

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

ASPEN SECURITY FORUM: GLOBAL

THE CONTINUING STRUGGLE FOR AFGHANISTAN
AND INDO/PAKISTAN RELATIONS

Lancaster House
Stable Yard, St. James's
London, United Kingdom

Friday, April 22, 2016

LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

CLARK ERVIN
Director, Homeland Security Program,
The Aspen Institute
Partner, Squire Patton Boggs

SUMANTRA BOSE
Professor of International and Comparative Politics,
London School of Economics; Author,
*Transforming India: Challenges to the World's
Largest Democracy*

MICHAEL CLARKE
Former Director-General, Royal United Services
Institute

HINA RABBANI KHAR
Former Foreign Minister, Pakistan

HAZRAT OMAR ZAKHILWAL
President's Special Envoy and Ambassador
of Afghanistan to Pakistan

CATHERINE HERRIDGE
Chief Intelligence Correspondent, Fox News

* * * * *

THE CONTINUING STRUGGLE FOR AFGHANISTAN
AND INDO/PAKISTAN RELATIONS

(2:45 p.m.)

MR. ERVIN: All right. Well, the next session, as you see, is titled The Continuing Struggle for Afghanistan as well as Indo/Pakistan Relations. And to moderate this afternoon's panel we are very pleased to have with us Catherine Herridge. Catherine is an award winning chief intelligence correspondent for the Fox News channel based in Washington. She covers intelligence of course, the Justice Department and the Department of Homeland Security.

Catherine joined Fox News in 1996 as a London based correspondent. Her most recent book published by Crown is called *The Next Wave: On the Hunt for Al Qaeda's American Recruits*. She is a graduate of Harvard in the Columbia School of Journalism and Catherine began her career as a London based correspondent for ABC News.

Please join me in welcoming Catherine and this terrific panel.

(Applause)

MS. HERRIDGE: Thank you very much for being here. It's such a pleasure to be here in London as part of the debut of ASF Global. I want to congratulate Clark and his team also for graciously hosting us and to all of you for being so invested in the security issues as we all know that threat does not respect boundaries and this is certainly the case now.

I would like to begin by introducing the panel. Next to me is Sumantra Bose, a professor at the London School of Economics who specializes in international and comparative politics; also Hina Rabbani Khar, former foreign minister of Pakistan; Michael Clark, former director-general of the Royal United Services Institute; and also at the end the Afghan president's special envoy and ambassador to Pakistan Hazrat Omar Zakhilwal. So thank you very much.

We're 15 years after 9/11. Ambassador, I would like to begin with you. What has been accomplished by the military intervention and how has it contributed to the current state, which is unstable in Afghanistan?

MR. ZAKHILWAL: Well, a lot. Fifteen years ago or prior to 9/11 we had this brutal Taliban regime that I do not need to describe what it was -- so the end of it -- and instead replaced by democratic institutions with progress on all fronts, particularly women, and of course other development indicators and that Afghanistan became part of the responsible global community.

So those are just a few of the significant sort of changes and achievements that there were of the past 15 years. But of course there are challenges and I'm sure that you will come back and talk about those.

MS. HERRIDGE: The challenges just specifically in terms of the military intervention. You had said to me that because there was such significant damage to Afghanistan and particularly in terms of collateral damage that this did go some way to increasing the radicalization on the ground. If you could just elaborate?

MR. ZAKHILWAL: Yeah. Well, there are two questions that we need to ask. One -- of course as an Afghan -- Afghans, what they wish -- they see -- international community's intervention had not taken place, the answer would be no.

What they wish is the international community as well of course Afghan leadership had handled the situation -- and that includes the war on terrorism, that includes again certain other goals that were added to the intervention, which included the state building process and development and governance and democracy and regional harmony and all that, could they have handled it differently so that we could have peace?

Now, we have a different regime, but have peace and stability in the country, the answer is, yes, it could have been handled differently. Because while we achieve

those I just mentioned, we do not have peace, we do not have stability, we are not sure about the future, anything can happen. So we certainly -- the last thing we would want to see is to reverse on the progress we have had -- and God forbids -- in certain areas go back to where we were 15 years ago or before 15 years ago.

MS. HERRIDGE: Ms. Khar, I would like to bring you in. Do you feel that the international community had a realistic set of objectives in Afghanistan?

MS. KHAR: Thank you for that. And if I were somebody who was living in the United States of America or in Europe my answer would probably be yes. But since I don't have the luxury of being -- of living in outside of the region and I'm happy to be living in the region that I am, I don't think it can be set right because -- and simply to answer your question I think I'm going to do it from two angles. One is a rather broad brush looking at what happened and then analyzing as to what could possibly be the contributing factors to why the ideal situation isn't there.

So about a trillion dollar spent on this intervention. Hundred billion dollars all together in economic assistance to Afghanistan in the last 15 years. And as I said, as somebody who is coming from that region if you ask me the entry goals were probably unrealistic, okay. And if you were to broadly summarize the entry goals they have to be at least the following three.

One, that we don't want religious extremism to grow in that area -- and it because of religious extremism in that area and Al-Qaeda being, you know, stationed there that the attack happened or the intervention happened in the first place. So you don't want religious extremism to grow. You want more stability in the region, right, so the region could also grow and of course and Afghanistan. And you obviously don't want this to be a bastion of drugs, et cetera, right?

On all three counts -- for instance, if I were to look at it from Pakistan's vantage point, pre 9/11 there was only one, you said, bomb attack in Pakistan.

Post 9/11, post intervention we've had so many hundreds that we've lost count. We've lost close to 50,000 people altogether. The Afghans are probably the only ones who compare to us because they have also lost about as many, if not more civilians. We have lost about 5,000 to 7,000 paramilitary forces, military forces within that time. So clearly on that front if you say more stability, I would say the answer has to be no.

Then let's take drugs. Back in 2001 there was 8,000 hectares of cultivation of opium within Afghanistan. In 2014 the number according to UNODC is 224,000. That's 28 times more.

So these are the real facts. So I would love to be able to give you a happy answer and say, "Yes, interventions worked well. We are at a much happier place than we were." But the facts speak otherwise for that region.

Now, what could be primarily the two or three or four -- or let's say four big factors for that? First of all, I believe the goals were unrealistic, the entry goals were very, very unrealistic. And if you look at now the exit realities, we seem to be comfortable because domestic opinion doesn't support staying on in Afghanistan anymore. We seem to very comfortable with the exit realities, you know, and we want to broad brush that in an Alice in Wonderland type of a way to say that all is well.

So unrealistic goals. You wanted to create a Switzerland in an area which would probably not support Switzerland type of way. You know, you wanted to do everything at the same time. You were not able to pick and choose. You wanted girls to go to school -- an excellent goal -- and at the same time you wanted democratic values exactly the way they are in the United States of America -- unrealistic. So factor number one: unrealistic entry goals.

Factor number two, related to that, you wanted to create structures and institutions which had nothing to do with the local realities, okay. And on that when I speak as a Pakistani, I'm obviously -- you know, whatever

I say is taken with a pinch of salt because I'm not supposed to want stability in Afghanistan, whereas I get the most affected by instability in Afghanistan.

So the structures, the institutions that we wanted to create together -- because I consider myself part of that international coalition -- were alien to the society, to the tribal. And when I say tribal, I don't mean it at all, because many people think saying tribal in some ways is taking away something from the strength of Afghanistan. Not at all; it's just the reality. So is my country -- many parts of my country tribal. You cannot undo that reality.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, we all were so convinced about how we knew to solve the Afghan problem that we had neither the patience nor the care to listen to what the Afghans had to say. So we thought we had the solutions in London and in D.C. and, yes, closest to home in Islamabad. But nobody had the patience to really listen to what the Afghans possibly thought was -- and typically -- there are so many conferences I end up attending where we are discussing Afghanistan without the Afghans being in the room, right.

And this happens at the government level also -- surprise, surprise. Because we all think we know what is best for Afghanistan so well that we really don't need to even to consult the Afghans, forget everything else.

And lastly, clearly the Iraq war -- and now with the not so new but the knowledge that we went into the Iraq war with wrong information given to the Security Council becomes a harder truth to deal with. The Iraq war took away attention from Afghanistan. That's a fact. And then of course by the time the attention came back, Obama years, how many forces to come, it was possibly -- it's never too late, even today it is not too late. So I'm an optimist. I'm by all means an optimist. But it was too late in being able to correctly do the intervention to be able to achieve at least some goals.

So I will just end by saying that, you know, sometimes it's important to pick what is really important.

So when you say everything is a priority, you want to fix everything at the same time, you will end up fixing very little, if nothing.

MS. HERRIDGE: Sumantra, is that also your assessment?

MR. BOSE: Yes, in part. You know, I will speak right now in this opening comment as a compatibilist who has worked on international state making and peace building interventions in other parts of the world. It's very important to remember that international interventions that are aimed at, well, state rebuilding -- in this case kind of a monumental and complex task -- and peace building at the same time are by nature, by definition notoriously complex and difficult.

So in a way they are soft targets for all sorts of critics. You know, one can easily, you know, pick apart the premises, the assumptions of the intervention in the first place, you know, strategies, tactics. You know, "There's so much going wrong." You know, "There's bad news coming out of what seems to be a basket case all the time," and so on and so forth.

But it's also important to remember I think that what has necessitated these international interventions that are so easily, you know, criticized and kind of trashed, you know, as soft targets is that these pieces were in dire and desperate straits in any case and that's what necessitate these international interventions in the first place.

Beyond that, I think that where there is, you know, significant armed activity -- you know, certain kinds of this category of intervention take place in post-war context, in post-war societies, where an armed conflict is winding down or is over for whatever reason. While others take place in, well, war contexts, where an armed conflict often very complicated is ongoing or unfolding or, you know, restarting.

And when there is insurgency going on, there is very significant, you know, foreign armed presence and

activity on the soil of a particular country. It's very likely to elicit a certain kind of a patriotic resistance, which is not intrinsically a bad or an evil sentiment --

MS. HERRIDGE: Right.

MR. BOSE: Whether one agrees with its particular manifestation and articulation or not, it's kind of natural.

The last point I wanted to make before I wind up is that there's a very legitimate topic for discussion here, whether, you know, by nature protracted international intervention -- there are no quick fixes, no quick exists -- are doing more harm than good or doing more good than harm? You know, some of my students, you know, write papers on this topic, you know, whatever the case or cases -- the studies may be. They often pitch it as success or failure. And I try to suggest to them sometimes that it might be more useful to frame it as: is it doing more good than harm or is it doing more harm than good?

If the latter, then the intervention does need to be fundamentally rethought. But if the former, then perhaps there is some room for optimism very cautiously in a very qualified way, as I think the Ambassador expressed. But I completely agree with, you know, Minister Khar, who has right at the outset really, you know, succinctly described many of the things that have been wrong from the outset with the foreign presence and intervention in Afghanistan whether premises, assumptions or strategies, tactics.

MS. HERRIDGE: Michael, what could we have done differently with the benefit of hindsight?

MR. CLARKE: I think there's an alternative explanation. I don't disagree with anything that Former Minister Khar said in terms of the mistakes that were made and the lack of foresight. But I think there's an alternative interpretation from a more parochial point of view in, say, Kingdom, United States about this, which is that Afghanistan in a sense -- the operation in

Afghanistan contained a potentially larger problem and I absolutely agree that the Iraq war drove attention away. So five years were wasted after really 2002 in the politics of South Asia. But there was a sense I think that built up -- and this wasn't there at the beginning -- could have been, but it wasn't -- but a sense built up in 2003 that if we -- if the Western world, the alliance, just withdrew from its responsibilities in Afghanistan -- it was justified to do something about Taliban in 2001. Should we then have withdrawn completely?

And the sense built up, well, if we had done that, Afghanistan might even have split between the northern Kabul and Herat and the southern Kandahar and that would have put real pressure on the Durand Line and the Pashtun heartland, which would have -- it would have created a bigger South Asia problem. And so staying involved, trying to make a success of the Afghan operation was a way of containing a broader problem.

And I think that's an alternative way of thinking about it geopolitically. But it left us with two problems. One problem was that by the end, by 2010 increasingly Western involvement could not affect the outcome. Usually, if you think back to the colonial periods or successful counterinsurgency, external forces don't withdraw until they know pretty well what's going to happen in the next four or five years. They know pretty well what they are leaving behind.

This wasn't the case here. So we arrived at the point where we didn't really know. It might be successful, it might indeed. But we can't guarantee it. We don't know. It's out of our hands. And that's a fairly uncomfortable situation.

And the second is this question of possible strategic failure. From the point of view of certainly Britain, some of the other NATO countries and to a lesser extent the United States, we still face the prospect of the perception of strategic failure in a very simple way. If terrorist operations aimed against this country appear to be planned in Afghanistan whether they are successful or not, the public will say what on earth were we doing

for 10 years if they are still attacking us from Afghanistan. And that is a real worry I think within the British government because the perception of one or two terrorist operations could change the public mood altogether and in that respect we still face the prospect -- whatever happens in Kabul -- of the sense of strategic failure.

MS. HERRIDGE: Having spoken to the panelist in advance one area of consensus is that the problem requires a regional approach. So with that in mind, Ambassador, how will Afghanistan strike a balance in its relationship between India and Pakistan?

MR. ZAKHILWAL: First, let me do a quick, let's say, response to what Michael said.

MR. CLARKE: Have I provoked you?

MR. ZAKHILWAL: Yeah, yeah.

(Laughter)

MR. ZAKHILWAL: I do not think -- I absolutely do not think that Afghanistan would have been split into two if the forces had withdrawn after the defeat of the Taliban. Certainly, we've gone through a lot worse prior to that and we have not seen this materializing even though of course there were lot of pundits who expected the split. And we do not believe that even in the future even if things get worse that's going to happen.

But I do believe -- you see we will come back to the regional issue because -- as to what went wrong, there were many things. The Iraq war certainly a factor that played into it. The goals was not so much an issue because there were -- as an Afghan -- certainly supported. But how they were delivered with heavy footprints of the foreigners, then of course I agree with Minister Khar that even though if the capacity was not there within the Afghan institution but still relying more on those because that would have been sustainable, more sustainable. Certainly, the goals would not have been just of entire region goals, but still would have been goals that would

have been sustainable.

And also there was no exit strategy by foreigners. When international forces came to Afghanistan there was -- you know, they played as if they were there forever. And when there was talk about exit, it was not because things were going well but because things were going badly. And that was not the right time to be talking about exit when things became worse.

On the regional, I do believe that we together -- Afghanistan as well as our international partners -- have not handled the regional dimensions of Afghanistan. If there was any sort of involvement of region, it was more focused on fight against terrorism, which was of course Afghanistan was more concerned about. Then it was about broader set of issues. This could have included of course regional economic integration, investments could have been made in this. Even of the money that came to Afghanistan some of that portion if had spent on regional integration we would probably been in a lot different situation with Pakistan as well as with other regional countries than we are today.

And also I think we did not balance properly -- and by "we" I do mean Afghanistan -- the relationship between India and Pakistan. A neutral Pakistan absolutely bases its policy vis-a-vis Afghanistan from Indian angle and it continues to be so. And that is the most difficult, let's say, issue right now. While there are so many factors that contributed to where we are or how things went, let's say, badly, but those are history.

Right now it is the Pakistan/Indian/Afghan relationship that will have to be focused upon if we are to get it right, if we are to get out of where we are today.

MS. HERRIDGE: Minister, what assurances would Pakistan need to allow a stronger relationship between Afghanistan and India to go forward?

MS. KHAR: Okay, I -- you know, I have to say in an utopian world and in an idealistic setting and in the

type of relations that we would eventually want to garner with Afghanistan, I believe we should require no assurances for a sovereign state to pursue its relations with another sovereign state. It should be well within their means and their -- you know, they have every right to pursue whatever. So they will pursue relations with the countries which they feel -- which inspire more trust and confidence for the Afghans.

So I consider it to be wrong if we view everything -- I would want to somewhat disagree with it, but I will accept the reality in the statement that the Ambassador has made because it is true that there has been a general fear in Pakistan as to how India will be using Afghan soil and there's obviously been evidence of that and counter evidence, et cetera, et cetera. We've all been playing these games, right.

So there has been a concern as to how India would use Afghan soil to be able to plan, you know, separatism, et cetera, et cetera within Pakistan. And it was generally believed that if there was linkages between the militaries and there was training, which is happening -- I will have to acknowledge that as one of the big steps that President Ashraf Ghani took as -- many steps that he took to try and inculcate that confidence in Pakistan. So there is military training of Afghan nationals happening in Pakistan. And that is obviously -- you know, it gives a lot of trust I guess.

But I just want to look at this situation. I do want to talk a bit more about, you know, this regional approach that you said, because to be quite honest having served as Pakistan's foreign minister for almost two and a half years I don't think there's a dearth of regional conferences or sit-downs, trilaterals, quadrilaterals. I mean literally 50 percent of my entire time as foreign minister of Pakistan was consumed by quadrilaterals and trilaterals on -- and Doug Lute is laughing for obvious reasons -- Afghanistan.

And did that solve the situation? Will more quadrilaterals and trilaterals in the region sitting together in the RECCAs and the Heart of Asia conferences

will they all solve -- because till the time that the trust, you know, remains an issue and there is constant friction in countries bilaterally trusting each other, whether it is Pakistan/India, China/India, Iran/Pakistan, Iran/Afghanistan, bilaterally those relations have to really improve and trust has to be inspired before, you know, other things can happen.

So the regional situation it has to be centered around Afghanistan. I think this is how I want to put it. Because every country has to normalize and develop its trust and relationship with Afghanistan and that can then -- through that road we can go to various tributaries which might inspire more confidence.

MS. HERRIDGE: Sumantra, how can that trust be developed and is there a role in this for India and Iran?

MR. BOSE: Yeah, sure. I know we have (inaudible) from the first point of discussion. But very briefly, I do very much agree with what Minister Khar said in particular about, you know, trying to fix everything all at once. I think that's a very important point because, you know, I've worked on international peace building intervention post-war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, for example, in the former Yugoslavia and that's precisely one of the conclusions I drew from what was wrong with international intervention.

There were many things wrong and one of those was this tendency to try and fix everything, to poke your nose in everything, and you do run the risk of ending up, you know, fixing nothing. And so a modest and more focused, you know, set of goals may in the end leave the least diverse and most useable legacy for Afghans themselves to build on in the future.

Now, moving on to this question, well, let me be utopian for a second. Looking ahead, you know, two decades or even close to a half century from now because clearly the "problem" of Afghanistan is not going to go away, it's going to be with us for a long time. Certainly, any sort of stable, settled, reasonably peaceful Afghanistan -- and I use all those terms in a

qualified way -- can -- you know, that sort of a positive scenario, not perfect, but relatively positive, something the Afghans themselves, the region and the world can live with, which is not the case now, that can only be anchored in a reasonably stable and settled regional neighborhood which is at peace with itself.

You know, let me say something about the India/Pakistan angle to this. In Pakistan for the most part, you know, rightly or wrongly Indian and Pakistani engagements with and involvement in Afghanistan is seen as a zero sum game, that, you know, it can't be tolerated. Now, one can agree or disagree with this notion of strategic depth and so on whether that strategic doctrine is outdated or is not outdated and not going into that.

Now, nobody in India -- and there are plenty of mad people in India -- but nobody in India is mad enough to think that Pakistan cannot or will not or should not play a role in Afghanistan. It's simply absurd. But in Pakistan, you know, there should also I think be a realization that India does have longstanding ties, trade, commercial, cultural, educational ties. You know, there's the soft power of Bollywood, which is very influential at the popular level of Afghanistan that's not going to just go away.

And since the overthrow of the Taliban regime in late 2001 Indian governments have been consistently engaged with Afghanistan in seemingly benign ways most of the time -- at least what's publicly known -- you know, road building, development assistance, all sorts of things like that, you know, opening of embassies and consulates in various parts of Afghanistan.

Now, something interesting did happen a few months ago when the Indian Prime Minister Modi stopped over on a surprise visit in Pakistan I think deliberately on the way back from Afghanistan where he had just spoken in Kabul at -- if I'm not getting it wrong, Ambassador, the opening of the Afghan parliament building, which has been built with Indian assistance or --

MR. ZAKHILWAL: All by Indian assistance.

MR. BOSE: Yeah, exactly. Now, I think Modi decided to stop over in Pakistan to send a signal, to send a gesture of reassurance. At least I think that's what was intended at the benign level that India's relationship with Afghanistan doesn't necessarily have to be viewed as being at the expense of Pakistan and the Pakistan/Afghanistan relationship, which of course is tremendously central to Afghanistan because Pakistan has this huge border with Afghanistan which India doesn't have.

Well, you know, maybe that signal, that attempted gesture of reassurance is something worth thinking about, because Modi who is going to be around till 2019 at least -- he may not be around after that, but that's still another three years -- he is gone from being a kind of a controversial provincial leader to being a still controversial but dominant national figure and he clearly harbors ambitions of being a global statesmen. And the stepping stone to being, you know, any sort of global statesmen is being a regional peacemaker. So perhaps, you know, people's personal ambitions can also be harnessed to good and noble causes in the longer term.

You know, the last point. I've spoken long enough. I mean this is commonsensical; this is self evident that there has to -- you know, the neighborhood powers that's -- and above all Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan -- Pakistan, Iran and India in that order of importance I would put them can play and have to play the major role both in the immediate term and in that longer term of, you know, two decades or a half century from now in bringing a semblance of stability to Afghanistan.

You know, that's where remote distant powers like the United States, Britain and various other countries that have been involved have a natural kind of a deficit because they are remote, they are not from the region, they are culturally alien. And so clearly a regional multilateral approach is the way to go.

MS. HERRIDGE: Michael, I like to bring you in to respond. And also is there any role here for China

given its economic interest in Afghanistan?

MR. CLARKE: Yes, there is. I think it's one of the new elements that Western foreign offices have got to take into account, which is potentially quite constructive and in fact very constructive if we get used to it. You know, China has a very small border with Afghanistan -- 56, 57 miles -- but they worry partly that it will relate to politics in Xinjiang and the Uyghur problem. They worry about spillover effects or safe havens on the Afghanistan side of the border for what they say is a terrorist problem. I think that's massively overstated by the Chinese incidentally, but that's what they say.

But I think there's much more interesting motivation for China's much asserted recent interest, which is the One Belt, One Road, the new Silk Road and this real initiative to create this new Silk Road. Just look at the map. You know, Afghanistan is intrinsically at crossroads. And if you look at the other stan, the smaller stan, often Kazakhstan, but Tajikistan and Turkmenistan to the west, Kyrgyzstan -- if Afghanistan were unstable that will certainly be difficult for the One Belt, One Road project to cope with and Afghanistan should be intrinsically part of it.

But, as we know, the infrastructure in South Asia is not very good. I was at a meeting only two weeks ago where we spent almost four days lamenting the lack of common infrastructures between South Asian countries. And the Chinese see that that's a massive problem for their One Belt, One Road vision of a new Silk Road from China into Western Europe. So they have a big, big interest, and as a result of that, they are starting to -- they didn't put any aid into Afghanistan to speak of until 2014 and now there's about \$300 million worth -- some military, mainly non-military \$250 million worth for next three years.

They have got themselves involved in a peace process. They are shuttling between President Ghani and Prime Minister Sharif, not with much effect at the moment. But they've started this quadrilateral coordination arrangement from the beginning of this year, had some

meetings. And so they are giving it a go. And that is a very interesting development which wasn't there really in the background before and they've got oil and copper interests around Kabul and in the north of the country. So it's something to take account of and it's something that I think the West should try to work with when we think about a regional approach.

MS. HERRIDGE: Before we open it up to questions, I would like a quick answer from everyone on the following, if that's possible. Based on our discussions there was a consensus that US influence in the region is receding and the countries gaining influence Russia, China and Iran. Does this present an opportunity on the Afghan question? And I will begin with Ms. Khar.

MS. KHAR: Yeah, absolutely. I think this is a huge opportunity and I think it's not a competitive opportunity. Whereas -- what I mean to say is that the US is not unhappy with other countries playing a bit of a leadership role as US' own interest is waning from this area.

And I think it's extremely important -- it might not be very pertinent to the current discussion, but becomes very, very pertinent if you look at the bigger picture, that the US' interest and the US' Asia pivot has nothing to do with the part of Asia that I come from. That Asia pivot is very, very China containment if you want to look at it slightly that way. But even if you want to look at it vastly positively, it's got to do with East Asia -- that pivot has got to do with East Asia.

So their influence and their interest in this area is waning. Their interest in that area is obviously increasingly. Some of the Middle East interest is actually being taken away and going into that area. And within all of that you have China really now being comfortable with asserting itself as an emerging superpower, which was not the case before, mind you.

So about two years back -- okay, maybe three to four years back initially when I started office of foreign minister I remember very clearly that China did not want

to obviously play a role in the peace process, for instance. They wanted to give the impression that they weren't really the type of big power that would want to -- because it obviously has a cost as we've seen in the case of the US. Playing a role has a cost because failure has a cost.

MR. CLARKE: Same in the Middle East.

MS. KHAR: Same in the Middle East.

MR. CLARKE: Same in the Middle East. They were kind of free riders on everyone else's diplomacy.

MS. KHAR: Absolutely. So as China is taking this role, I think it's a happy place for them to be. It can only be a force of good the investment that they are making because many Europeans and Americans get very concerned about economic imperialism of China within this area and other -- Central Asia. I think it's a force of good. If you invest in infrastructure it can only be a force of good.

Had the US also invested the \$100 billion of economic assistance that it gave to Afghanistan in various forms only in the infrastructure, believe you me as an aid recipient country it would have done much more good and had much more results in Afghanistan than all of the money that went away in sectors which we thought we knew better to fix.

MS. HERRIDGE: Ambassador, do you also agree that there is an opening now?

MR. ZAKHILWAL: Definitely. First of all, the rising Chinese interest with respect to again security and economics in the region is encouraging. Also, the US-Chinese engagement again on Afghanistan regional issue is a different incursion. China is viewed both by Pakistan and by Afghanistan -- probably the only common neighbor that we do believe -- we both believe that cannot have anything but positive intentions for the region for its own sake both for security, as I've mentioned, and for its economic ambitions, economic ambitions that we are

supportive of.

We are supportive of in this again China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, CPEC. We are supportive of its One Belt, One Road project. We certainly would want them to come in and invest in Afghanistan and there is Chinese interest in that as well. And we also understand China's concern with respect to again EITM in Xinjiang's province, in its concerns again with respect to instability and how those elements could use Afghanistan to destabilize China.

So all those elements putting together and then China's coming forward in involvement -- and it is something we review positively. And I do hope that it will produce again a very constructive sort of broker's role particularly between us and Pakistan, because at the end the one thing that could really change the situation in Afghanistan is Afghanistan-Pakistan relationship. Right now it is -- there is absolutely no trust between these two countries and for us to be hopeful there has to be some positive sort of developments on that front and I do believe that China can play a role.

MS. HERRIDGE: Okay, I would like to open it up for a couple of questions before we wrap up. Right here in the back?

MS. GLASSE: Thank you. I'm Jennifer Glasse. I'm a correspondent and based in Afghanistan for five years. I wanted to ask about the Pakistan/Afghanistan relationship. It seems to be deteriorating especially in the wake of the attack on Tuesday. The intelligence services has blamed that on the Haqqani network in Pakistan. Dr. Abdullah has cancelled his trip next month to Pakistan. What is going on with the relationship and what does that mean for the prospect of peace talks with the Taliban? And is there any concern about the continuity of the National Unity Government past what Afghans believe was a two year deadline at the end of September and the absence of a loya jirga to ratify Dr. Abdullah's position?

MR. ZAKHILWAL: Definitely --

MR. CLARKE: One for you.

MR. ZAKHILWAL: Definitely for me.

(Laughter)

MR. ZAKHILWAL: The Tuesday attack was absolutely a setback for the recent progresses that Afghanistan and Pakistan had made. But I hope with this -- again this extremely tragic event as it is that it could now be used as an opportunity for, let's say, self pressure to be more constructive.

I can only tell you this: that I believe that the Tuesday attack has pushed certain efforts that are encouraging. At least that is again my -- I was in the back there and of course back and forth with respective issues and I hope that some positive developments emerge in the next couple of days that could give us some -- again some hope. And those positive developments if they do emerge could not have been foreseen this quickly if it were not for the last Tuesday attack.

MS. HERRIDGE: Ms. Khar?

MS. KHAR: Yeah. Look, I think one of the major problems -- and maybe I should have mentioned it as the problem in the -- you know, as the fifth problem. The fact that we decided, you know, even post intervention to let the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan remain as fluid as it is is a huge source of both problem between Pakistan and Afghanistan trust building and for the stability, security of Afghanistan and for the stability and security of Pakistan.

To anyone who charges Pakistan with providing safe havens to the Haqqani network -- and I'm going to just answer -- you know, say this categorically because I don't think there's any hoodwinking of this particular issue -- or the Afghan Taliban. Okay, the reality is that this border area is so -- and the border management is so bad and fluid that 60,000 people, for instance, cross the border one border crossing every day -- only one border

crossing, right, with no visas, with no passports. There's no telling. And when we try to put biometric systems, et cetera, it was resisted. Instead of encouraging the international community presence in Afghanistan, instead of encouraging that, it was actually resisted.

So it is really -- I truly believe that it is one of the primary factors which can have an influence on another primary factors that Ambassador Omar referred to. It can build the trust between Pakistan and Afghanistan. So that's one factor.

And the other is that let's be clear: I don't think Pakistan has ever denied the fact that there are certain Afghans whether -- you know, so they can be from any of the various groups that have been living in Afghanistan together with the about 3 million Afghan refugees that Pakistan has been hosting for the last three decades now.

Now, Pakistan has limited capacity to be able to deal with the many, many terrorist groups which have attacked Pakistan itself, okay. So first you deal with those who are attacking you and then you try and create the circumstances to enable dealing with those who are attacking others. So we are trying to do both things at the same time. And I'm encouraged by the statement by Ambassador Omar that there is encouraging interactions and hopefully we will try and -- you know, the two countries will fight through this.

MS. HERRIDGE: I'm afraid there's time only for that one question because I would like to get some final thoughts from the panel. I would like to begin with you, Michael. As we look forward what will you see as indicators of progress and what will you see as signs of further concern in Afghanistan?

MR. CLARKE: For me indicators of progress are the survival of Afghan institutions and another smooth transition -- the fact is the transition from President Karzai to President Ghani occurred. It happened -- one of the interesting thing I was thinking was that whenever we

in the West we looked at Afghan elections, we all said is this election fair, is it free, is it legitimate? Afghans don't mind as long as there was a result. They just wanted a result. And if there is another result that's a sign of progress.

And as we were saying I think, you know, regional ownership of parts of the problem. And that's something that Western powers haven't thought through properly I think and need to do that much, much more. For me those will be two signs, survival of the Afghan government and that sense of regional involvement. For all of the problems that we know it brings, it is the only way forward.

MS. HERRIDGE: Sumantra, what do you see as the indicators of progress versus the signs of concern?

MR. BOSE: Well, one point that I haven't mentioned is that the sort of coming in of Iran from the cold -- this is of course, you know, without endorsing the Islamic Republic and its particular form of theology -- is potentially a very positive development because this means that potentially Iran can become a full member being brought onboard of this multilateral international strategy to stabilize Afghanistan. And the Iran factor is often overlooked, that it's the kind of the other neighbor after Pakistan or along with Pakistan looking at the geopolitical angle regionally primarily.

However, this somewhat utopian multilateral regional approach may -- of course it is putting the cart before the horse at this stage of the conversation because there are a couple of toxic relationships that need to improve significantly first. You know, one being the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship broadly defined. Of course, you know, one can unpack that. But let's leave it as the Pakistan-Afghanistan relationship that has been referred to already. The other is the Pakistan-India relationship, which also impinges on Afghanistan.

So it seems that any progress on Afghanistan towards that kind of utopian future of relative stability, you know, sort of lasting peace is contingent on kind of

incremental progress on improving these two toxic relationships, the Pakistan-Afghanistan one being obviously the central one, but the Pakistan-India one is the secondary one.

But I think in the longer term there is space -- in the medium term, I would say, there is space, because if we think -- if we again take a step back from this quagmire or what looks like a horrible quagmire regardless of some progress, some positive indicators, which -- you know, what are the -- what's the balance of the forces that want a perennially disturbed and violent Afghanistan with the forces that do not want that, that want that other kind of future outcome?

And if the forces that do not want a perennially violent and disturbed Afghanistan can be brought together in sort of a -- to use language from Indian politics -- a common minimum program, okay, because it necessarily is a political coalition of disparate interests, then I think there is hope in both the near-term and the medium-term.

MS. HERRIDGE: Ms. Khar, your final thoughts?

MS. KHAR: Yeah. To me -- I think again I will use my own sort of -- I will use what I said -- apply what I said in the beginning to myself also. Because I think you cannot have ten priorities. You have to have priorities as to what is the most important. And to me clearly peace and stability from Afghan standards, not Swiss standards, okay. So every year there's more stability in Afghanistan than the previous year.

Now, again, I do not want to be a pessimist, but the facts are that currently there are more Afghans leaving Afghanistan than refugees flow coming into Afghanistan, which means that Afghans are not finding the situation to be better than the previous year. And 2015 has actually been the deadliest year in terms of violence both for the military and for the civilians.

So these are -- so what would be success, indicator of success, a marker of success in the future? More Afghans are coming back into Afghanistan than those

that are leaving Afghanistan. Less Afghan military is deserting and dying because of violence within Afghanistan.

So peace talks will have to be really as to how much to give to whom has to be an Afghan decision. And all of us can only be supportive of that. And I think the time is there where Pakistan will obviously be fully, fully supportive of whatever role it can possibly play, potentially a positive one.

And lastly, I do want to say this, upholding the Afghan economy. You see because as the aid money is dwindling away the Afghan economy is obviously suffering and that obviously has a direct effect on peace, stability and the future that Afghans see for themselves in Afghanistan.

MS. HERRIDGE: Ambassador?

MR. ZAKHILWAL: Well, first, I just want to assure Michael because he mentioned a success indicator: the political survival I would take it of the Afghan government. It will survive politically, so be rest assured. Of course there is widespread disappointment of the government. But at the same time, nobody would -- and by "no" I mean the politicians or the oppositions who are out there would want to push for the collapse of the government because we know then the consequences of that. It's nobody's benefit and that's very well understood.

For me over the next few months -- it has to be over the next few months otherwise we could be in some serious trouble -- some positive development on the roadmap of the quadrilateral and development again that's on peace talks. If peace talks do begin with the support from Pakistan, then of course what that -- that by itself is an extremely significant development in our relationship with Pakistan. Because as much as for us it's important to make progress on peace talks with Taliban, it's important that we make progress with Pakistan.

So those are the two fronts we will be watching.

If they do not happen, let's say, over the spring or summer, then they may become more and more difficult and therefore we might even get into sort of a worse situation than we are today.

MS. HERRIDGE: Thank you to the panel for informing us and for your candid and direct assessments on the problem and thank to all of you for attending this afternoon.

(Applause)

* * * * *