think that is really important for us to focus on and that is really important for us to remember, at the end of the day.

It's very easy to fall victim to delusions of grandeur, of the idea that there's some wonderful Panjshiri rebellion that's going to come from beneath and sweep into Kabul. I think that is a fiction. If you'll recall back to 2001 and some of the Taliban protestations against surrendering al-Qaida figures who were in Afghanistan and had been plotting to attack the U.S., and there was a very fine line going back to the late, you know, 2001 period where we had that question of, you know, will the Taliban surrender leading al-Qaida figures or will the United States have to invade, and they fell back on the fig leaf of Pashtunwali and said that we needed to come in and get them and that they would not participate and they would not cooperate.

I hope and my prayer is that in the post-Doha moment this will create more of a semblance of, how do we align? How do we make sure that what is in the long-term strategic interest of the U.S. is not polluted or contaminated with emotion or with short-term concerns. What I saw on the ground at Hamid Karzai International Airport last year was – and this was a comment that was made to me by a number of American and international personnel – it was a sincere belief and a sincere surprise that, frankly, the United States and coalition personnel worked closely alongside the Taliban. The Taliban were not the folks that were trying to kill us in that August window, and this was something that just shocked many of us who were there, expecting resistance, expecting confrontation, expecting difficulty, when the approach the IEA took was, we signed an agreement, what can we do to help you leave? How can we be of assistance? I think that is continuing to be – or that is a reality that we have not yet fully grappled with. We have not yet been able to set aside our immediate priors with where our long-term interests are in that region, and I hope that we're able to get to that point. I think it's imperative that we get to that point because the threat of a widespread

humanitarian catastrophe in Afghanistan will be tragic on a moral standpoint, and it will be tragic on a strategic standpoint for the United States. We have invested too much, and we spent too long to turn our backs on this region, and we don't have the luxury, as we've had in the post-Vietnam period, to have that interval where we readjust and we reassess.

I know I'm probably taking a position here that may be unpopular in some quarters, but we need to be real about our strengths and our weaknesses and we need to be real about the dynamics that we're facing in Afghanistan today. I think there is a tremendous amount of opportunities. I think we should not shy away from engaging and from holding the Taliban's feet to the fire on any number of issues, from humanitarian access and humanitarian aid to the more fundamental issues around disavowal of al-Qaida and getting women back in school. I think those are areas where we should not take the first no for an answer; we should not just walk away from the table. We need to recognize that we have moral, political, strategic, and tactical considerations that have to be taken into account in Afghanistan.

And I appreciate the fact that CSIS is hosting this discussion today. I'm sure we'll hear from a lot of other members of, you know, various organizations who have had and played an impact to be focusing on what that long term looks like because we cannot be stuck in the – we cannot remain stuck in the past. We cannot be solely focused on what has occurred, and we need to hold that in balance with what will – what has yet to pass and what is coming down the pike, because both of those need to be equally weighted when it comes to the future of American security in Central Asia.

Thank you.

Mr. Runde: Hello, Fawzia. How are you?

Fawzia Koofi: Thank you so much, Dan. As you can imagine – and not only me but I think most people in Afghanistan are not in a situation mentally, emotionally – it's a day of mourning for us in Afghanistan, outside.

Mr. Runde: Thank you. I would welcome any additional thoughts you have. You don't have to say much because I know it's a particularly difficult thing to discuss, but I think – I know you're – you know, you were there and you – I think it was quite a dramatic – you were there and then I think you were sort of the unwelcome – you were held as – I'm going to – you know, in essence, as a prisoner for a bit of time in Kabul before you were allowed to leave. There were a number of assassination attempts against you. Your husband was, in essence, killed by the Taliban, and you were also the only woman member of the negotiating team. So I know it's a particularly difficult day because it brings up a lot, frankly. But I do think, Fawzia, that I think it's really important that we heard – hear from you a little bit more because I think

that it would be inappropriate to be talking about Afghanistan without an important voice like yours here. So I know there's a lot of loss, and I also know – I'm also hoping that we can find some hope. I'm not – it's not a particularly hopeful moment, I think, here in the United States. But I wanted to at least give you a chance to reflect a little bit about what are some of the things you are concerned about, but also what – if I can use the term – what you could be even minorly optimistic about, given sort of the circumstances and given the fact that how you're – how you and so many others were – had to leave under such awful circumstances.

Ms. Koofi:

Thank you so much, Dan. And I thank CSIS for giving me a platform to be part of this wonderful team and group of people.

It is a very sad day for people of Afghanistan, and especially for women and girls of Afghanistan whose hopes, aspiration for a better Afghanistan was shuttered last year the same day. Today I woke up with the memories of what has happened last year on the 15th of August, and also the memories of what happened before the 15th of August. On the 4th of July, when the last American military airplane left Bagram Air Base, I was – in my media intervention I was saying that we don't know whose flag is going to be in Bagram Air Base one year from now.

Looking now at the dynamic of regional interests and the growing influence of certain countries in the region, I think my speculation come true that Afghanistan once again is becoming the battlefield between the superpowers for the very important geographical location it has, or for the security impact that the security in Afghanistan could have, the security consequences. I think Taliban have created three narratives that we, the people of Afghanistan as well as our strategic partners, tend to believe that. The first narrative was that they are the ones – are the only ones, in fact, that are able to fight military extremist groups, and completely disassociated themselves with other military extremist groups, including al-Qaida.

The second narrative was that they have changed. That there is Taliban 2.0. And that they will respect women and human rights within the principles of Islam. And the third paragraph was that they want to be part of a political process. In fact, they have signed the Doha Agreement on the 29th of February 2020 committing the three issues that I have mentioned – the two issues that I have mentioned. Not the women and human rights, because there is no mention of – word mention of women and human rights protection in the Doha Agreement.

However, if you – if we reflect on some of the Taliban's commitment a year since the handover of Kabul to Taliban, and three years since the Doha agreement almost was signed, I think none of the commitment Taliban have – or, none of the narratives Taliban have created for us seem to come true.

When it comes to their disassociation with military extremist groups, not only al-Qaida leader was killed in Kabul recently, but also from my contacts inside Afghanistan and my, you know, wide networks across Afghanistan, I know that they have inspired a lot of military extremist groups from Central Asia, from other countries that are using Afghanistan. So sooner or later my concern would be that, you know, that inspiration may get out of Afghanistan and hurt the global security interests.

When it comes to a political settlement, of course, after the Doha Agreement was signed, and I went for official negotiation with Taliban, I have realized that the Taliban are the not the same Taliban with whom we were engaged in different dialogues and platforms before they signed the agreement. They were absolutely in a victorious mode. And that's why they have expedited the war. With the start of negotiations, they have also expedited the war attacking the cities, including Lashkar Gah, in – we all remember – in October 2020. This was against their commitment.

And when it comes to women and human rights, they went back to scratch. Things that the Taliban do when it comes to eliminating women's rights. If they invest that on – that time and energy on changing the economy of people or changing the security situation, on trying to redefine a foreign relations policy, probably the situation would be different. But we know that since they have taken over, they have issued 28 decrees and verdict eliminating women's freedom from access to school, to work, to mobility, to, you know, access to resources – all kinds of verdicts, which is sad.

Now, moving forward, I think Taliban are now in a different kind of relationship with the regional dynamics of power. I know that there is now a lot of, you know, countries in the region that are in Afghanistan. They have a lot of economic interests, and I think Taliban have now tried to politicize somehow the foreign policy towards the region. Moscow was the first city that accepted Taliban's diplomat. So I think if the world abandon Afghanistan and if the U.S. think that, well, you know, job done, mission accomplished in a country that both Americans, Europeans, allies, and Afghan people invested blood and treasure – if we just walk away, it's not – the security consequences is going to be huge.

So what should be done? Briefly, I think first of all you still have – you need to use your leverage for a political settlement – a settlement that is acceptable, that is representative, with participation of women. Now, when I talk to a lot of international diplomats, they say, well, there is not much leverage left. I think the West went from one extreme to another one. One extreme was fighting with Taliban. The other one was making Taliban their partner by signing a deal with them. There is a middle ground of political pressure. That include the travel ban on Taliban. That include working with regional countries trying to – especially the member of the OIC, the Qatar,

the Gulf states, the Pakistan especially – to make Taliban accountable for their promises during the negotiation and also, you know, since they have taken power and pursue a political settlement.

I know that there is a lot of, you know, sympathizer or, in fact, a narrative that some of the countries in the region created that the reason for collapse of the economy in Afghanistan is because of the frozen asset. Now, the fact of the matter is the frozen assets are the people of Afghanistan's money. Of course, they need to be returned to the people of Afghanistan because we are the main victim of 9/11 along with the families of those who lost their lives. But meanwhile, we need to also, you know, keep in mind that the Taliban creates some income from revenue which pay for their foot soldiers. They have actually increased their foot soldiers. Why are they increasing the number of their foot soldiers? To prepare themselves for a fight.

So I think moving forward economic aid must continue, but it's not sustainable. We cannot – in a country that is full of natural resources, we cannot continue to forever, you know, give people a bag of flour or a can of oil. There should be more than that and the priority should be more of a political approach. A political approach consisting of supporting political process in the region. Nobody else can do that but the West. I think the West still has that leverage. We must use the leverage before it's too late, not only for the people of Afghanistan but for your own as well. Thank you.

Mr. Runde:

Thank you, Fawzia. I'm so grateful that you agreed to be a visiting fellow at CSIS. Now, you're going to be coming next month to Washington and we're going to be making you feel welcome here in D.C., and I know there is a number of folks here who are going to want to also help me in making that happen. Thank you for that really thoughtful and important contribution you just made. I'm very grateful. And thanks for being here on this difficult day. I appreciate it. Thanks, Fawzia. Thank you.

So let me just say one other thing. So what I've said to senior leaders in some Gulf countries is if you want your head of state to get the Nobel Peace Prize, and they all – you know, most governments, most heads of state want to win the Nobel Peace Prize, especially – and especially smaller, poor, you know, less-developed countries. The way to get the Nobel Peace Prize for, say, a Gulf state or the head of state of Qatar or the prime minister of Pakistan is to make sure that girls can go to high school in Afghanistan. So if one of these countries delivers that, I'll be the first person to nominate that head of state. And I suspect there are many people here that'll help nominate that head of state for the Nobel Peace Prize. So if I'm the head of state of Pakistan or the head of state of Qatar – these are all – and the head of state in one of the UAE/Gulf states, if they want to be heroes, they would help us solve this problem.

So I think Fawzia's point about working with countries that have relations with the Taliban – or perhaps this would be something of let's think about what their incentives are. How about let's get them a Nobel Peace Prize for that? So, Norway, if you're listening, that – help us out with this, please. But this would seem to me – like, I'm quite serious about this. So I think, think about what other people's incentives are. I don't think we can guilt people into anything, so let's appeal to some people's other interests, to be frank. So, OK.

So I wanted to have a conversation with people who I respected, who had a lot of thoughtful things to say. I think you all will agree that Congressman Meijer's comments were really sophisticated and thoughtful and impressive, and it's a real shame that he's leaving the Congress. He was defeated two weeks ago in a primary and a number of bad actors intervened in his primary, and so people should look at themselves in the mirror if they participated in that and be ashamed of themselves. So that's the first thing I'll say.

The second thing is we're very grateful to have Fawzia Koofi, who's had several of her bodyguards murdered by the Taliban, her husband was killed by the Taliban. She was, basically, an unwelcome – an unwanted guest of the Taliban for at least a month after the fall of Kabul. So I'm particularly grateful that, given those circumstances, she had the time to speak with us today.

So I think we've got a number of voices here that I wanted to hear from to talk about what are the consequences, but also what do we owe the Afghan people, what do we owe ourselves, what are the regional and what are the global consequences of withdrawal, and what do we need to look out over the horizon on.

Because this isn't – I think there's a temptation both in Washington and among the American people to kind of just forget about it. It's receded from the front page of the newspaper and so it's a small forgotten corner of the world. We can't get there directly. It's a landlocked country. And so for us to engage, we have to have a relationship with somebody.

We do have to have a relationship with China. Probably ain't going to happen. We have to have a relationship with Russia via the Central Asian states. Probably ain't going to happen. We have to have a relationship with Iran. You guys tell me. Probably ain't going to happen. We have to have a relationship with Pakistan if we want to – and that – you know, that's tricky. That's, literally, it. Like, that's the – you can only engage with Afghanistan unless you have the cooperation of one of those countries.

So with that, I'm going to start with the humanitarian issues and I'm going to ask my friend, Bill O'Keefe, who I'm really happy is here, as the executive vice

president for mission mobilization and advocacy at Catholic Relief Services to talk about the current humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan as well as I'm hoping he'll briefly touch on how we're doing in terms of receiving people here because I think we have a – we had a moral responsibility and a geostrategic responsibility to make sure we hosted as many people as we could, whether here or in other countries and outside of Afghanistan.

So, Bill, over to you.

Bill O'Keefe:

Great. Thanks, Dan, and, first of all, I really love your criteria for the Nobel Peace Prize. I'm going to put a check on that.

So Catholic Relief Services has been in Afghanistan since 1998 and is supporting education, cash, disaster response, and agriculture, and right now we are seeing the same thing that other humanitarians are and that the U.N. is reporting.

Of the 41 million people in Afghanistan, 92 percent are facing food insecurity. Another 18.9 percent of that are facing more life-threatening insecurity, one of the highest levels around the world, and about 1.1 million children are facing the kind of severe malnutrition that needs therapeutic intervention, and without that intervention many of those children may very well die.

So it's a terrible humanitarian situation. It's aggravated by a couple of things. One, climate change and cyclical drought. In the '60s, Afghanistan experienced a drought about once every four years. Now it's every other year. And as most of you are probably aware, in poorer countries when the rate of drought picks up the coping strategies gradually get eaten away and people are more and more vulnerable, and we see that in Afghanistan right now.

There's a lot of growth in disease and disease vectors right now in Afghanistan, partly because of breakdown of the health system – COVID, measles, dengue fever, diarrheal disease, hemorrhagic fevers. It's quite a cocktail of disease impact on the population there and, of course, that kind of disease always impacts women and children most of all.

There's a serious macroeconomic and liquidity crisis in the economy. So normal Afghans are not being paid. They can't get their money out of the bank. They're having all sorts of trouble with the basics of economic life because the economy has really been frozen, in part because we and other countries have frozen the assets of the Afghan government and limited its ability to participate in the broader macro economy.

Civil servants are unpaid. Many are unable to work. Unemployment is 40 percent. And so the sum of these impacts is really falling most severely on the most vulnerable people, who did not cause this problem, were not fighting, and have just watched the last 20 years and are now watching what's happening now while suffering.

I'll add that a complication at this particular point in time is everything in Afghanistan is in the context of the broader global food crisis caused by COVID supply chain issues, the Ukraine conflict. And so there's – the global need is competing with need in Afghanistan, and I think we as a country need to learn how to multitask better and not move from just one crisis to another crisis.

Let me say a quick word, Dan, as you asked, on the resettlement effort. We don't resettle folks at CRS, but we do work very closely with groups that do. And the status of people in this country who have been resettled is really complicated. Most of them came on a humanitarian parole, which is not the same as refugee status. They weren't entitled to many of the same benefits and the same infrastructure. And of course, the previous U.S. administration really deconstructed the overall resettlement infrastructure in the country. So groups that were resettling people in the United States were already facing more than they could handle because their infrastructure had been so disinvested over a four-year period. So they've all been struggling. There was, obviously, not enough planning. And so many of those people are in legal limbo right now when their humanitarian parole expires. There's an effort in Congress in the Afghan Readjustment Act or Adjustment Act, and we're certainly supporting that and think it's a sensible way to try to help move forward to provide legal status.

Lots more I could say. Lots of ideas that I'd like to contribute as part of the conversation about what we've learned in 20 years for the path forward.

Mr. Runde: So here's a question, Bill. So two questions, Bill. What – and this is a little bit of a – you may not know the answer. What percentage of the Afghan population has gotten, like, one dose of the COVID vaccine? Is it like 10 percent or 15 percent? It's pretty low.

Mr. O'Keefe: It's pretty low, although I'll say 100 percent of our staff in Afghanistan –

Mr. Runde: Sure.

Mr. O'Keefe: We have about 300 staff. It can be done.

Mr. Runde: Right.

Mr. O'Keefe: But it's pretty low. I don't have the exact figure.

Mr. Runde: Yeah. So let's just – let's just posit that it's under 50 percent. And so that – there's a U.S. interest in making sure everybody in the entire world, whether it's North Korea or Afghanistan or Iran, or at least, you know – you know, countries that are kind of like – we want to have everybody in the world vaccinated and it's not – it's in our collective interest to have everybody in our world vaccinated. It's a very low percentage, and that has negative effects in the rest of the world if not everyone's vaccinated. So that's point one.

So my other point, too, Bill, is if you are a policymaker right now and thinking about the fact that we have to decide between funding humanitarian work or ensuring that at the margins we can help girls go to high school or university, but it means running monies through the pipes of some Taliban-controlled government ministry, what's your – what's your view of that? Because this is a dilemma, right? This is a problem we're grappling with. We don't want to help the Taliban, but we want to help the Afghan people. How do we deal with that?

Mr. O'Keefe: Absolutely. So, first, I think it's a little bit of a false choice. We run community-based education programs in much of the central part of the country. Many other American NGOs are supporting similar activities, and those activities need the compliance of the local education authorities. But most of those people are – you know, they're part of the Taliban government, but they're civil servants. They're people who are interested in education. And so I feel very strongly, and we feel we need to be able to work with those folks in order to advance the education, health, and other social services that are both for the good of the most vulnerable people but also for creating a more stable environment for growth in the country. So I think both can be done.

Also, let me just – last thing. You know, there's the central government, people think the government in Afghanistan. That's like saying the government in the United States. We have a federal government. We have state governments. We have county governments. We have municipal governments. And so one of the mistakes of the last 20 years was not enough working directly through nonprofits, NGOs, credible groups, and local municipal governments, and too much focus on the national central government. So by decentralizing some of our work, I think we can make progress.

Mr. Runde: OK. Thank you.

So, Annie Pforzheimer, thanks for being here. You're a senior associate with CSIS but you are also acting deputy assistant secretary of state for Afghanistan. You were also the deputy chief of mission in Kabul. You've been

a really important voice. You've been a moral voice on Afghanistan. I wanted to make sure that you came. Thanks for coming down from New York to be here. So I'd welcome any initial thoughts that you have.

Annie
Pforzheimer:

Thank you very much. And I look forward to any conversation that we can have amongst us all.

I'll make four points. First is the urgent and continuing need for principled engagement in Afghanistan. As you – you know, as you point out, Dan, there is that tendency in the U.S. to put things on the back page. I think there are official administration desires to see this not talked about. And so keeping this in front of us all as an urgent and important issue to – you know, to continue U.S. engagement, however it may be, this is something we should do beyond the anniversary dates.

And I think there are lots of reasons for that, but I'll point to one which Fawzia Koofi mentioned, that what the Taliban have done is created an inspiration for other groups around the world. And we have that as a problem. We also have the problem of the generation of Afghans either not going to school or, if they do go to school, we don't know what they're going to be taught. So we have a concern in Afghanistan about what that country not only is like right now, but what it might symbolize and turn into for groups around the world that want to destabilize governments on their own.

Secondly, I think there's a driving need for a consistent and multilateral face of engagement. I think the days of the U.S. taking a lead and speaking on behalf of the quote/unquote "West," I think those should be over. Because I think, among other reasons, besides providing a convenient foil for the Taliban, you know, it's more important to have an international voice that the Taliban might actually listen to, which includes some of the neighbors, as Dan pointed out, and some of the organizations that they really need.

So I think that this is one of the reasons that it's important that the U.N. Security Council has passed some good resolutions and a very strong mandate for the U.N. assistance mission in Afghanistan. I don't think that mandate is being fully enough exercised. We don't have to reinvent a role for the international community. It already exists. And that includes all of the very good work done on humanitarian aid, which should be more localized – I absolutely agree.

The mandate also calls for the international community to facilitate conflict resolution, which could start at more local levels and could provide a counterpoint for the vast majority of Afghans who would like more say in their own lives, and don't want to be centrally administered by the Taliban, to give them the ability to speak up and to have their own version of self-administration. And I think we have to use the levers that we have of

influence, the very few that we have remaining, appropriately. I think that every issue of recognition should be linked to concrete and irreversible, ideally, steps on human rights.

The levers of sanctions and sanction relief – and I strongly urge that the travel ban against the Taliban leadership be fully reimposed by the deadline of August 19th. Everything about sanctions should be linked to better performance on counterterrorism. And our assistance should track with transparency on the part of the Taliban of where their income is coming from and who is in charge of fundamental institutions like the Central Bank.

Thirdly, obviously – and I hate to have to say it over and over again – but it's the Afghan voices that matter. Afghans want their rights, and they want their economy. And so what are we doing to empower Afghans who are in the country – there are peace groups, there are women's groups that are there and still organizing. What are we doing to empower their voices? I think the U.N. has had very important speakers at some of their meetings who represent these voices, but do we hear them enough in the United States? Do we hear them enough in the OIC? What are the Afghans inside the country saying?

Finally, I do want to mention the community here in the United States that cares and is working about, you know, relief for Afghans but also the continued relocation of Afghans who are eligible through special immigrant visas or the P1, P2 priority categories created last year, which have almost not been used, or those who arrived through humanitarian parole, who would benefit from the Afghan Adjustment Act.

You know, as everyone has mentioned, this is a hard day and Americans who worked with Afghans in Afghanistan, myself included, truly wake up feeling guilty every day about our comfortable lives and the fact that we can't do more. So in solidarity with the people who are left in Afghanistan, the people who need help who are already here, I hope that we learn something from this day and that we do better going forward.

Mr. Runde: Thanks, Annie.

OK, Ambassador McKinley, thanks for being here. You're a senior adviser here at CSIS. You're a four-time ambassador. You were ambassador in Afghanistan, and so I'm really grateful that you would take the time to be here today.

P. Michael McKinley: Thanks, Dan, for the invitation.

And if I can start echoing Annie's last words: We really can't forget what a tragic day this is. And so we look at a lot of the coverage over the last few

days, much of it focused on the consequences for the Afghan people but also for the American people, and it's important, as Annie has pointed out, that we remember what these 20 years cost on a very significant scale for both our peoples, and not just on anniversaries, which are sad ones, such as the one today.

The three previous speakers I think have raised extremely important topical points and so I am – was struggling to think of and what can I add to the already very important issues which have been covered?

I would start by following up on what Congressman Meijer said about we cannot remain stuck in the past. But as part of not remaining stuck in the past, the United States historically has not done a great job of dealing with historical memory and the consequences of negative political developments, both inside our country and our engagements overseas. So there's talk of lessons learned. There's certainly the very important SIGAR report that came out last year –

Mr. Runde: SIGAR is?

Amb. McKinley: The oversight body appointed by Congress to monitor the expenditure of U.S. funds, both civil and military, during the wars in Afghanistan. And they certainly began a very important process of looking at what happened and trying to explain what happened. But we certainly need to go beyond that because I think we're still absorbing the impact inside this country, first on the failures of American political strategy, failures of American military strategy, the failures of American developmental strategy across 20 years. This isn't a question of focusing on the moment, as Congressman Meijer said. It's not just about the withdrawal, the decision, how it was done; it's a question of why 20 years didn't succeed in building something more permanent going forward. And we have yet to see a concerted, dispassionate, objective, nonpartisan effort launched which can begin to look at what happened with our engagement in Afghanistan and what we can do and learn going forward in terms of how we deal with conflicts in the future but also to help us decide how we deal with Afghanistan today.

Second component is Afghan realities, and I think by now most of us will accept we did not fully understand Afghanistan across the 20 years we were there, and I think it requires us to sort of be more humble as we look at those last 20 years and recognize and ask ourselves – but I think these are questions Afghans have to ask themselves as well. Why, across 20 years, did the entire political leadership, both at the national and regional level, not commit more fully to the transformation of the country? Why, year after year, did we deal with systematic undermining of efforts to build democratic governance or systemic corruption on a massive scale? Why didn't the Afghan security forces build out as advertised – certainly by U.S. government

reports to Congress, but on the ground, too? It was a mirage, and we saw that in 2021 as the Taliban began to stretch their advantage. And we also did not – we fundamentally misunderstood the Taliban – its sense of purpose, a level of support which did exist for them inside the country.

And so, looking at Afghanistan now, these are questions we have to come to terms with, try to analyze, try to understand, if we're going to move on and do something constructive in supporting another transformation of Afghanistan, hopefully in a better direction.

And the third issue is staying power. It's true that global issues have moved on. We have Ukraine. We have Taiwan, as Dan mentioned. We have our national economy. We have climate change. We can go down the list of issues, which are more important now.

But it doesn't mean we can't multitask, I think, again, as Dan said. It is important to continue to focus on issues in the region and in Afghanistan, in particular, partly because of the moral obligation of 20 years of engagement inside the country, but also because what happens in Afghanistan to begin over the years to have a knock-on impact on security matters that are important to the region, to our relationship with the broader South Asia and Central Asia region. And so, to look the other way is not an option.

So, as we go forward and look at engaging on issues, Annie's points about what do we do now, working with the multilateral agencies, working with governments – like-minded governments around the world, with regional governments to see how we can affect change, continuing to monitor the terrorist threat. Although I'm in the camp of, you want to look at terrorist threats, take a look at what's happening in the Sahel with Islamic state and al Qaeda off-shoots or Northern Syria and Northern Iraq. The threat's much closer than Afghanistan at this stage, but it doesn't mean you don't have to address what could and is emerging in Afghanistan.

So, going forward it just seems important to focus – keep Afghanistan as part of our national – sorry international engagement, address the important issues that have already been referenced, and to close – again, paraphrasing Congressman Meijer – distinguishing of the events of the past 18 months and our long-term strategic interests in the region. We should not shy away from reengagement.

Thank you.

Mr. Runde:

Thank you.

Lieutenant General Nagata, thanks for being here and welcome any comments that you have. I know you served in Afghanistan, so please.

Michael Nagata: Thank you very much, and thanks to you and CSIS for inviting me to be here.

The – I was doing some quick math as I was listening to the Ambassador. So, 21 years and four days ago, a very much younger version of me – my hair was darker, and my heart was lighter – was very busy launching my squadron. I was a commander in the special operations community at the time towards South Asia and continue to do so for that entire period.

So, everything I'm about to say is to one degree or another colored by that experience, so for that reason, you should all take what I'm about to tell you with a grain of salt. In some ways, I'm a little too close to the problem.

There are three things I want to talk about. The first one is directly related to our ongoing need to be mindful of our counterterrorism requirements in this part of the world. But it's such a broad topic, there's only one aspect that I want to focus on, and that is the term that is being used in this town that is purported to be our solution for that problem. It is called over-the-horizon counterterrorism.

The strike that killed the al Qaeda leader Zawahiri the other day was a good example of over-the-horizon counterterrorism. It probably took many months for us to develop the precise intelligence required to execute that strike, and of course, we had the technological and operational wherewithal to do it precisely and successfully.

But here's the most important point that I think more people in this town and around the world need to grasp. That kinetic strike, which was highly successful – and I shed no tears for the loss of Zawahiri – is a tactic. It's a very successful tactic. It is not a strategy. It cannot be a strategy. We have developed – not just we, but many of our allies. We have developed an exquisite ability – given enough time, resources and intelligence – to go after any terrorist in the world and have a pretty good chance of success. That will not and has never brought an end to terrorism. It does eliminate a particular threat. It might save a life. But it does not solve the problem. And so I guess one of my greatest wishes on this, again, anniversary of that terrible day, is that I really wish we would stop treating a tactic as if it were a substitute for a strategy. It is not.

The second thing I want to talk about is a personal point of view. I have no metrics. I have no research to back this up. But I am part of the veteran community that served in Afghanistan. I spent many years of my life in that part of the world. I have never seen the amount of grief, sorrow, anger, and I'm not a psychiatrist or a psychologist but I'll still call it, psychological trauma. And not just in the retired community. There are traumatized people still serving in government. We all try to hide it, but it is very real. It has real

consequences. And I do not believe American society, or the American government is adequately dealing with it. People are really suffering as a result of this withdrawal. Whether or not it was the right thing to do, the amount of trauma that I see in this community is astonishingly bad.

Finally, again, personal observation here – or, at least, personal conclusion. We have given populations and nations all around the world a significant reason to no longer trust us. It's coming at a particularly terrible time for the United States. In order to rise to the occasion in the competition we have underway with actors like Russia, China, Iran, North Korea, this is a particularly awful time for people not to trust us. But whether it's awful or not, really doesn't matter. We have given populations all over the world a very significant reason not to trust us. Doesn't have to stay that way, but it begs a question that I do not believe we as a nation or we as a government have answered yet. What are we now prepared to do to get people to trust us again? Thank you.

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

Ambassador Wayne, thanks for being here. Like Annie Pforzheimer, you've been an important moral voice here at CSIS for many years and have encouraged us to work on the challenges in Afghanistan over a number of years. So I really appreciate you, Ambassador, being here. You were ambassador to Argentina. You were ambassador to Mexico. And you were the deputy ambassador in Afghanistan, where you were, in essence, the way I would describe it, was sort of the quarterback on assistance for at least a year in Afghanistan. You were assistant secretary for economic affairs. So I really appreciate you being here.

Earl Anthony Wayne: Well, thanks very much, Dan. And thanks to everybody. I have the challenge of having a lot of smart and insightful people having spoken before me. So I'm going to repeat a few things that they say – that they said, and hopefully then we can have a good conversation.

First, it is important to look back and realize that we made serious mistakes all the way through the 20 years. Different kind of mistakes at different times, and we didn't really learn well from those mistakes. I started working in Afghanistan in the fall of 2001, as we were already trying to start planning for rebuilding after a conflict of what we did there. And it went through my two years in Afghanistan. And since I came from Afghanistan, I've led an informal group of former officials who care about the country for the last six years or so, talking this through.

So we've got to be humble as we go forward. We have to be patient, thoughtful, and yet ready to act and ready to stay engaged. We do have a clear moral responsibility to those Afghans who fought with us, but not only

the Afghans who fought with us; the Afghans that we educated and who are alive because of the medical systems we put in place, because of the education systems we put in place, because of the free media that actually existed there. Afghans are much more engaged with the world, and I know that many of them were not happy with the Afghanistan before the Taliban came in.

You know, talk about exit strategies, we really, really, really blew the departure from Afghanistan. We had a terrible agreement with the Taliban, we had a terrible drawdown process, and we had a terrible departure process. And the result of that has been massive suffering, people living on the edge of starvation and death from other hardships over the past year.

So we need to find ways to keep addressing those serious human needs as we go forward. And as has been mentioned, we also need to address our security interests that are still evident there. And we're doing this with probably the least amount of leverage we've had since 2002 and the least amount of intelligence that we've had for a long time about what's really happening there.

Plus, as none of us have yet mentioned, the Taliban is internally focused right now. They're consolidating their rule. They really don't care a lot about what the international community thinks. They're happy to have that relief coming in, but they're focused on maintaining their internal unity, deciding what they want their new regime to look like. They still have just a provisional government. So in a lot of ways part of the challenge is getting the attention of the Taliban to doing the right thing and then having the leverage to have them do that. So we need to do that in our engagement.

Working with our partners, as Annie and others and Mike have said. We have to have partners doing this. We have partners that agree with us ideologically and we have partners that don't agree with us, but so far, the international community has hung together because the Taliban has been so reprehensible in many ways of not being inclusive in their government – including, of course, their treatment of women and children as a prime example.

So as we go forward, again, looking – we need to really be patient and committed to a long-term strategy that looks for opportunities to get the Taliban to do things that they should do, but to make sure they're tied to – when we give – if we give something for that, it's tied to specific steps that are positive. And we have to be ready to act if we discover new Zawahiris there, and to act forcefully. And all the time, engaging with regional and international players who still care using the U.N., using other things.

So it's a tough agenda. And especially, as we all know, attention in the United States to these things rises and wanes and tends to wane right now – not tying to my last name, of course. But it really is important to stay engaged. So let's have a good conversation.

Mr. Runde:

So I'd welcome – I'm going to suggest one of three things that each of you could do. One is you could react to something someone else has said. And then let me put two questions to this group and you can answer either one of these two questions.

One is: So should – I don't think anybody on this panel's going to say let's walk away from Afghanistan, but if we're not walking away from Afghanistan, what does engagement look like given what – the cards we've been dealt? So that's one question. So you could react to – react to what someone else has said or you can say, OK, tell me what engagement looks like, given this.

The other question I would put to you is: OK, there's been discussion about regional actors. I've put on the table the idea of I'm telling you – this isn't a completely glib statement on my part – we should be thinking about what we could do to help one of our – you know, one of the neighbors that's got relations with the Taliban, get their head of state the Nobel Peace Prize. But if we could get girls in school through 12th grade or university again and some – like, something pre-2021, we ought to get one of these heads of state – if they can deliver that, we ought to give them the Nobel Prize. And I would tell you that's far better than, like, saying you can come give a speech at Yale or you come give a talk at the World Economic Forum. That's actually a real carrot for some actor who might be a little diffident about this to consider doing this.

So how do we engage the regional actors? So reaction to something that has been said, how do we engage, given the circumstances, or tell me something about how we should – what role regional actors can play, given what we're talking about.

So let me just go down the – then I'll open it up to some Q&A. So, briefly.

OK. So, Bill, go ahead. You don't have to respond to all those things.

Mr. O'Keefe:

Great. Definitely not going to respond to all of them. I'm going to focus on what's engagement and, first, say somewhat of a controversial statement, which is this is, I think, for many a tragic day but for many in Afghanistan, actually, particularly in rural areas not so tragic because there's not fighting that there was for 20 years and so many people are experiencing peace, in a

relative sense, in a way that they weren't before and I just think it's important to remember that.

The costs of an ongoing conflict, good or bad, are extremely high, again, on the most vulnerable people and there are people who are now living much more normal lives – farming, taking care of their families – than they would have had the conflict continue. So point one.

In terms of what engagement looks like, I'm going to focus on the need to continue to support humanitarian relief but also to move towards resilience building and more development – community development activities for the long term.

One of the mistakes of the last 20 years is rather than a 20-year community development strategy that built the relationship between people and the administrative state by providing services that people needed we focused on a lot of money through a narrow central administrative pipeline, and when there's too much money in a pipeline it overflows and that's what actually creates corruption, and that's what we got.

So we need to focus on local credible actors in long-term community development activities that make people's lives better. We can do that. There is a way to do that and still avoid supporting the worst actors in a way that is contrary to American interests. So that's the engagement that I'm looking for.

Mr. Runde: Ok. Annie?

Ms. Pforzheimer: Thank you.

Maybe I'll just, in a way, push back at the idea that it's – you know, first of all, that everything that we did was a failure. I mean, I, certainly, don't believe that, but also that, going forward, that it is somehow romantic to have moral – you know, sort of a moral quality to what we see as our engagement strategy.

I mean, I think that the Taliban are not the only ones who are allowed to have an ideology. We believe in the U.N. Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and I think that our path of engagement, as I said, should absolutely be as multilateral as possible because we don't need the U.S., the West, NATO, et cetera, to, again, sort of put itself in the savior category.

What we need is a worldwide, you know, set of standards for the Taliban to understand are actually nonnegotiable. I mean, they were successful in their negotiating strategy by simply sticking to what they believed in. I think we have beliefs, too, and I think that is where we are strongest.

So that, you know, humanitarian relief is incredibly important. Humanitarian plus is important. But beyond that, the Taliban have taken over the responsibility for the feeding of every person in that country. What is it that they are prepared to do in order to guarantee that Afghans can survive and even thrive?

And so the conversation between the Taliban and the international community, you know, has got to be one of principles and one of clarity and that we need to be as united as possible with other members of the international community in order to make that stick.

Mr. Runde: OK.

Ambassador?

Amb. McKinley: So I'm going to speak very quickly because Dan will shut me off otherwise.

I think the central question we're dealing with, and we shouldn't sugarcoat it, is what the Taliban are doing with women and girls. It's the single most challenging aspect of their rule. It's gender repression on a scale we haven't seen anywhere in the past hundred years. And so part of engagement is continuing to look for how to address that question.

We have the humanitarian needs. We have the response to terrorist links, to building out governance and so on. But I think we shouldn't lose sight that perhaps the biggest – not perhaps – the biggest negative of the Taliban coming to power was what happened to half the population.

And, second, I think – as Bill already said, and Annie and Tony – focusing on what we can do going forward. But Bill's point about relative peace in a lot of the countryside, International Crisis Group just sent a group of people that visited 13 of the 34 provinces. That wouldn't have been possible 18 months ago. And speaking with not just government representatives but Afghans across the board, something is happening there, something different. We need to understand it more clearly.

And take into account what Tony said about Taliban focused inwards, consolidation of their government, and divisions among the Taliban. But also on things that didn't happen. Back in December/January we were predicting famine by March. Well, the international community marshalled its resources and worked with NGOs inside Afghanistan and prevented that happening. And the work has to continue. But it was prevented, meaning something's functioning inside the country.

And as we deal with engagement, important to realize that even governments we don't like have not recognized the Taliban. Not the Iranians.

Not the Chinese. Not the Pakistanis. It's really – there is significant reserve, looking at what they are. And it should be possible to begin to leverage that. And so finally, working with regional actors, you know, we need to move forward and see how they're seeing it, seeing where they're prepared to use leverage, and be fluid. The situation is fluid, not static.

And just a final pitch, everybody feels on this panel, everybody in this room, but we left a lot of people behind. We left people behind we worked with by the tens of thousands. It's unacceptable that we don't continue to make that just about the most important priority in terms of our people-to-people. We have a responsibility we have not yet met. We don't want to wait 10 years, as we did in Southeast Asia, to meet that commitment.

Mr. Runde: Oh, God. Thank you.

General.

Lt. Gen. Nagata: You – I think you originally posed the question as one about engagement with Afghanistan. I'm going to take the liberty of broadening it to a question about engagement in the region. And the reason I want to do this is because three of the four competitors that the U.S. has declared are important to us – Russia, China, and Iran – are proximate to Afghanistan. We also have the world's most dangerous nuclear armed standoff between Pakistan and India on the eastern border of Afghanistan. So I think it should be obvious that this region is strategically consequential for the United States and its interests not just in the region, but around the world – whether we like it or not. It's a very inconvenient truth, but I would argue it's true nonetheless.

But that begs the question that I'll end with. If what I said is accurate, does the United States have – whether you want to call it a theory of success or just a reasonably coherent strategic approach – to rationalizing what we do regarding Afghanistan with our strategic interests that are created by the fact that Afghanistan is proximate to all of these crucial national security problems for the United States. I would argue before I retired three years ago, we did not have one. Maybe it's been created in the last three years, but it's one of the best-kept secrets in Washington, D.C.

Mr. Runde: Ok.

Ambassador Wayne?

Amb. Wayne: I think one of the key words I would say here going forward is engagement. I think there's a general agreement that we have to stay engaged. How we forge that, and what strategy it fits into, is the question that remains to be answered. I think there's no question, we need to talk to the Taliban about women and girls. But we need to talk to them about their economy also. How

are we going to get – how is that going to support the rest of the Afghan people? I think the talks that U.S. officials were having about getting money flowing into the central bank again were a good thing to do. It's good to talk about that. I think our reflection on the money that we have frozen and still have on hold in the United States and in other capitals around the world is a good subject to explore with them. It doesn't mean we give into everything the Taliban asked for, but it means we keep working along at these kind of things and we try, I think, all of us in the international community, to develop leverage with them going forward.

I think there are Taliban that are going to feel the responsibility to govern responsibly, especially the longer they have this responsibility. They are dealing with this battle, sort of, of ideological purity going on right now within the Taliban, but it's clear there are already differences there. So I think part of what we're doing is staying engaged, testing, probing, working with them, staying true to our values, as Annie said, as we go forward, and putting it into a framework that can endure, because this is going to take a while. We're talking years here to engage these guys going forward and trying, at the same time, to keep Afghans alive and to find ways to get more people out who did work with us and who want to leave and come live not just in the United States but other places for the time being because of their own values that they developed during the 20 years that we and other members of the international community were there providing various kinds of support, educational opportunities. And so I think that is the general direction we have to go, and we should look to our administration to come up with a strategic vision that they can sell to all of us.

Mr. Runde: OK. So engage, revisit what kind of a strategy. It's probably not Jeffersonian democracy any time soon but maybe something along the lines of what Congressman Meijer was saying, something along the lines of maybe – something along the lines of Saudi Arabia or something like that. OK, and let's – OK, so I've got several questions from the audience. Let me put a couple to you; you can pick and choose.

What is the status of Afghanistan's foreign currency reserves? Are they frozen? There's been some reference to some of that here, if someone wants to take that on, what the current status is. There was some – there was a little bit of a debate a couple months ago about – I think the U.S. government made the decision to take some of those resources and give them to 9/11 families. If someone could talk a little bit about that, that would be – if one person would take that on.

Mr. O'Keefe: Dan, The Wall Street Journal reported this morning that the U.S. had decided not to allow the 3.5 billion (dollars) that they were originally allow to go, so –

Mr. Runde: OK, so, Bill, I'm going to have you take on this issue of the reserves and anyone else who wants to take this on.

And then I'd say the other one is, how can the U.S. reset its relationship with Pakistan and other neighboring countries to manage the humanitarian security crises in Afghanistan?

So I think I said this in the green room, or I may have said this earlier, that, you know, if you look at a map, it's China on one side, Russia and Central Asia – so if you want to get to Central Asia, you have to go through Russia, on the other – to General Nagata's point, it's proximate and they've got a vote – or Iran or Pakistan. So you pick your poison in terms of how you engage with Afghanistan. And so our decision has for 20 years – we're going to work with Pakistan. So I think the question of how can the U.S. reset its relationship with Pakistan and other neighboring countries to manage humanitarian and security crises in Afghanistan.

The other question is: Other than winning the Nobel Peace Prize, what potential motivators exist to pull Gulf-state interests into Afghanistan?

So you can each pick one or some of those, but I'd like someone to take on this issue of reserves, please, or a couple of people to take on the issue of the reserves, OK? So we'll start with you, Bill.

Mr. O'Keefe: OK. I'm not the expert on the reserves. I'll just start it off and then others can fill in. But there are \$7 billion of the reserves of the Afghan Central Bank that are held in New York, whatever that means, by our Fed as part of the global monetary system, and the Biden administration some months ago said that 3.5 billion (dollars) was going to go to victims of terrorism from – and victims of 9/11 because – making the logical connection that this money is from the Afghan government, which is from the Taliban –

Ms. Pforzheimer: Who's going to be eligible to be used for –

Mr. O'Keefe: Eligible to be used, right. Eligible to be used as part of legal processes ongoing. And the other 3.5 (billion dollars) they were going to try to figure out how to get to the Afghan people in one way or another. And then this morning my understanding is, as reported in The Wall Street Journal, they have now said because of concerns with ability to monitor that money and antiterrorism risks they aren't going to allow that to happen. At least that's my understanding.

Let me just add one other quick point, though, and I'll be super quick. I do want to recognize that the Treasury Department, the State Department, USAID have really done, I think, a good job figuring out how, within the respect of our antiterrorism laws, making it possible for groups like Catholic

Relief Services to provide humanitarian assistance, basic education and health –

Mr. Runde: Without getting crosswise on the terrorist stuff.

Mr. O’Keefe: Without getting crosswise on the terrorist. And it’s a web of anti-terror restrictions. It’s very complicated. But I think they’ve done a really good job and I do want to give them a shout out.

Mr. Runde: Thanks.

OK, Annie?

Ms. Pforzheimer: No.

Mr. Runde: OK.

Ambassador Wayne?

Amb. Wayne: You know, I guess the United States and other countries froze any Taliban – any Afghanistan official reserves that were in their central banks. In the United States, there was a suit filed by relatives of the 2001 bombing claiming to get recompense from this money for their families. That suit is still ongoing. This court case is still ongoing in the United States. As part of an effort to free up part of the money to go to meet the humanitarian needs of Afghanistan in the short term, the United States government made this proposal to allow about half the money to still be treated by this court case – court case still to be decided, and not everybody supports the families of the 9/11 victims getting that.

Mr. Runde: And there’s – within the 9/11 families there’s different views.

Amb. Wayne: And there are differences. Some families say we don’t need the money but give it to Afghans who have been suffering. Others say, no –

Mr. Runde: Have a different view.

Amb. Wayne: Have a different view.

So, of the money that they were going to give to Afghanistan, there was also a debate because part of the money – at least couple hundred million dollars of that money actually belonged to Afghan private banks and was just sitting in the Fed to be protected. So that never was Taliban money. It was never Kabul republic/Islamic republic money. That’s still also held. And so that makes it very hard for the banks in Afghanistan to function, private banks in Afghanistan, if their own reserves were taken away.

Mr. Runde: And, Ambassador, we would agree we'd probably want to have a functioning banking system if you want to –

Amb. Wayne: Right.

So this was all part of the discussion how can we move this forward in a way that actually does return some money to be used for the good of Afghan people going forward, and that's still in process. And that's what The Wall Street Journal was talking about this morning, that people are being cautious – not surprisingly, the wake of al-Zawahiri being discovered and taken out there in Kabul. So this will be a long process going forward, but an important one because that is money.

Now, just to put this in context, when the Taliban regime fell and the new republic came in, I participated in the negotiations to return a couple billion dollars – as I remember, 1 to 2 billion (dollars) – that had been frozen in the United States all during the 1990s and were returned to the new republic as part of a negotiated agreement after the Taliban had left. So this has happened before at a different scale in our own bilateral history.

Mr. Runde: OK. Thank you.

General?

Lt. Gen. Nagata: You already know, Dan, but the word “Pakistan” is like red meat to me, so I have to rise to debate.

Mr. Runde: I know. (Laughs.)

Lt. Gen. Nagata: About maybe a year and a half ago my former special operations colleagues – colleague and once my boss, General Joe Votel, and I wrote – co-wrote an article about the relationship between the United States and Pakistan. And it's a pretty boring article, so I could just tell you – I'll just cut to the chase and tell you what our principal argument was.

One of the most difficult things in the world – I spent almost three years of my life there – is to have a functionally effective relationship with Pakistan or between Pakistan and the United States. It's unbelievably difficult. But what we argued in the article is the only thing harder than that is to not have a relationship with Pakistan.

Mr. Runde: Totally. I a hundred percent agree.

Lt. Gen. Nagata: The consequences of not having a – of not even trying to have an effective relationship with Pakistan are much worse than the frustrations, energy, and time you have to expend in having one.

Now –

Mr. Runde: A hundred percent agree.

Lt. Gen. Nagata: Having said that, whatever America's aspirations, hopes, and strategic goals end up being in this part of the world, not just Afghanistan, the likelihood we will achieve them if we don't create a more functionally effective relationship with Pakistan, in my judgment, is zero.

Mr. Runde: A hundred percent agree. Thank you, General. I 100 percent agree with you. Thank you for saying that. Yes. Yes. It's fifth-largest country in the world, most rapidly urbanizing as one of the largest youth bulges in the world. The only people in Washington who know anything about Pakistan are spies and generals for the most part. (Laughter.)

We have an overly militarized relationship, and I'm all – I support the troops. I support the military. But we have an overly militarized relationship with them, and we look at them through a refracted lens of either China, India, or Afghanistan.

Lt. Gen. Nagata: Well, it is – it's important to remember – I totally agree with you. It's important to remember it is a country run by an army.

Mr. Runde: Yeah. No, but I think, you know, we have a more sophisticated relationship with Brazil, Indonesia, or Ethiopia – all countries with about 200 million people with kind of imperfect democracies. But we don't have a completely overly militarized or over intelligence community-ed out relationship with those countries. We do have all those equities, but we have other equities there, and our priorities are completely mismatched with the priorities they want to talk about. And so, we have an autistic relationship with the Pakistanis as a result of that, and we just talk past each other all day long.

Amb. Wayne: But it's fair to say, we should add, that they contributed mightily to that relationship because of their bad behavior.

Mr. Runde: Oh, just every criticism of Pakistan I a hundred percent ascribe to and agree with and accept, comma, and everything I just said. Yeah. Yeah. (Laughter.)

Annie?

Ms. Pforzheimer: Addressing neither of those questions, I do want to go back to one other thing that the general had said – how important it is to make sure that Afghanistan policy is nested inside other policies.

I think one of the mistakes is thinking about it sort of in this siloed sense, and you know, we have policies about the region. We have policies about Russia, about nuclear proliferation. We have policies about women, peace, and security, about atrocity prevention, right? And those are policies where I feel like there's been this sort of line drawn around Afghanistan. It's not one of the countries addressed by the Global Fragility Act. It's always set to the side and put into this different category. And that's one of the things that has to end. And I will also – not quite related, but I do feel a need to take issue with the idea of the poles between Jeffersonian democracy, whatever that might mean, and Saudi Arabia on the other side. I mean, whatever Afghanistan wants – what the majority of Afghans want in a – you know, in a reasonable sense, to find that out and to act on it, that's imperative. There is no such model that's out there yet.

Mr. Runde: But, Annie, what do you think they want? You served there.

Ms. Pforzheimer: A, it doesn't matter. But, B, I think a lot of Afghans were very attached actually to the constitution, in the sense that it was a predictable document that they could live according to and that they believed in individual rights. But how that actually manifested itself, you know, in between elections, what kind of a government structure and democracy in every sense of the word, that wasn't well developed. I mean, all of the criticisms are true about what was or was not done by the previous governments, by well-meaning outsiders. That's all true. And that Afghans in different parts of Afghanistan – rural, urban, north south – did probably want different manifestations of it. But the constitution maintained a lot of credibility, legitimacy, I think all the way through.

Mr. Runde: Hmm. Thank you.

OK, Ambassador McKinley, I'm going to give you the last word.

Amb. McKinley: But I was going to remain silent. (Laughter.) So just, you know, I think a lot of important points have been made about the complexity of dealing with Afghanistan moving forward. The issues on reserves, how that plays into what approach we take to humanitarian assistance, for example. Absolutely central question. The, by the way, parallels with what's happening elsewhere in the world. Take a look at the debate over what to use Russian funds that have been frozen for, and whether some of it should be used for response to the devastation that's taking place in that country. So it's alive and well.

But Afghanistan, very much central to precedent setting. And questions like this, I think, shouldn't sort of slip out of sight. They're very important for deciding how to move forward. And with the regional actors, it really is interesting to watch the change in dynamic. Whether it's in Pakistan – the approach to dealing with Kabul is now very layered and nuanced, as they think through the implications for themselves in terms of their internal security. And I would point out that the U.S. focus on – al-Zawahiri is really a symbol. There is a very significant issue with the buildout of terrorist groups on the ground in Afghanistan. And there will be over the coming months and years.

It's not just our preoccupation. It's a preoccupation for the region. And many of these governments, which we have difficult ties with, actually will agree with us 100 percent on the importance of containing that threat. So simply as we approach any number of the issues we've discussed today, there is a national component inside the Beltway on keeping Afghanistan, as Annie put it well, as part – not siloed, but as part of our regional and global strategy imperatives. But it's also critical to keep it front and center in our discussions with the region.

Somebody asked in the audience about the importance to the Emirates. All of these countries may now look at it as a situation that looks sort of stable. But they're watching, because they've had to deal with the fallout of it for the past 20 years, and they don't want to do that again. So they're part of our engagement. They're part of the dialogue and thinking through what practical options are there for going forward.

Mr. Runde:

OK, thanks. I don't feel better after this discussion. I don't feel more hopeful after this discussion. But I have a little bit more clarity about some of the responsibilities that we have and some of the steps we could take. It's still an awful day. And this – but I think we have significant responsibilities. And the message is: We can't look away. We can't try to ignore it. We have a number of interests there, but we also – I don't think we can solve this alone. And we're going to need to find ways to work with friends and not-so friends to try and deal with this.

Thanks, everybody, for being here. (Applause.)