

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT
Online Event

“Picking Up the Pieces in Afghanistan: What Now?”

DATE
Wednesday, August 18, 2021 at 9:00 a.m. EDT

FEATURING
Mark Ward
Former Country Director for Afghanistan, International Medical Corps

CSIS EXPERTS
Daniel F. Runde
Senior Vice President; William A. Schreyer Chair and Director, Project on Prosperity and Development, CSIS

Anne Pforzheimer
Senior Associate (Non-resident), Project on Prosperity and Development, CSIS

P. Michael McKinley
Senior Advisor (Non-resident), Americas Program, CSIS

Earl Anthony Wayne
Senior Advisor (Non-resident), Project on Prosperity and Development, CSIS

*Transcript By
Superior Transcriptions LLC
www.superiortranscriptions.com*

Daniel F. Runde: We're having a conversation today about "Picking Up the Pieces in Afghanistan: What Now?"

I'm deeply dismayed and disturbed by the fall of Afghanistan to the Taliban. My work at CSIS in partnership with a lot of wonderful people in the last six years has been about sustaining a presence in Afghanistan to buttress the democratically elected, legitimate government in Afghanistan. Over 20 years we have made significant progress in education, including girls' education; human rights; health; infrastructure, agriculture; and governance.

We have especially made progress in women's and girls' rights and education in the last 20 years. In 2003, less than 10 percent of Afghan girls were enrolled in primary school and just 6 percent in secondary education. In 2017, those numbers had improved to 33 percent and 39 percent, respectively. Entire cohorts of women have gone through K through 12 and finished university in that time.

I would have strongly preferred that we had left residual forces and allied forces in Afghanistan until there were better conditions to leave. The disorderly pullout and events in the last four months have been disheartening.

I have a few points I want to make before we get to our panel.

The first is for 20 years we have not had a major attack similar to 9/11 on American soil. The reason for that has been the sacrifices of U.S., allied, and Afghan troops to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a training ground for terrorists, as it was 20 years ago. I want to thank the troops. I want to thank diplomats. I want to thank the folks in global development. And I want to thank the folks in the intelligence community. We must all – so we owe them all a great debt. The 20 years of peace and development are a source of pride. You did not serve in vain.

Second, we have large and lasting obligations to our friends in Afghanistan. There are hundreds of thousands of people who are going to need to be helped in a variety of ways. It is not just the people who supported U.S. military efforts – of course they should be supported – but people who supported our intelligence efforts, our global development efforts, and our diplomacy efforts. I also deeply worry about women leaders and folks who have stood up to try and build a different kind of Afghanistan. The current arrangement for visas that we're using, these so-called special immigrant visas, are not going to be enough. We must do more, and a lot more, and quickly.

Third, there is going to be a very strong temptation to walk away and stop paying attention to Afghanistan because this is too painful to deal with. This is what happened in 1989. Many of you saw “Charlie Wilson’s War.” If you haven’t, go back and see it. Our decision to leave in 1989 came back to bite us and start paying attention 12 years later. The U.S. is going to need to be involved diplomatically and developmentally going forward. We are going to have to remain engaged in the region in different ways.

Fourth, the – President Biden was handed a difficult hand by the Trump administration that left him some very poor choices. However, the execution of the withdrawal by the Biden administration has made the Afghan situation worse. It’s very unfortunate, to say the least. I’m not going to get – say further about that than that.

Finally, the international community is going to have to signal resolve. What stays in – what happens in Afghanistan is not going to stay in Afghanistan. This has reputational effects, whether with our allies and with our adversaries. Our adversaries are yukking it up right now because of what has happened. So we have to be very careful to dismantle the image that we are somehow weak or lack nerve. There are significant questions and worries under the – under people’s breaths about our commitments to places like Taiwan or parts of Eastern Europe. We are going to need to find ways to signal resolve and work with our allies, who are very, very disappointed with us right now.

Before we move on to our panel, I would like to quickly add that this is an interactive online event, and I invite you all to participate through submitting questions to our panel. To submit your questions, please go to our webpage at [CSIS.org](https://www.csis.org) and click on the “ask live questions here” button.

We have a very thoughtful group of people who are going to help us unpack what has happened in Afghanistan and what are possible next steps for the United States.

I’m joined by my friend Mark Ward, who’s the former country director of the International Medical Corps. He served twice at USAID in another life in Pakistan. He also served in another tour of duty in – a humanitarian tour of duty in Afghanistan. So tour – he knows Afghanistan, knows Pakistan, knows global development really well.

We have Ambassador Michael McKinley, who’s a senior adviser at CSIS, who’s a former ambassador to Afghanistan.

We have former Ambassador Tony Wayne, who’s the former deputy ambassador of Afghanistan.

We're later going to be joined by my friend, Annie Pforzheimer, who was a former acting deputy assistant secretary of state for Afghanistan and did two tours on the ground in Afghanistan.

So let me ask the three of you, and then when Annie joins the four of you, what needs to happen in the immediate term? What can the U.S. do now? Mark, let me start with you.

(Pause.)

Mark? Mark Ward?

Mark Ward: Just unmuting.

Mr. Runde: Right.

Mr. Ward: Good morning, everyone.

Yeah, let's – I mean, if we look at right now and if we look at what we can do that's within our control – we don't need help from anybody else – and the thing that leaps to mind, and a lot of you have heard me say this before, is we got to do humanitarian aid and, as much as possible, tell the NGOs that are out there who have done such terrific work to get back to work. They're kind of sitting back waiting for a signal. They're worried about funding. I've done my best to reassure my old organization and others that they needn't worry about that.

Given the ascendancy of the Taliban, we probably need to push for a license from OFAC at Treasury because it's going to be harder and harder for those NGOs to avoid close interaction with the Taliban now that they're in charge. We probably should focus in the short term on programs that we know the Taliban support, like medical care. When I was head of IMC, we had to deal with the Taliban regularly on access issues. But, generally, they were very supportive of medical care because they needed it and the communities with which they were living needed it.

We can keep the other programs going, like Dan mentioned at the outset, education, particularly for girls. But I think in these initial days where we might be trying to build a relationship with the Taliban, maybe don't lead with those programs. Lead with things that we know they have supported over the years because we have a track record of working with them on these programs.

We know what they support. We know what they don't support. I think, for us, doing even more in humanitarian aid right now is kind of a twofer. It's

the right thing to do, given the needs on the ground. But it also gives us an opportunity to see whether the Taliban will respect humanitarian principles and not try to control everything.

Our experience in the past, as I said, wasn't bad. On most issues, we were able to find a way forward with commanders on the ground in the provinces where we worked in the east, and that bodes well, potentially, for the future. If the Taliban allows humanitarian work to continue, and what they've said so far is – I'm optimistic – then we have a foundation to build on to grow other programs – civil society programs, more education programs, even the longer-term development projects.

We'll get to see how they organize themselves to deal with humanitarian NGOs. That's going to be very important. Frankly, dealing with the government in the last year or so was horrible. I mean, they had mounted almost a campaign against the work of the NGOs. So it's going to be very interesting to see how the Taliban organizes itself.

And then as we build that foundation, as we build that relationship, we can, you know, start discussing other needs, longer-term needs, and explaining whether directly or indirectly how does foreign aid work and begin to see whether there's an appetite there in the new leadership in Kabul for working with us down the road.

The last thing I'll say, Dan, is not going to make me popular but being very direct because I think we do need to think about different approaches right now, I would not work too much with the U.N. agencies right now. I would go directly to the big international NGOs, particularly those based in the U.S.

Sadly, the U.N. has a bad track record at times like this for not standing up for humanitarian principles. Look at what happened in Syria and Yemen. We have to challenge the Taliban to play by the rules, and I'm just not sure the U.N. will enforce them. They're just going to be interested in calling meetings after meetings. We need to be sure – hold the Taliban to these principles. And I think going directly with our funding to the big international NGOs we've got a better opportunity, a better chance of holding the Taliban to those principles. And those organizations, I think, will be less likely to cave

Mr. Runde:

Mark, one question, a follow up. There's these OFAC rules – which I think is the Office of Foreign Asset Control in the Treasury Department – that has had – it makes it difficult to operate developmentally or on a humanitarian basis, I think, in Taliban-controlled territory. Do they need to have some kind of what I'm going to describe as an OFAC fix? Over.

Mr. Ward: Yeah. I mentioned that at the beginning. I think – I mean, that was always there while we were working over the last few years. We cannot provide any kind of material assistance to the Taliban while they remain under sanctions. That's going to be harder and harder to live with now that they are in charge and they will be summoning us, presumably, to meetings. So I think recognizing that they are going to be part of a decision-making process or at least a consultative process and getting a license for the international NGOs is all the more necessary now.

Mr. Runde: Thanks.

OK. Ambassador McKinley, what needs to happen in the immediate term? What can the U.S. do now?

Ambassador P. Michael McKinley: So, first, thank you for inviting me to participate, and I'll echo your sentiments. It's devastating to see the scenes we're witnessing now, and I think all of our thoughts are with everybody we knew and worked with in Afghanistan and our hopes that the evacuation efforts of the people who need to leave proceed as quickly as possible.

But I would like to say that what – Mark has actually laid out many of the key immediate issues related to working inside Afghanistan. I would perhaps go a step further, just witnessing what groups like the Norwegian Refugee Council are doing right now. UNICEF representatives on the ground in parts of the country, for example, they've been told by the Taliban as the Taliban was moving in – and it seems like ancient history, but it was only two weeks ago – to stay in place, to continue doing the work they're doing. We're seeing that also with NGOs that work on medical questions. I'm not going to say, "so far, so good," but it is certainly an effort to keep, at least for the time being, international NGO presence working inside the country. And as Mark points out, given the way the Taliban's proceeding fairly methodically over the last three to four days in trying to establish authority in Kabul – and I don't want to oversell that; that could change on a dime – there does seem to be an avenue for not just the United States, but other international actors to test this.

If I can slightly disagree with Mark on one issue, on the U.N. he's absolutely right, but we have to differentiate among the bodies within the U.N., and there's some which were better than others. I would suggest UNHCR does and UNICEF is on the ground, and we certainly need to continue signaling support for those efforts.

One point I thought the West let the side down on after Doha was signed in February of 2020 was not moving quickly or signaling strongly enough financial support over the long term for Afghanistan, for the Afghan

government. There was plenty of time across 2020 to do it. It wasn't done. It was much the same as always on donors' conferences. And I think this is the moment to make sure that the resources are there for the humanitarian response. And that means breaking through barriers like OFAC licensing, which can take a long time to do, and, frankly, seeing whether there's the stomach for a conference which does focus on immediate humanitarian needs going forward.

More broadly, there is the issue of what kind of influence anyone will have on the incoming Taliban government. And perhaps we can discuss that later, but I think there is very much space right now for regrouping within NATO, at the U.N., among our allies, even outreach to regional governments. And if we let the time slide on that, we're going to lose precious moments to try to create a better dispensation. And I won't say a new dispensation for the Taliban; the jury is still out on that.

And so as we focus on the humanitarian aspects of this and how we can assist on the ground, it's absolutely critical not to become defensive and drop the ball. Whatever mistakes have been made, we need to move forward with a strong diplomatic effort to reposition and regroup. And I'm sure we'll get into those issues later in the conversation.

Mr. Runde:

Yeah. At some point in the future – September/October – after, you know, a bit of time has passed, I think we should probably revisit sort of what lessons we can learn from this, so I agree. But I think now there are some immediate steps. So I agree with you, Ambassador McKinley, about everything you've said.

Ambassador Wayne, what needs to happen in the immediate term and what can the U.S. do now?

Ambassador Earl Anthony Wayne:

Well, happily, the United States is moving into a more activist phase, which is what was lacking in recent months. I think there's a serious effort underway at the airport, and this is just evidenced by sending out one of our former colleagues who has been ambassador in Afghanistan to help manage at the airport, John Bass. There's a tremendous amount to do just managing this flow of humanity, and that means working with others including the Taliban to try to make sure people can get to the airport. And then we have to cut through all of the bureaucratic process around our efforts to give people visas and we need to seriously consider, I think, a humanitarian parole for those groups of individuals who have great reason to fear abuse, mistreatment, punishment by the Taliban because there have been assassination campaigns going on against them. And this includes journalists. It includes women leaders.

The Taliban have been saying good things in their words, but we need to be skeptical and watch what they're going to do. In this, I think it's important to remember that the Taliban have now really been preparing for two years here. I can't say I always concluded this, but I've now concluded that they used the last two years to strengthen themselves militarily, to strengthen their political apparatus on the ground starting in the rural areas, and to think through at their highest level what their strategy should be. And I think one of the things they realized that you see now is they know these are massive tasks they've now taken on that they won, and so they can't manage everything in the short term, and so they are asking some humanitarian groups to stay. They are sending out positive signals. This doesn't necessarily mean that will be their practices, but we should work with what we have at the moment to save lives.

I think it's really important to remember here that our most important enduring investment in Afghanistan is the human capital – is the young women and men that were educated during the last 20 years, that absorbed many of our values and goals, and that were really working hard for that. And that's what we have to really have number one right now preserving, after our own – of course, our own employees, our own citizens, people who work directly for us. But there's this group – bigger group of a couple of generations or a generation and a half that we really need to care about. I think it is very important to work internationally with others early on on some kind of humanitarian protection mechanism that will include signaling very clearly to the Taliban what is expected of them and what the costs and benefits will be – the costs if they don't obey – you know, obey – abide by, follow these procedures going forward, and there do – there are going to have to be some benefits. There's no question about that.

They are – they do need money. They need more than humanitarian money. The previous government was dependent for 80 percent of its financing on the international community. Taliban is not going to be able to deliver services without retaining a lot of the previous employees and without funding from somebody. I notice one of the things that we and I'm sure others did in recent days was cut off the flow of money, of dollars going to Afghanistan. They're going to need funding going forward. That's an important piece of the leverage.

The other – finally, what we need to do is what we've started to do, which is go into high gear in diplomacy in the region and with our friends and allies. There's no question that the last few days have undermined U.S. credibility with friends and allies, and created a big space for rivals to be talking about that we're weak, that we're pulling back, and see, you better establish a better relationship with us. So that credibility can be rebuilt, but it's only going to be rebuilt with an intensive diplomatic effort extending over time focused on Afghanistan, both with regional powers, with our more

traditional allies. I think it's important that we're – one of the signals, we're going to have a special G-7 summit the British are going to call. Those kind of things are really important going forward. It's not the be all and the end all, but it can start making a difference as we move ahead in these weeks. And we really have to maintain this activist, focused approach to dealing with the immediate and the medium-term challenges here.

Thank you.

Mr. Runde: Thank you.

Annie, thanks for joining us. I want to pivot. So there have been many folks who have said – and I want to hear first from you, Annie, and then briefly from each of the others – that the Taliban is, quote/unquote, “different” from 1996 or 2001, that this is somehow a different Taliban and that we – they've, quote/unquote, “changed,” and that we should – we should take at face value some of the statements that they're saying, that women will participate in society, and they've made sort of a series of I won't call them friendly gestures in the last 72 hours. What's your reaction to that, Annie?

Annie Pforzheimer: My reaction is very deep skepticism. It's a – you know, it's a creditable – it's an incredible charm offensive. And it's very possible that in ways of optics they have changed somewhat, but the fundamentalist sort of bent of this is that women are going to have all the rights that the Taliban give them. And that is – you know, that is an unacceptable state of affairs.

You know, for my way of thinking, if they were serious there would be an absolute protection of the media. You know, we don't need an international body to tell us how things are. What we need is Afghanistan's free media to be able to operate, and we also need Afghanistan's Independent Human Rights Commission to be able to operate. And with those two bodies in place, doesn't matter what the Taliban says; we will know.

I do think that what we're hearing is that they're still assessing essentially what they've just won and how to take control of it, but that their, you know, retribution has been swift. What I guess was seen in Jalalabad yesterday, firing directly on a crowd of people who were trying to protect the Afghan flag, is that they – is they want demonstration effect of how terrifying they are in order to keep people from making any kind of active rebellion. So this is – this is the crux of it, is that they shouldn't be believed at face value in any way, shape, or form.

Mr. Runde: Mark, has the Taliban changed? Should we take at face value their statements?

Mr. Ward: I agree with Annie. We've got to be skeptical. But you know, there is a track record, and it's longer than the last couple of days.

And I go back to what I said at the outset: The humanitarian NGOs have had to work with the Taliban in provinces, in districts, in villages that they controlled for years. And we have, for the most part. I mean, there are always a few jerks that we had to deal with who we had to go to the leadership to try to get off our backs, but most of their I guess you call them officials that we had to – that we worked with, whether in Kunar or Nuristan or, you know, other provinces in the east and the north when I was with IMC were reasonable.

And I guess my definition of “reasonable” would be they listened to their communities. And that's maybe room for hope. If the communities needed what we were offering, the Taliban would generally back off if they were trying to interfere, if they were trying to seize the goods, if they were trying to force the way who we gave our assistance to and not leave that up to us to determine based on need. And so that – if you're looking for seeds of optimism, there is some experience there, a track record over the last couple of years that they understand the needs of the communities, they listen to the communities, maybe that's a change.

I'll leave it there.

Mr. Runde: OK. Let me pivot to something else. Ambassador McKinley, Ambassador Wayne, we've talked about allies and neighbors. How should we be engaging Pakistan, Russia, China, the Gulf states, Central Asian states – Uzbekistan, Tajikistan – our allies in the G-7? Ambassador McKinley, let me turn to you.

Amb. McKinley: Thank you, and allow me 30 seconds parenthetical as Ambassador Wayne talked about SIVs, and Mark and Annie – and Annie's been formidable in advocating publicly for rapid reaction steps. Let's remember it's not just interpreters. It's not just the professionals. It's not just the politicians. It's drivers. It's mechanics. It's cooks. It's store sellers. It's a universe in Afghanistan that worked with us. And it's not a few thousand people; it's tens of thousands of people. And the responsibility going forward is not just what we see at the airport but a much broader support and rescue effort over many months.

And one other parenthetical on the Taliban changing. Maybe we can return to that at some point. The signals and symbols have been interesting: On Tolo News, a Taliban official allowing himself to be interviewed by a female reporter. We've had the reports of Anas Haqqani – next-generation Taliban, 26 years old – meeting with Abdullah Abdullah of the Tajik and mujaheddin struggle era, and with former President Karzai, asking people to remain at work, government officials to include women. I think the skepticism

everyone has expressed is very much required going forward. Annie's point about they're assessing where they are is what we're facing right now, and I wouldn't draw too much comfort yet from the positive signals.

On the issues of dealing with the region, I think we need to differentiate in terms of who are the actors we're concerned about.

Pakistan has played – I'm not going to call it a double game. They're a country that has been on the border and faced much of the fallout of what's happened in Afghanistan over the last 40 years. That said, they kept their options open, and it's now going to be incumbent on them given the close ties they have with the Taliban leadership to try to define and use influence to see if we can chart a more moderate course.

Iran historically has not been a friend of the Taliban. They've been less of a friend of the United States. But now the equation is strictly one of Iran/Afghan interests, and how they define their relationship with the Taliban going forward is going to be critical.

The three major outside actors of concern are China, Gulf states, and Russia. I would suggest that we don't focus on Afghanistan in terms of how global power relations are evolving with China and Russia. This is – we really ought to differentiate crises. Afghanistan is not Taiwan. Afghanistan is not Ukraine in the Donbas. And in this case, the Chinese and the Russians can probably play a fairly positive role in signaling to the Taliban that relationships are going to be based on how they act in terms of the region, how they approach support or links to terrorist groups, and how they, frankly, deal with their internal dynamics, which are serious. And I would point to the Russians in the recent weeks – and Lavrov, I think, the foreign minister, this week warning on terrorist ties and saying going to withhold recognition, we're going to wait and see where things are going. And I believe, whether the Russians and the Chinese move to recognize next week or not, the caveats they have stated explicitly about their concerns are coming into play. That should be something we should be able to work with.

And finally, Ambassador Wayne's absolutely critical point on money. This is a government or a system that cannot live without international assistance. There is a generational change. The Taliban's leadership, living in Pakistan or Gulf states or even whether they were in other countries, has seen a different way to live. And they know it requires money, structures, systems, education. And at this moment, the Gulf states are in a(n) extraordinarily powerful position to signal that resource flows from them, which are more informal and less conditions-based, become extraordinarily conditions-based depending on what the Taliban does in power.

So I do think there's a world to work with right now in the region. I think Ambassador Wayne is absolutely correct. There is an effort ramping up to deal with these diplomatic realities. But again, I would suggest speed is of the essence. I don't think we have two to three months to sort of figure this out. Things are moving very, very quickly, and other capitals much nearer to Afghanistan than the United States are making their calculations and their decisions as we speak.

Mr. Runde: Ambassador Wayne, can I ask you to talk about – comment on this issue of the regional actors? And then I want to come back to this issue of, what do we owe folks beyond SIVs? And if the only way out of Dodge is the Kabul airport and you ain't in Kabul or you can't get to the Kabul airport, how the hell are we going to deal with that? So I'm going to come back to that, so – but let me first go to Ambassador Wayne on this issue of regional actors. And then I want to hear from Mark Ward and Annie specifically on this SIV and beyond SIV issue. Ambassador Wayne?

Amb. Wayne: Well, I think one of the key points, building on Ambassador McKinley's outstanding thoughts there, is that we do need to work with a broader range of partners in international – in the international community because that helps put pressure on some of the regional parties that might be a little more hesitant to get – might be hedging their bets. And the more we can build international consensus with the Europeans, with others in the Middle East, with those in East Asia, it's going to be easier, I think, for the Chinese and Russians and for the Paks and others to come along as we do this. And similarly, with the Iranians – who, of course, we don't deal with directly, so we do need to involve others to talk to them in going forward.

And we – there is leverage. I mean, the Russians are concerned about all the drugs coming out of Afghanistan. When I remembered very, very seriously a – a serious conversation with the Russian ambassador in Kabul talking about how the largest source of addiction in Russia was heroin coming of Afghanistan. That hasn't changed. And we do know the Chinese, for better or worse, are concerned about Uighur extremists in Afghanistan and will be concerned about, you know, ungoverned space in Afghanistan. So there are some cover – there are some common grounds that you can build on here.

But the key is to, I think, get an international consensus on these core principles and do that quickly. I mean, I fully agree we need to be acting very quickly diplomatically as well as on the ground in going forward.

Now, part of this is going to be – to go back to what Mark said – is going to be having a modus vivendi with the Taliban, and there will be some areas where they'll be more cooperative than others, and there are going to be some things that they really don't control. They don't control, I think, you know, in a give-me-a-phone-call thing all their little units around Kabul or in

other cities yet. That's part of what they're really trying to manage and assess.

So there are going to be bumps in this process, and there are going to be things that we're going to have to work through. But we're going to have to be working on this sort of multilevel process in Kabul, in the region, more broadly internationally, and we need to do it as a priority. And just to say that was one of the reasons we are where we are: It wasn't being treated as a priority by Washington because they have a big other agenda. I mean, I understand there's a lot going on, but we are in the position we're in because it was not a priority.

Mr. Runde: OK. Mark – or, let me first turn to Annie. Annie, so we just produced a paper on special immigrant visas on Monday. My view is, is I'm not sure that there's a whole – I think we're probably going to have to go beyond special immigrant visas. I saw something from Capitol Hill I think last night from – I think 46 senators signed a statement basically saying we need to find special protections for women leaders and others in Afghanistan who aren't necessarily going to fall under the special immigrant visa program to give them some kind of protection or ability to come to the United States. So, Annie, could I ask you to talk about what do we need to be doing to meet our obligations to our Afghan partners, but also sort of a larger circle of folks? And could you comment on this issue of what do you do if you can't get to Kabul airport?

Ms. Pforzheimer: You know, I think I'm not going to be in a position to comment on the getting to the airport or not. That's a – that's a fairly operational side of things.

Mr. Runde: I'm sorry. I'll ask Mark to do that, then.

Ms. Pforzheimer: Yes. Thank you.

But, look, I would say that our obligations are many, but the SIVs is a – is a circle, and a more outer circle is all the people who implemented indirectly, and then the people who were fellow workers with us on key issues of human rights defense and promotion of free media, et cetera. I'll be a little against the grain and say that I don't think that that's the best way for us to spend all of our energy because there are 35 million people in the country and they are not all going to get evacuated. So what about the people who are human rights defenders whose names we don't know? And I think it's vital that there be some kind of mechanism that the international community insists on before recognition.

UNAMA has had a civilian protection unit for a long time, but it needs teeth. And I would suggest that there be an additional layer of a specific watchdog which is deputized to report to the Security Council. And in addition, the

Afghanistan free media is the right watchdog, not a bunch of foreigners, and the Afghanistan Human Rights Commission. So those are the entities with teeth that come from the Security Council pulling together, which as many people have pointed out requires the U.S. to make this a strategic priority. It's doable if we choose to make it a priority.

So the teeth that come from the Security Council and the leverage of recognition and their seat at the United Nation(s), they have to accept some kind of in-country monitoring of all of these lovely promises. And, yes, we should evacuate, of course. But you know what? There are a lot of people we'll never know their names and there are also a lot of people who are going to do tremendous good if they are alive and able to do their work within Afghanistan.

Mr. Runde: Thank you.

Mark, how do we deal with the mechanical problem of the only way out right now is Kabul airport?

Mr. Ward: We have to talk to the Taliban. This is, you know, one of those things we have to try to build our relationship step by step. And clearly, my understanding from friends there is that they have, you know, deployed their forces around the airport. To use diplomatic language, they're interviewing everybody that's trying to get in. And that's very, very worrisome to people whose SIV applications are in process, but because of whatever delays I guess at State and DOD they haven't been issued yet.

And these are the people I'm most worried about. As you look at that initial cadre that the SIV program was designed to protect, those that worked for our forces, they check all the boxes. They are completely eligible and they just didn't get their SIV in time because this happened so quickly. They are scared to death right now because – and I know many, and they have received threats from the Taliban, and their families have, for years. So clearly, the Taliban knows who they are. They are on lists and they could be on lists that these guys at the airport have. So they're scared to death to go to the airport right now should they get that email from the embassy saying go to the airport.

And so we have to have a conversation with the Taliban about some kind of a corridor that anybody goes that wants to go, and I don't think there's any other way to do it. We just have to be upfront about it with the Taliban, say this is very important to us for all the reasons that the panel has articulated. And this, you know, should be an easy win for the Taliban. They don't need to send a message anymore to the other side by killing people that used to work for us. They won.

Mr. Runde: OK. So let me suggest – Ambassador Wayne, do you want to comment on this SIV issue, or?

Amb. Wayne: Well, I do just want to say that, in addition to the people that worked with us are the people that worked very closely with us who are now in hiding, and that includes those who resisted the Taliban and fought them. And how are they going to be treated? And what – the Taliban is saying they want to have a reconciliation going forward. So, similarly, they should be in our area of concern for free passage.

And I think part of what we would talk about going forward also is working with neighbors such as Pakistan and having corridors going through, but that – going through to Pakistan – but that means there needs to be a serious international refugee response mechanism ready to take care of these people because the Pakistanis, remember they still have over a million Afghan refugees from the last time that the Taliban were in control. So that's a complex other part of this problem.

Mr. Runde: So Ambassador Olson and I did a paper – we did several major reports over the last six years at CSIS on one – I did several with you, Ambassador Wayne, and several with you, Annie. And so one of them was on what happens if we pull the plug, and I – one of things we – I fear two things. One of them is we're going to have massive refugee flows. There's 40 million people in Afghanistan. We could easily have multiple millions of people leave Afghanistan. We have the largest global refugee and internally displaced people crisis in the world in human history right now already, so add to that. And that Pakistan will probably get a couple million people in that scenario and Iran would probably get a couple million people in that scenario. And whenever I've met Pakistani military I've always said to them, is that a win for you guys if you get 3 million refugees? And they all kind of look at each other and, like, they're not super psyched about that. So I do think that that's an issue, and so I think we're going to have to engage Pakistan and work with Pakistan on Afghanistan regardless of some of the – some of the issues.

Let me ask, Ambassador McKinley, do we – should we recognize a Taliban government?

Amb. McKinley: So, although I'm a former diplomat, I'm going to fall back on diplomatic language on this and take my cue from the national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, yesterday, and it's premature to begin considering a date for recognition. So much is going to depend on the coming weeks, and I would say weeks and a couple of months. I don't believe we're going to be waiting six months to a year to figure out whether this is a government that's going to respect at least some basic norms. Let's not pretend that we're going back to seeing the freedoms that Afghanistan has enjoyed over the last 20 years. But as we've been discussing here, there are issues that are absolutely

central to just maintaining some kind of normality of life, and Annie's pointed to a couple of institutions which are critical and there are others.

And so, as Mark and Ambassador Wayne have laid out, there's also metrics, if I can use that term when we're speaking about humans – and I don't like to do it – but in terms of whether they do go after people who are in hiding, former military, former police, former local government officials, district officials, people working with NGOs. And so the international community has the time, and that includes the United States, to watch – not watch; work and try to influence this as we're going forward. And at that point, I think a judgment call would then have to be made on recognition if certain baseline criteria are met.

And I know this is very difficult in the context of 20 years, in the context of 9/11, in the context of tens of thousands of deaths of Afghans, of Americans, of coalition partners. There's a tremendous debate underway in the British Parliament today on the cost of this war to our closest ally. But there's also the moment and moving forward, and we maintain diplomatic relations with a lot of governments that we have very significant not only differences with, but concerns about how they govern internally and human rights issues at the fore. So the time will come. I think right now – and the question will be asked every day probably at the White House by somebody in the media or from outside the media, but I don't think we can rush to sort of try and just speculate about deadlines for recognition.

Mr. Runde: OK. I want each of you – I want each of you to take one of the two questions I'm going to put on the table.

So one is, how do we prevent Afghanistan from being a training ground for terrorists as it was before 9/11 going forward?

Or the other question you can take is, I would argue that what has happened in Afghanistan has effects outside of the greater Central Asia area. I'm thinking about Taiwan. I'm thinking about the Baltic states or eastern Ukraine. How do we signal resolve when many of our adversaries are interpreting this as incompetence and weakness and rudderlessness? So but I need each – somebody – so you don't have to – you don't have to agree with that interpretation, but that is how our adversaries are interpreting this.

So, Mark, let me start with you.

Mr. Ward: I'll go for option two.

I think by doing everything we've just been talking about, which is engage. Don't walk away. Engage on increasing humanitarian aid. Engage on corridors to get people at risk and in jeopardy out. Don't shy away from

having a conversation with the Taliban. Find ways, working with OFAC, to make that, you know, legal. But take on these issues. Accept the fact that we have to deal with them. Maybe, you know, show a little humility about that – good luck with that – and get these issues resolved. And that will signal, I hope, to those that are watching outside that, while we won't admit that we've made mistakes, we're taking steps to try to deal with them; we're not just walking away. And being a leader again in humanitarian aid and looking after those who helped us over the years I think are two very positive steps in that direction. And perhaps a third would be, as the other panelists have suggested, some kind of an international conference to focus world attention on the needs there. These are things that we could do to show to the world that the United States still cares a lot about the Afghan people.

Mr. Runde: Annie?

Ms. Pforzheimer: It was a great answer. Maybe I will – I will say, you know, first of all, to reinforce that, I would agree with all of it, maybe, except for the conference. I think conferences helped get us where we are today, that we have to – you know, we're building, as you say, step by step. Just like you're going to open the airport again, we're going to build our way back into international regard by doing credible and provable acts rather than promises.

You know, this is such a lesson for the United States. And going forward, if we continue to think of ourselves as having a central role in diplomacy, I think we will fail all over again. Really, it's beyond time for us to move beyond, you know, having ourselves as the special envoy who does everything, convenes everybody. This is not the right role for us. I believe and have believed that we should have empowered the U.N. to take that role, and we're going to have to suck it up at the Security Council and make promises to our adversaries because this is important. This is worth it. But someone else is going to have to take a leadership role until we build our way back into the confidence of the world.

Mr. Runde: Ambassador McKinley?

Amb. McKinley: So if I can just suggest on the geopolitical front, there's a lot of talk and a lot of writing about this being a defining moment for U.S. influence in the world – end of an era, end of the Cold War, crumbling alliances, impact on our ability to engage. I would just suggest we've been here before and we – we can go back to 1975 in Saigon, but that's not the best comparison. We can go back to the '70s as a whole, when we were also in economic crisis, where we had difficulties with our allies, where it seemed that there were emerging powers around the world that threatened what we stood for and the policies we pursued and engaged in, and we rebounded. The world's much more complex right now, and I would suggest this is a defining moment for our

engagement in Afghanistan and in the wider region around Afghanistan, but not necessarily for our engagement around the world.

I think you're going to see a very significant effort to rethink the alliances – it's already underway – in East Asia with our Korean and Japanese partners.

There's an ongoing diplomatic effort in the so-called Quad, which engages Australia, Japan, India, and the United States in a response to the security issues of the Indo-Pacific region.

I think there's going to be a renewed focus on NATO and regrouping on what NATO does. Was out of area a step too far for our alliances in Europe? And should we return to basics, which is to focus on security in Europe, particularly with a more aggressive Russia that's focusing not only on the Ukraine, but on the Baltic states, on Central Asia, intervention in the Armenian-Azerbaijani crisis/war?

I think certainly this is going to concentrate minds in terms of the importance of sustaining alliances going forward.

I would also suggest that we need to be at least a little humble in terms of the influence that the United States and our Western partners can bring to bear in situations. I would just point to in the last two years we haven't had much of an impact on behaviors of Nicaragua's Ortega government, Maduro's Venezuela government, China on Xinjiang and Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia on the murder of Adnan (sic; Jamal) Khashoggi. And I think we could certainly draw a wider list, and I've already mentioned Russia.

So as we think through our options in responding to this crisis, which is a serious crisis – I'm not underplaying it – we also have to think through what's the realm of the possible. And in that respect – and the focus and the rationale for our intervention in – after 9/11 was on counterterrorism and going after al-Qaida – the world of global terrorism has changed markedly over the last 20 years. We are responding to threats in the Maghreb, the Sahel, to a lesser extent I would suggest in the Levant and the Arabian Peninsula with a different approach which doesn't necessarily require significant deployment of U.S. forces. And that doesn't mean that we're not losing capabilities with the withdrawal from Afghanistan; that's absolutely true. But I would suggest, as the debate over intelligence failures goes forward right now, I don't like the term "intelligence failures." Intelligence is not a science; it's humans trying to read situations on the ground. Sometimes you get it right, sometimes you don't, but it's not necessarily dependent on being on the ground. So I think we can also regroup to address the possibility of resurgence of a terrorist space inside Afghanistan.

Mr. Runde:

OK.

Amb. McKinley: Sorry. Thank you.

Mr. Runde: That's all right.

Ambassador Wayne?

Amb. Wayne: OK. Thanks very much. Let me start off with the broader and get to the counterterrorism part, because I did get to spend, for better or worse, a lot of years working on counterterrorism.

First, Ambassador McKinley is exactly right. We need to be much more humble as we go forward, humble and active in working with others around the world as best we can going forward.

No question this administration has a big domestic agenda and a big international agenda. We knew it was going to be complex to try and run both of them at the same time, and this is a reminder of how complex it is.

Third, let's get back to being a little bit more partisan. Stop blocking all the State Department appointees and other appointees. We need our positions staffed more than ever now to get out there and be active. Let's come together. Let's use this as a catalyst, positive catalyst, both in Washington and then in the administration to do what they talked about wanting to do, which is strengthen alliances and coalitions and partnerships for what we agree upon. Let's make this now much more positive.

And then, on the specific counterterrorism agenda, this is – it's going to be really hard to rebuild intelligence in that region, you know, for the reason of which we've, of course, discouraged all the people who might have been working with us and we're going to be a long ways away. It's not impossible, but it's going to be a lot harder.

So, in addition, though, to finding ways to maintain some kind of eyes in there to see what's really going on, it is time to double down again on the principles that the international community has agreed upon for dealing with terrorists. And as Ambassador McKinley said, there are some more refined ways that we're dealing with these terrorists in specific parts of the world, and we should build on the best practices there. But we also have a whole area of agreement that did not exist in 2001 internationally about sanctioning people who support terrorists, and that – we need to really look at that again and make sure everybody is committed, and then keep them committed to take the promised actions if this government or if others don't abide by those rules. And that's hard. It's hard diplomacy and you have to really work hard to persuade people sometimes to do that. But we really do need to do that going forward.

Thank you.

Mr. Runde: OK. I got three questions. Lightning round, pick one. I'm hoping each of you will cover one.

Myanmar's military in the wake of the February coup has met a fierce opposition from the public, who had pretty much been inspired and opinionated by 10 years of the democracy experience. Can we expect some sort of a popular response against the Taliban if it proves as brutal as ever in Afghanistan? So that's one question.

Second: There are deeply held concerns about what will happen now regarding the rights and expectations for safety for women, girls, and other vulnerable groups. Are there mechanisms in place for the USG to effectively consult with Afghan women and vulnerable groups about how to best support their needs and priorities if the USG develops policy positions and future engagement in Afghanistan?

Third: Over the weekend, the Biden administration froze Afghan government reserves held in U.S. banks. How ambitious or broad do you expect U.S. conditions to be regarding release of the funds in view of the president's limited view of U.S. obligations to Afghanistan?

So, Annie, let me start with you. Everyone gets extra credit if their answer on one of these is 60 seconds or less. But, Annie, you first.

Ms. Pforzheimer: You know, on the mechanisms to watch over women and vulnerable groups, that's what I was talking about. I don't think that right now there are effective mechanisms in place.

I also don't think that it should be only the United States that is watching. This needs to be as broad as possible. And that's why I'd go back to the Security Council, as imperfect as it is, because this is the group that actually embodies the people the Taliban is – cares about. And so there should be a body that is empowered by the Council, attached to UNAMA, that is protecting the media and protecting the human rights defenders and reporting back to the international community to see whether the Taliban is keeping to Afghanistan's international obligations.

Mr. Runde: Mark?

Mr. Ward: Yeah, I like that question too. I would just go back to what we said at the outset: Keep those programs going. Keep our support going to girls' education, to civil society, to human rights and press. And that gives us an opportunity to test the language – maybe rhetoric, let's hope not – that we're

getting out of the Taliban these days that they're going to be easier to work with. So I've been advising friends that are running NGOs working with girls' education, don't – you know, don't sit back. Keep those programs going. And let's hope that the Taliban, you know, does not interfere – they're signaling that they won't – because women and girls are watching right now. They're looking to see what we're going to do. And if we sit back and wait for some kind of a signal, we're doing damage.

So my advice is, get on with those programs. Maybe this isn't a great time to, you know, grow them tenfold, but keep the programs that we have going going so that the girls and women and very brave activists in media and civil society see that the international community continues to support them despite this takeover.

Mr. Runde: Mark, how about this issue about the freezing of assets?

Mr. Ward: What was the question again? I was – Tony's going to answer that.

Mr. Runde: Oh, Tony, you'll get – Ambassador Wayne, you'll cover that? Let me – I'll get – Ambassador Wayne, let me go to you.

Amb. Wayne: Well, I actually helped negotiate the freeing of the assets that we'd frozen under the Taliban and giving them back to the government in 2001-2002. It was actually 2002, I believe, when we got it done.

I think it's very important that we have those assets, and there should be really clear conditions tied to releasing them. And that's part of what we need to develop within the U.S. government and international consensus, as much as we can get, and we should encourage other people to freeze these assets if they haven't done that. I mean, that's a big point of leverage going forward. The Taliban did not have those assets during their rule in the 1990s from the United States, and it was a big boost to a new government that came in.

Now, doesn't mean we shouldn't, if they meet certain conditions, find a way to release them, but it needs to be a tough negotiation going forward, it seems to me. There are not many levers that we have on the – a new Taliban government, and this could be one going forward.

And just very briefly on the resistance, I believe there will be resistance to the Taliban. It depends in part, of course, on what they do in the country. But I think we will see resistance organized in certain areas, and there are certain parts of the country where that is already being organized, I am told. We'll see what happens. But it's been hard for many people to control Afghanistan, including their own governments, over the years. So I think this, you know, protest in Jalalabad the other day is just one indication. I

think a lot of people were just set back by the speed of what happened, and I think we're going to see a lot of unhappiness displayed going forward.

Thank you.

Mr. Runde: Ambassador McKinley, you get the last word.

Amb. McKinley: And I'll keep it short since I overstayed my welcome on the last answer.

I will just agree completely with what Ambassador Wayne has said about the internal situation, but add one element here. The collapse of the last few weeks should not be the measure of what has happened in the country for 40 years. Afghanistan has been a country at war for 40 years. The sacrifices of the Afghan people have numbered in the millions of refugees and internally displaced for years and even decades at a time. The absolute courage of Afghan families to send their girls back to school; of Afghan women to take on positions in government, administration, and business as conditions liberalized after 9/11; the courage of Afghans fighting the Taliban from 2004/5 on through 2020 – we're talking about tens of thousands of deaths – but it is a country that at the moment is exhausted by war. It is a country where – and we didn't get into that – the government and the military disappeared at a critical moment. But let's remember that there has been a very long struggle inside that country with very many Afghans putting their lives on the line for that struggle.

Mr. Runde: Thanks, everybody. We're going to have to end it here. I think there's a lot more to discuss. Thanks, everyone, for doing this on short notice. We're going to say goodbye now. Bye-bye.