

# THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

## ASPEN SECURITY FORUM

### “Victory” in Afghanistan and Iraq

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Allison Jaslow: Good morning everyone. My name is Allison Jaslow, and I am honored to be a part of the 2018 Aspen Security Forum Scholar Class. As a two time Iraq War

veteran, it's quite meaningful to introduce today's first session, Victory In Iraq and Afghanistan.

As your program says, victory in both Afghanistan and Iraq remains as hard to define and elusive as ever. In the decade since I left the Army, I've worked in nearly all facets of our political system, and I can tell you that something we don't talk about enough is what success looks like in both wars. And perhaps more importantly, we don't publicly debate why and under what conditions our troops are put in harm's way as our war on terror nears its 18th year. What does winning these wars look like in Iraq and Afghanistan today?

Moderating this discussion that I hope extends from here in Aspen back to Washington DC is Kim Dozier. Kim Dozier is a CNN Global Affairs Analyst and a regular contributor to The Daily Beast. She covered intelligence and national security for the Associated Press and then The Daily Beast from 2010 to 2017, after 17 years as an award-winning CBS News Foreign and National Security Correspondent. She held the 2015 General Omar Bradley Chair at the US Army War College, the first journalist and first woman in the post, and her bestselling memoir *Breathing The Fire: Fighting to Survive and Get Back to the Fight* recounts losing her NBC News team and recovering from a car bomb in Iraq.

Without further ado, I turn it over to Kim Dozier. Thank you.

Kim Dozier: Thank you.

As Congressman Schiff next to me has said, we have an hour so we can easily solve Iraq and Afghanistan. Joining me to tackle this are Congressman Adam Schiff, who is the ranking member on the House Intelligence Committee, and then we have Juan Zarate, the former Deputy National Security Adviser for Combating Terrorism in the Bush Administration. We have Ambassador Tom Shannon, the former, just former, Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs and also more than 30 years as a Foreign Service Officer, and we have Samantha Vinograd, former Director for Iraq on the National Security Council, who also spent a year in country in Iraq for the Treasury Department.

With that, starting with the lightning round question that I've all warned you about, easy to answer, will we still have tens of thousands of troops in Iraq and Afghanistan in a decade from now?

Adam Schiff: I guess I'm going first, am I?

I would say we'll still have a substantial number of troops in Afghanistan, but I would say more likely than not, we will not have a substantial number in Iraq.

Kim Dozier: Juan, would you-

Juan Zarate: Kim, first of all, I'm honored to be here, honored to be with you on a beautiful Saturday here in Aspen. You're one of the great reporters who's been in Afghanistan and Iraq, and knows this better than anybody from a press perspective, so great to be here with you.

Kim Dozier: Thank you.

Juan Zarate: Let me answer your question two ways. One is, what will be the reality, and what should be the reality? I think the reality is we probably won't have tens of thousands of troops in those two countries. The reality is we should have a military presence consistently in both in a decade or two.

Kim Dozier: What sort of military presence?

Juan Zarate: I think it depends on the conditions, but I do think the reality is, we're going to need to not only support those governments and their militaries, but we're not going to want to, in theory we shouldn't want to, dismantle our capabilities that we've invested for the last 15 years in developing in both of those countries. The moment you begin to dismantle our ability to not only operate in those countries, but to find, fix, finish terrorist targets and also to influence politically and diplomatically given a military presence, that is very hard to replicate, very hard to rebuild, and I think we're wise to think about how we unwind and dismantle our presence in both countries.

Kim Dozier: And of course, remaining depends on the host nation as well.

Ambassador?

Tom Shannon: That's the point I was going to make, but let me underscore what Juan noted. What a pleasure it is to be here, and especially to be in such an incredible venue with so many interesting people, and have an opportunity to talk with such a great panel.

This is all going to depend on our partners. It's going to depend on the kind of relationships that we build and continue to strengthen with the governments of Afghanistan and the governments of Iraq, because at the end of the day, we've learned our lesson well. We do not do well as an occupying power. We do very well as a collaborating power, and the extent to which we can build those kinds of relationships, that will determine the nature of our presence, but also increasingly we've realized that what we're doing in Afghanistan and what we're doing in Iraq is not just about Afghanistan or about Iraq. It's about the regional challenges we face in south and central Asia, and in the larger Middle East, and so our interests there are going to extend far beyond what is happening inside of these countries, but what happens beyond.

Samantha V.: It's a pleasure to be here. It's my first Aspen Security Forum, and what I would say is we often group Iraq and Afghanistan together, because of the times that

we got involved in both countries, but they are entirely different wars. They're different threats, they're different terrorist threats, they're different counterinsurgencies, and they're different capabilities within the host governments and the military forces that we are partnering with in both countries. I think it's hard to compare the Iraqi Security Forces with the ANSF for example, and so I do think that we will have and we should have troops on the ground in Iraq, and that's something that doesn't make me happy to say having been there in 2007 and still seeing service members there and putting their lives in harms way.

In Afghanistan, we obviously have a significantly larger amount of troops there now. I think that the threat from Afghanistan will likely be higher in 20 years than it is in Iraq, and we can talk about that, but the NATO presence is also something that we need to take into consideration. We have a new NATO mission that's been announced in Brussels that was buried in some of the other headlines that came out of the Summit, but NATO has renewed commitment to these theaters. We have countries like Qatar and the UAE getting more involved, and so I think the nature of our engagement in both theaters will look different, but we'll still be there.

Adam Schiff: Can I just add, Kim, the reason I say yes to Afghanistan, no to Iraq is because I think the host government situations are going to be so different 10 years from now. They're different already. In Iraq, with such a Shia-dominated government, with the proximity and influence of Iran, it's hard for me to imagine 10 years from now it will still be politically viable to still have a substantial number of American troops there whether it's desirable or not. I doubt it'll be politically viable, but I think in Afghanistan, it may very well be both viable and necessary.

Kim Dozier: Which of course calls into question the original investment in Iraq that I want to get into, but let's start macro, reasons we went into both countries: An alleged threat from Iraq to the United States, the attacks of 9/11 brought us into Afghanistan. Is there still enough reason to stay? In Afghanistan for instance, you've got General Scott Miller in his confirmation hearing to head there in the fall said that, "Afghanistan and Pakistan's frontier region have the largest concentration of terrorist groups who want to do harm to US interests." I asked General Petraeus recently about Afghanistan, how long should we stay, and he said, for the same reasons, because of terrorism, as long as it takes. How long is that, and are we willing to stick it out?

Who wants to jump in?

Adam Schiff: I would say as long as it takes in Afghanistan is unfortunately going to continue to be a very long time. I was there most recently a couple months ago, and it was interesting getting the assessments from the intel community and the military before we left, which were, "It's a stalemate. If anything, the Afghans are gaining more ground." A very negative depressing assessment.

Kim Dozier: You mean the Taliban's gaining more ground?

Adam Schiff: I'm sorry, yes. The Taliban is gaining more ground. On the ground when we were there visiting, it was a much more optimistic picture. There was a sense that moving to a conditions-based approach had changed the dynamic, that the Taliban seemed newly receptive to potential negotiations, and yet not much had really changed in terms of our approach. Yes, we were embedding our troops closer to the fight. We were loosening some of the rules of engagement, but still if we had over 100,000 troops there, and that was not enough to change the dynamic, why would these former modest changes ... I would say that probably Secretary Mattis has defined victory better than anyone I have seen.

As I understand how he has defined it, it is not a military victory but a political victory, where we have a political resolution, and even that is not a wholesale negotiated outcome with the Taliban, but merely a negotiated outcome with certain elements of the Taliban, and a necessity to continue to suppress those that are not willing to leave the fight. If that's our definition of victory, and I think that's probably about as optimistic a definition as we're likely to achieve, that is going to require a continuing presence for a long period of time, and that's why I think that's likely to come about.

Kim Dozier: Ambassador Shannon, you were part of the Trump administration process to come up with this conditions-based strategy. What does victory look like?

Tom Shannon: I think the Congressman is on point when he notes that so much of this is going to depend on how the Afghan government responds to us over time, and obviously success and victory is going to depend a lot on how the Afghans and also the Iraqis understand it as we look at both cases. We don't have an Afghan or an Iraqi representative up here on this panel, so to a certain extent, we're talking to ourselves about how we understand victory and success, which is important. We have to have that preliminary discussion before we can have the larger discussion with our partners, but the Congressman noted Secretary Mattis is focused on really the political dimension of success, and Secretary Pompeo has underscored this.

At the beginning of this administration with National Security Advisor McMaster, with Secretary Tillerson, and the White House team, the ability to fashion a South Asia policy which, as the Congressman noted, is conditions-based, sending a very clear message to the Taliban that we don't have a timeline or a scale for departure, but are really looking for the conditions that have to be in place before we talk about departure, was designed to send a clear message to the Taliban that military victory is not in their future.

Also, the Afghans themselves have been working very hard in the region to build support for some kind of peace or reconciliation process through the Kabul conference, through the cease fire offered by the Afghan government, and by the willingness of President Ghani to meet with the Taliban. Our own

engagement with the Taliban has indicated an interest and a willingness on their part, and follow-up regional conferences, for instance recently one held in Uzbekistan, the Tashkent Conference which brought in all of the regional players including the United States and our NATO partners, is a very important step in this regard.

I'm actually ... Optimistic might not be the right word, but I think we are in a position in which there are possibilities and potential out there for political resolutions which will not solve the problem in its entirety, as the Congressman noted, but could indeed create large areas of stability within the country where we can begin to focus on development in a way that's meaningful, enduring, and sustainable.

Kim Dozier: Though that does sound a little bit like nation building and getting pretty far afield from stopping groups that might want to attack the United States. Is that still the same threat that it was?

Tom Shannon: Well listen, the terrorist threat is real and worrisome, but let me make an outrageous statement. It's hard to fight terrorism when you're fighting another war at the same time, and it's going to be tough to get on top of ISIS and Al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups inside of Afghanistan if you first don't have some kind of entente between the Taliban and the government that allow both to turn on these entities and fight them, and allow regional partners also to involve themselves. In other words, when the Afghan government and the Taliban are tearing at each other, it's very hard to successfully fight other kinds of terrorist groups.

Kim Dozier: Juan?

Juan Zarate: Kim, you've pointed to a dichotomy in our policy and attention. We don't want to be nation building around the world, both President Obama said that, President Trump has said that, so there is a dynamic tension between the need to actually be in places around the world to disrupt terrorist safe havens and operations while also trying to figure out how you help the host countries and our partners develop the capacity to actually not only fight those fights, but also to govern safely, because ultimately success in both countries has to be seen as governments in the societies that are able to govern themselves peacefully or at least productively and constructively, and are able to control their territories, so there are no global threats that emerge from those countries.

That's easily said, very hard to do, but I will tell you having worked in the counter-terrorism field now for two decades, the lesson of counter-terrorism over the last three decades looking at these global groups is the moment you allow them operational breathing room, physical safe haven, even virtual safe haven, that allows them not only to innovate and strategize, but to adapt and think more globally, more expansively, and I think the times when we've run into trouble with our both counter-terrorism policy in the context of Iraq and

Afghanistan, our posture military has been when we've lost the vision that these are groups that are adaptive, these are parts of broader movements that aren't just confined to the manifestation of one group or another, Al-Qaeda yesterday, ISIS today, Son of Daesh tomorrow, this is part of a throughput, and I think we have to come to grips with, and this is where I'm simpatico with some of the generals that you quoted, we have to come to grips with this is a different kind of conflict.

This isn't a classic war, but these are parts of the world where we have to partner with our counterparts, but we have to find ways of disrupting these groups, because if we don't, we're going to find ourselves in positions where we're going to have to come back in more aggressive ways, we're going to have to invest more time resources, blood and treasure, and we don't want to do that. I think that's where we are. The Obama Administration drove us toward that kind of a posture. I think the Trump Administration is there. We've got troops around the world working with counterparts in the Maghreb in East Africa, in parts of Southeast Asia, trying to ensure that these groups don't gain momentum, global reach, and don't present a strategic threat to the host governments. That really is a dynamic tension though, because how do you do that in a way that's consistent and doesn't require tens of thousands of troops for decades.

Samantha V.:

And I think it gets at this notion of self reliance, and this is now the third President that I've seen work on both of these theaters. I started under Bush in Iraq, worked for Obama in the White House on Iraq, and now we're here when we have President Trump giving a speech on Afghanistan where he said that he's a problem solver, he's going to solve the problem, and what that means in the President's context is to kill bad guys. That was what was in the speech, and it really got me to thinking about this notion of self reliance and responsibility.

When President Obama announced the end of combat operations in 2010, and I was the Director for Iraq at the time, he said it is now the responsibility of the Iraqi people to maintain security in the country, and the idea was that the government had to have the capability to take care of the security situation in country, and this is perhaps why it's okay that we're talking about these issues from the US national security perspective without an Afghan or Iraqi counterpart on stage, is from a US national security perspective, how do we diminish the risk to the homeland and to US interests overseas?

We have not been able to get these countries to a point of self reliance from that perspective. That is a military endeavor, but it's also a civilian endeavor, and so the trade off here, and this is where Presidents have varied through administrations, is how much capacity building and foreign assistance do you want to use to enhance capacity at various ministries, to focus on governance, to focus on infrastructure and services, so that different parts of the country become more self reliant?

In 2007, we were literally doing everything from Iraqi budget execution to counting how many hours of electricity there were and how many nurses there were in hospitals. That was over-correcting towards advising on the self reliance side, where now, my sense is at least, we are moving for an assistance away from all of that and into more of a focused endeavor on security self reliance, and so we haven't gotten it right yet, but I think that the Trump Administration, or at least my read at least, is that we are trying to focus more narrowly on that military/security/counter-terrorism mission.

Kim Dozier: And I'd like to focus on that aspect of capacity building, building security. The method of choice seems to be Advise and Assist. That seems to be the tool that everyone keeps pulling out of the toolbox. Can you tell me an example of where Advise and Assist has produced a long lasting security situation that is sustainable without US assistance? Anywhere?

Tom Shannon: By assistance, you mean military presence or-

Kim Dozier: Yeah.

Tom Shannon: Sure. Central America and Colombia. We've done this before. During the Central American Wars in the 1980s and 1990s, in Guatemala, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, we fought three very distinct kinds of wars. We achieved outcomes we wanted to achieve. We had very limited presence on the ground. The same is true in Colombia. We helped the Colombians end a 50 year civil war that had a cost economically and in terms of persons that is equal to Iraq or Afghanistan, and so we've had experience doing this before. It's about choosing your partners, and it's about as Sam noted, being able to find a way to help countries build their own capacity and then support that effort.

Kim Dozier: But Special Operations Command South still has advisors throughout Latin America including Colombia.

Tom Shannon: They don't fight, and this is Advise and Assist. It's all about institution building. It's all about ensuring that these organizations have the right kind of connection with us and broadly globally, because many of them now participate in peacekeeping operations around the world, so they're globalized security services. And some, like the Colombians, are even exporting their security capabilities into Central America and the Caribbean.

Juan Zarate: And even to Afghanistan, actually. The Colombians are supporting the Afghan troops.

I think there are three categories of examples. One is the special operations community, which has done an enormous amount of work to build capacity in both Iraq and Afghanistan, and oh by the way, I think in the NATO context has done an enormous amount to build ties between the special operations community in the NATO context. That has endured, and in fact, has given Iraq

and Afghanistan an ability to fight on their own and in more aggressive ways using those capabilities, so I would see that as a real success.

Kim Dozier: What you're saying is the special operations elements in each of those countries have been the strongest part of the security apparatus?

Juan Zarate: Without a doubt, by the very nature of the fight and the very nature of the relationships, and so that's one category. I think another category is where you have willing partners to fight on the ground. The Kurds are a great example, where Advise and Assisting the Kurds, the Kurds were able to take on ISIS directly in ways that we were able to support, but we weren't necessarily the leading edge, and that is not only important in terms of their capability, but also the sustainability of the relationship and the-

PART 1 OF 3 ENDS [00:21:04]

Juan Zarate: ... but also the sustainability of the relationship and the political situation in the Kurdish north of Iraq.

Then, finally, I think there have been some economic successes. There's lots of starts and stops, but there are parts of the Afghan and Iraqi economies that are working relatively well. I mean, Kabul in 2018 is very different from the Kabul you and I visited right after 9/11. There are elements and pockets of economies and the hope and promise of future economies, for example, the mineral wealth in Afghanistan, that are very much present and can be imagined. So I think that there is a positive dimension to this.

Maybe, just to make one final point in this regard, and it alludes to something Tom mentioned in his opening statement. The problem with the way we Americans typically talk about Iraq and Afghanistan, we talk about a finality. Right? We talk about victory. When can we pull out? I think the challenge here is how do we think about a positive, constructive set of relationships, and presence even, in both countries where both countries are not seen as occupied countries, so to speak, but are seen as real allies. Where we're seeking real opportunities, and frankly, taking advantage of the investment in time, energy, diplomatic capital, everything we've put into this.

We very rarely think forward in that way, and I think that's a real challenge for our policymakers, because President Obama was stricken by this, President Trump was stricken by this ... the desire to get out. The desire to end it doesn't allow the imagination to think forward about how does Iraq and Afghanistan play into all of the broader dimensions of things happening?

Samantha V.: Like South Korea, even.

Juan Zarate: Exactly.

Samantha V.: And we have tens of thousands of troops on the Korean Peninsula, after being at war on that peninsula for a long time. But the difference, I think, with the Train, Advise, and Assist missions that we've been discussing, and with Iraq and Afghanistan, is there is still an active threat in Iraq and Afghanistan against the United States and against the homeland, which hopefully will be mitigated.

In Iraq, the threat from ISIS is going down. But in Central America and some of the other places where we have Special Operations forces, there is less of a direct threat against U.S. personnel both in-country and threats emanating from those theaters against the homeland, so I don't know that we have a direct corollary to this.

But in Iraq, to your point, Juan, hopefully we are moving towards that more sustainable long-term presence. We've transitioned to, what is it? An enduring presence force that is serving much different functions than the larger Train, Advise, and Assist mission. We have more NATO forces that are moving in. Potentially, you could see more U.S. troop members coming out because of that, so it feels like we're moving in that direction-

Adam Schiff: I have to say, I have a much more gloomy assessment of how much we have succeeded in either the Iraq or Afghanistan theaters-

Kim Dozier: I've been sitting here going, "Mosul." And "Afghanistan, they're losing territory." So please go on.

Adam Schiff: Well, it seemed apparent to me, from the very beginning of our efforts, certainly in Afghanistan, that we had two very different missions, and they were on completely different timetables. We had a military mission, which had much better prospects of success. And we had a civilian mission which seemed like a generational mission. The timelines were not at all aligned.

I think this has, sadly, borne out as a significant impediment to any kind of durable security situation in Afghanistan, notwithstanding how many tens and hundreds of thousands of troops over time we have had in Afghanistan, doing Train and Equip, helping to train the Afghan ... and arm its army, and police. We have had a fundamental problem with creating an Afghan government. Helping the Afghan government create itself in such a form that the Afghan people would be willing to fight and die for it.

I remember visiting the Afghan officials working on the anti-corruption efforts in the government, and being told thereafter by our folks in the Department of Justice and DOD that the prime minister's office was corrupt, the attorney general's office was corrupt. The anti-corruption section was corrupt. That we had to stop, in fact, teaching certain anti-corruption techniques, because they were using them to be more successfully corrupt. Because when you teach people how to ferret out corruption, you're also teaching them how to better conceal corruption.

So a lot of the vast investment we made in state building was completely unsustainable, and has been unsustainable. Every time we have drawn down troops, we have seen the problem rise. The training that we have done has not been able to be self-sustained, because the political strength behind it has been far too weak.

In Iraq, the minute we did draw down, because the political problem was never solved, because the Sunnis still felt disenfranchised, and still do feel disenfranchised, then that Sunni dissatisfaction reared its head, and ISIS was able to rapidly devastate this military that we had purportedly so well trained.

I have to say, as a Congressional consumer of innumerable and often upbeat briefings by the defense department over the years, I have become much more skeptical of the sustainability in those two theaters. I think, as you point out, Tom, in other theaters where the investment was different in scope and kind, we've had a different result. But I think the protracted challenge of addressing the civilian leadership, of addressing the corruption problem in Afghanistan, has meant that the investment and the training missions has not been self-sustainable, and likely won't be self-sustainable.

Kim Dozier: Tom, with those elements being a baseline of what you're having to deal with now, is that a recipe for decades and decades in Afghanistan in a large numbers way?

Tom Shannon: In some fashion ... Well, I don't know about large numbers. But again, we have to understand this in terms of our relationship. This is not an in-and-out equation. It's not when you come in and when you come out. It's when did we go in? For what purposes? How has that mission changed over time? And then how we've extracted ourselves in certain areas, but attempted to remain in others.

"Nation building" is a loaded term, and one that we probably should not use. Because it's the countries themselves that are going to build the nation. The most we can do is provide resources, and advice, and support. We've done a lot of that, but there's much more to do. But at the end of the day, a lot of this is going to be organic.

We can't want this more than our partners want it. This is why constant engagement with them, and constant evaluation, and working with them in ways that respond to their own political necessities and allow our engagement with them to be enduring and sustainable is going to be so important. This is frustrating, because there's no easy end date. There's no easy set of metrics to work against. But again, we are not strangers to this. We've done it around the world in one fashion or another.

I appreciate and understand the nature of the terrorist threat that comes from ISIS and Al-Qaeda, but in regard to Sam's point, what the Colombian cartels

have presented ... the threat the Colombian cartels present to the United States, in social terms, was much greater than anything Al-Qaeda or ISIS has presented to the United States.

Adam Schiff: I think Kim asked a question ... because this is something that has nagged at me for a long time. I don't know the answer to it. But I often think that had I known on September 11th that we would still be at war in Afghanistan 17 years later, with a significant and unending troop presence, would I ever have wanted to go down this road?

Now, I certainly would have wanted to go down a road. We had to respond to 9/11, but knowing the long-term, vast commitment of blood and treasure that would follow, if we had to do it over again, would we go for a counter-terrorism approach and never get involved in the massive investment of troops on the ground? If that's the case, do we still go down this road simply because we have gone down this road? What does it also say in terms of our approach in other places, such that we can avoid such an unending commitment?

Kim Dozier: [inaudible 00:29:54].

Tom Shannon: If I could just respond to that briefly, and very personally, on 9/11, my oldest son was 13 years-old. Ten years later, he was a lieutenant in the United States Army, serving in Afghanistan. It was quite something for me to watch a 13 year-old boy go to war. He was 13 in my mind. And to watch him fight a war that was really my war, not his war. But this is the nature of this conflict, and obviously, hindsight might have had us do this a little differently, but we are where we are.

Kim Dozier: There's thinking in military strategy circles, a bit of frustration, that they feel like policymakers present to presidents unrealistic expectations of victory. That the diagram is, you invade ... Let's see if I can do this for the crowd. "You invade, the troop presence goes up. Wins, immediately drops. After victory, you pull out." Where they want to teach the American public that ... starting with the policymakers that what they're learning is you go in, and then you expect a very long tail off that goes for at least a decade, if not two, for any intervention in another country, especially without their invitation.

They say if you present that to the president, and the president presents that to the American people, they will understand, and therefore not be having the kind of debates and the questions I have been asking you this morning. "Why aren't we out yet?" Essentially. But that means a change in mindset before going in, and an acceptance that we're in there for the long-haul. And then from that, seeing it not as a way to just gain victory in the short-term, but like some of our adversaries do, long-term influence. Are we wrapping our heads around that yet?

Samantha V.: Well, I think we just ... We have to take a step back to 2001, though. I mean, the military planners that ostensibly presented options to President Bush ... the

entire operation was different. I mean, what they were trying to achieve ... You read President Bush's speeches from 2001, it was about the CW threat, the WMD threat. It was about liberating the Iraqi people. That was never going to be a short-term endeavor, so I would imagine there was not a notion that you would go in quickly, take out a few targets, and move out.

I really struggle to think of any real military operation right now where there wouldn't be some longer-term presence on the ground. In Korea ... I'm sorry to keep coming back at this, but we often hear about this "bloody nose" option when it comes to North Korea, and there's a lot of media and ... analysis, I should say, not media, but a lot of analysis saying that that's not a realistic option. That you can't just go in, bomb a couple of sites, go back home, and declare victory.

From my experience, and I was a 24 year-old, really eager kid who went out to Baghdad in 2007, and we did have plans at the time to show how quickly things were going to get to a more positive place. I don't think that it's realistic right now to present a picture of quick gains. I do think that policymakers, at least ... I have been out of government for a few years now ... are more realistic in how they present these options, because they know there's a political element to it, too.

No one wants to send the president out to give a speech on Afghanistan, or a speech on Iraq, and say, "Everything's great. We've decimated ISIS in Iraq and Syria. We have 98% of the territory back. Let's pat ourselves on the back, and we'll be down to 1,000 troops by the end of the year." President Trump has wisely not said how many troops are going to remain in-country, nor what our timetable is, because he doesn't want to put himself ... and expose us in that way, I would imagine, Tom, politically as well as policy-wise.

Juan Zarate:

Kim, to your question, I think there are two challenges between the military and the policymakers, and even the American public. One is kind of a lack of recognition that these terrorist movements that we worry about, that we worry about in the context of homeland threats ... the evolution of Al-Qaeda, and ISIS, and the various groups that fly under different violent Islamic extremist flags, right? These are now embedded not just in a global movement ideologically, and adapting, as such, but are embedded in insurgencies locally. Right?

Insurgent battles look very different from classic military battles. Insurgent battles look very different in different contexts, depending on capabilities of those on the ground. Al-Shabaab, in East Africa, is a long-standing Al-Qaeda affiliate, long-standing insurgency. You have the movements in West Africa tied to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and ISIS. Those are embedded in what's happening in Nigeria and other parts of West Africa. You look at what's happened even in Southeast Asia, with ISIS taking over the city of Marawi in the Philippines, which was in some ways unexpected. But a fierce battle there to control territory, with fighters coming from all over the world.

So the first barrier to entry here is a lack of understanding that we're not talking about one battle, one geography, one group. This is part of a global insurgency, if you will, that's found was of embedding in different environments. Which means we're going to have to have a different kind of presence in these locations, or at least enabling capabilities to help our partners or allies fight these fights. That's one thing.

The second part is, I think we think about military, diplomatic, and other tools in very binary ways. I think the challenge is, our military capabilities, even our military presence, is a complement, if not an enabler, to all of the other things that we seek to do. Our military presence, especially when you talk about the Kurds, is a symbol of our commitment. Of our commitment politically and diplomatically. Our presence, physically, to have a base, even a forward operating base, is an ability to collect intelligence. So it's an intelligence enabler. The ability to have troops on the ground influences whether or not Tom gets a meeting with the prime minister of a particular country.

I think we haven't come to grips with the fact that yes, these conflicts aren't going to be solved only by the military, but some form of military presence or power, and influence, and persuasion is going to be part of the political solution, and has to be thought as much. In that regard, I think we've had a failure of imagination about how we influence moving forward.

I've wondered why we wouldn't, and I know there are good reasons, but why we wouldn't declare that we're going to consider a permanent base in Erbil, for example, as a signal of commitment in the Kurdish areas. A commitment to a fight against ISIS as it reemerges in different places. A signal to the Turks that there are alternatives to Incirlik, perhaps. A very near signal to the Iranians, since Erbil's very close to the border, that we are going to be present, if need be. And frankly, a commitment in the Iraqi context to actually being present if we are welcome. I just think we need to think more creatively about how our military presence and capabilities actually enables our diplomacy and our influence across the board.

Kim Dozier: Tom, would you have voted for that base in Erbil? [crosstalk 00:37:16].

Tom Shannon: It's an interesting idea. It's worth discussing.

Kim Dozier: Might you have been talking about it?

Juan Zarate: He's being nice to me.

Kim Dozier: [crosstalk 00:37:20].

Adam Schiff: I have to say, I like the idea very much. I'm deeply concerned that we reneged on our commitment to the Kurds, who are I think, among our ... not only those in Syria among the best fighting force, but those in Iraq among our best friends

and allies in the region. I'd like, for all of the reasons that Juan mentioned ... sending a signal to both Iran and Turkey where our priorities are, and that we're going to support our friends there, and so count me on board.

Juan Zarate: There we go.

Tom Shannon: Thank you.

Kim Dozier: Well-

Tom Shannon: Look for the bill.

Kim Dozier: Well, administrative officials have explained to me, along these lines, that when President Trump first took office, he wanted to pull all U.S. troops out of the Middle East. They came up with a way to explain to him why those troops matter, along the lines of what you have just described, through the lens of U.S. business. That they showed him how many places had U.S. investment, what money, jobs that was bringing back to the United States, and how the troop presence bolstered that. You see China seeing these conflicts as economic opportunities. Is there a way to expand the explanation that I just described to sell the Trump Administration on a long-term investment through the lens of American business?

Samantha V.: We've been trying this since at least when I was in Baghdad, in 2007. I mean, we ... I cannot tell you how many trade and investment delegations we tried to get to come. The White House, under President Obama, did the same thing. But at the end of the day, I think businesses make business decisions. I think that, unfortunately, the risk outlook from a business perspective on the ground in Iraq is not attractive to the kinds of businesses that would yield real returns over the long-term.

I think the Chinese are in a very different position. During my year in Iraq, there were a lot of Chinese businessmen on the ground. But China is not a free-market economy. A lot of businesses that were coming had some degree of state ownership, so it wasn't just purely a risk calculus about what revenue streams would look like, and risk to physical security, as well.

I think I'd be curious what the actual explanation was to President Trump in that regard, because I don't see large-scale business opportunities in Iraq until the security situation is more sustainable over the medium-term. You look at a country like Iran, when we lifted sanctions, there was this notion that there would be an inflow of investment from around the world. That all of these companies would be rushing to go into Iran to do business, because the sanctions were lifted. It's been much less than was originally forecast, because countries were worried about what we've seen, in fact, which is sanctions being reimposed, and having to divest from Iran all over again. So I'm not as sold on this argument.

Kim Dozier: So China can tell its companies what to do as part of its larger strategy, but the U.S. can only hope U.S. businesses-

Samantha V.: Hope, yeah. Private enterprise. Yeah.

Adam Schiff: I'd probably be the last one to give advice about how to move the Trump Administration in a certain direction. Except express my opposition, and that might encourage them. But I have to say, I kind of recoil at the idea of using business opportunity as the primary argument for the deployment of military forces.

I'm often struck when we are briefed on just how shrewd China has been about its building of bases, but even more its investment of resources around the world. How it is using its financial might to build friends and influence around the world. The briefings are generally along the lines of "China's doing this here. China is doing that there. Nothing we are doing is keeping pace with that."

And you would have the impression that China has this far more vast military, and diplomatic, and development budget that we do. Which is simply not the case. What is the case is we are devoting our resources in a very different way that China is. We are putting far more resources in traditional military than we are in the kind of investments that China is making.

I think it ought to cause us to rethink, is this the most wise allocation of resources to meet the growing challenge from China? Or do we need to think and counter what China is doing? That may mean, because our budget is not infinite, that we have to make some hard decisions about whether this traditional military investment really is as valuable as these economic investments that will help us counter what China is doing around the world.

Samantha V.: Well, I just have one point. I'm so-

PART 2 OF 3 ENDS [00:42:04]

Adam Schiff: ... counter what China's doing around the world.

Samantha V.: Well, I just had one point. I'm so sorry, but to that point, there's this notion that if China is investing more in Iraq, or when I was there, more present on the ground from a business perspective, investment perspective or what have you, that that would in some way garner positive influence with the host government. It would give them more of a foothold on the ground, when in fact it didn't. The Chinese government, yes, they had some leverage with the Iraqi government, because money was coming in and they had people on the ground; but I think that we overstate the amount of influence that Chinese investment and Chinese business in some of these countries in Central Africa, or in Iraq, give to the Chinese government vis a vis having American assets on the ground that

are engaging in a diplomatic fashion, a military fashion, or in a business way in the long term.

Kim Dozier: Well, and you track this stuff.

Juan Zarate: Yeah, I think ... Sam's right. We have invested a lot of time and energy to try to get US business interests into both countries. That said, I don't think we've been creative enough about how we think, not just about US interests, but allied interests in some of the economic opportunities in the country.

Now, obviously, security is a baseline. You have to have security in order for business to operate, but if you look at the estimate that we have from the 2010 study of mineral resources in Afghanistan, over a trillion dollars worth of valuable resources, including rare earth minerals, there's an interesting question as to whether or not we should be thinking a bit more strategically about, how are we thinking about potentially investing there.

Maybe not US companies. Maybe Five Eyes countries have companies that want to go in. Maybe NATO countries need to think about what the posture is from an economic extraction point of view. The Chinese certainly are. The Chinese have interests in copper. They have interests in other resources there. Oh, by the way, it's pretty strategically located in the context of the one belt one road initiative that the Chinese are thinking about.

So, again, I don't think it's inappropriate to ... I agree, we're not a mercenary country in that we send troops to where we want to have then business opportunities, but to the extent that we're already present, to the extent that we've already expended blood and treasure, why not consider how it is that we're thinking about the positive elements of economic development, as well as benefit to US and allied economies in these environments. Again, it's part of the forward looking dimension of Iraq and Afghanistan, not how are we getting out, how are we actually investing further, and I think there's some creative ways of doing it.

One example in the US context is, we have an organization called OPIC, that's not OPEC, it's O-P-I-C, right, which provides businesses insurance to go into difficult locations around the world. We haven't used OPIC as aggressively as we can from a strategic standpoint to say, yes, OPIC is going to insure your investment in a place like Afghanistan or Iraq in a much more aggressive way. Or, we have a consortium with our British allies or our Australian allies to go in and do some interesting things.

I think there's real opportunity if we actually allow ourselves to imagine what that looks like, because the Chinese certainly are, and they may not be reaping the benefits now, but they will in the years to come, and they're going to be doing it on the backs of our efforts and our investment.

Kim Dozier: Before I open questions, Tom, can you follow up on it?

Tom Shannon: If I could, just to follow up on Juan's point. This is really the president's concern. The president's concern from the beginning has been, wait a minute, we're the ones with the troops on the ground, we're the ones with the investment, we're the ones that have spilled the blood, why is it that somebody else is getting benefits from it? To be fair to him, in the explanation about what has been happening a commercial argument was made, but it wasn't the only argument, and it probably wasn't the winning argument at the end of the day.

But when the president came into office he was determined not to be just another president in a long line of presidents that had US troop presence in Afghanistan and Iraq or elsewhere, and this is where his description of himself as a problem solver comes forward. He's trying to send a clear signal to the US government, to the Department of Defense, to the state department, to our intelligence community and elsewhere, that he wants a road that takes him somewhere. We were required to think about how we're going to define that road and how we were going to define it in terms of his presidency and in terms of how explains himself to the American people.

In this sense it was a very useful and important exercise, because we had passed through two presidential administrations without really coming to this; and especially in Afghanistan, the Obama administration spent a lot of time deciding whether to stay or leave Afghanistan, and having decided to stay, they then passed it on. It was [inaudible 00:46:39] to President Trump to define what is the purpose of our staying. In this regard, coming from where he does, the commercial side of it was evident. He did ask these questions about why others are reaping this gain when we are the ones making the investment. It's going to continue to be a question that he asks, but his thinking had a larger national security dimension to it than just commerce.

Kim Dozier: So, in your definition, a victory in both Iraq and Afghanistan, it sounds like there is a commercial component where US companies can come out ahead.

Tom Shannon: But that company's not going to be Walgreens, this is not a retail opportunity, this is an extractive opportunity. It's petroleum, it's [crosstalk 00:47:23]-

Juan Zarate: There might be KFC.

Samantha V.: We did have Pizza Hut there, so, yeah.

Juan Zarate: That's right, that's right.

Kim Dozier: With that I'd love to open up to questions from the audience. Let's see, the gentleman in the blue shirt over here.

Matt Cavanaugh: It's going to take a moment.

Kim Dozier: Yeah, sorry.

Matt Cavanaugh: Oh, it's good.

Kim Dozier: Good, great.

Juan Zarate: It's worth waiting for.

Matt Cavanaugh: My name's Army Major Matt [Cavanaugh 00:47:50], so I have a lot riding on this discussion, I haven't chosen to run to Canada yet. I just finished a dissertation on supreme military command, and I spent years reading presidents, prime ministers, and senior military commanders balancing resources with objectives and means with ends, and it's a dynamic discussion. Is what we want to buy worth the price that we're paying? Can I ask you to do that explicitly, sort of answer Bob Barker's strategic imperative, "Is the price right?" In both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Kim Dozier: Who wants to jump in?

Adam Schiff: Well, I would say this, the threats that tend to concern me the most are those that have the capacity to fundamentally change how we live our lives. The prospect of another 9/11 type attack, that could really force us to potentially curtail civil liberties or privacy, or change how Americans can go from one place to another, that's what tends to keep me up at night, and I think General Scott's observations in terms of the AFPAC theater are on point, and I think the greatest threat to our homeland continues to come from that part of the world.

There is still a very tenacious ISIS threat coming from Iraq and Syria and elsewhere, so I think we do need to make sure that we're investing the resources to protect us against that caliber of a threat. But I also think that, as I alluded to earlier, we're going to need to think long and hard about ever making this kind of commitment again. We are certainly as policy makers, as you were saying Kim, much more mindful of the fact that there is no easy in and easy out. I don't know that people really thought there was, but it's been abundantly proven now.

I also continue to wrestle with the issue of sunken cost, how much do we maintain this policy because we have sunken so much into it? Which is a poor justification, but one that nonetheless pulls at you. I know this is not as crystal clear an answer as you might like, but I do think we're going to have to maintain a presence in both theaters sufficient to ward off a life changing, country changing attack from either theater.

Matt Cavanaugh: To be fair, I don't want a yes or no-

Kim Dozier: Sorry.

Matt Cavanaugh: To be fair, I don't think it's a yes or no answer, but it's a continuous grappling that it's probably just going to keep going.

Adam Schiff: Well, thank you for the question and thank you for your service.

Matt Cavanaugh: Yeah.

Juan Zarate: Likewise, thank you for your service. Can I just add to this, because I think part of the calculus has to be, what is the opportunity cost in terms of the investment? I think that one of the major negative externalities, of the investment in Iraq, if we want to put it in economic terms, is what we then weren't able to do otherwise. Not only with blood and treasure military resources, but also just political attention.

When I was at the White House Iraq would often take the oxygen out of the room, right? Keep in mind, when President Bush came into office, China was going to be the major focus. 9/11 happened, it changed everything. I think part of the calculus has to be not just what's the binary, ends, ways, means, but also what's the opportunity cost that we may be inflicting upon ourselves given the investment?

Kim Dozier: One thing I want to bring up, and yet, despite all of US investment in Iraq, the troop withdrawal under the Obama administration weakened our influence in that country, now you have a country where an Iranian backed clerics party won the majority of the parliamentary vote, is the king-maker to determine the next prime minister. You've got violent demonstrations in Basra because the Iranians next door have shutoff the electricity partly over our sanctions. Was it worth that investment, or did we mishandle it?

Samantha V.: I think that's a [inaudible 00:52:24] right now, but the Iranian role in Iraq can't be overstated, it does bring up an interesting point thought, and that's how long the host government allows us to stay. So, circling back to your original question, '07, '08 we were working on the SFA, the Status of Forces Agreement with the Iraqi government, which was an incredibly difficult legal and diplomatic exercise, and had massive repercussions. I don't know where the Iraqi government will go in terms of allowing the US military to stay in the country at the level that we currently are, giving us the freedom to operate that we currently are if Iran starts to play a more direct role in policy making within Iraq; and whether it was worth it not, to echo points that have been made, we have not had another 9/11, there has not been a catastrophic attack on the homeland.

But I think that we all know, because many of us comment on cyber issues from a different perspective, from a different country quite often, the threat has moved ISIS-wise, and the ability for ISIS despite the gains that the military has made in Iraq and Syria, to inspire attacks against the homeland has moved into cyberspace.

To your question on investment in dollars and that sort of thing, in resources, I do think that we're going to have to rebalance where we spend money, in terms of meeting that terrorist threat.

Adam Schiff: Can I just interject Kim, because I think ... I don't want to miss a fundamental point. The investment in Iraq was not worth it. Iraq is very different than Afghanistan, the threat we faced from Afghanistan was quite real and attacked us with devastating consequence. The threat from WMD in Iraq proved to be illusory. I'm really more responding to the threat that is present now, and in that respect, the investment is, I think, worth it. But obviously we can't lose sight of the original circumstances.

Kim Dozier: A question in the back.

Karin White: Hi, Karin White from the DOD office of the inspector general. We've been reporting on train, advise, assist for the last decade and it kind of gets frustrating when all of our reports seem to have the same issues, same recommendations year after year, it seems as though, for the train, advise, assist mission, we are applying US-centric approaches to solve some of these problems, and we're expecting the Iraqi and Afghan security forces to respond in the same way that US troops would, and that just doesn't seem to be happening. We keep doing the same thing over and over, kind of expecting different results and it's just not happening.

I'm wondering, when are we going to take a step back and really think about how we're approaching this mission, because it's very important, obviously, that Iraq and Afghanistan are able to provide that security to their population, most of all, otherwise nothing's going to change. I feel like we're just not approaching it in a really logical way.

Kim Dozier: Tom?

Tom Shannon: Yeah, I appreciate the question, it's an important one, but I'm struggling with it a little bit, because I'm not sure if what you're suggesting is that we should be training and advising them in a different way, in a way that doesn't match our standards of warfare and our standards of behavior. In other words, if we should let them do more human rights abuses, torture people more, do more extrajudicial executions. Use their air assets in a way that's more ruthless and brutal than we might normally do.

I would argue that part of our train, advise, and assist is really about professionalization and building institutional capacity and understanding of how a military is successful in a political environment where people actually have a voice. This is what we're aiming for, both in Afghanistan and Iraq, through the democratic processes that we support there.

It takes a long time to change institutions, it takes a long time to reshape, especially societies that are tribal or clan based, and in that sense I think you're on to something, because how we operate in the social and cultural environment we're in is quite different, say, in Afghanistan than from Iraq, and from what our soldiers might be comfortable with.

I would, I guess, argue that in many ways our trainers probably have greater insight into these societies than just about any of the Americans on the ground there, because they're working with these soldiers, who come from pretty basic communities, simple communities, on a daily basis, and understand literacy levels, understand cultural openness levels, understand religious antagonism levels in ways that many of our intelligence officers and our diplomats don't.

Juan Zarate:

Can I just add on to that? Because I think, structurally, the US government has a problem. Because our systems are built to go state-to-state, top-down, right? I think we have more trouble doing exactly what Tom just described, which I think we've done better and better over time, but injecting into environments where influence may reside at the tribal level, or the local level. Or may not even be connected to the state at all.

I think we've seen this problem in the Syrian context where we're having to deal with allies, train, equip, operate with those that don't have a state flag at all, and we frankly may not want them to. I think our challenge in environments like this, and it's not unique to Iraq and Afghanistan, it's also in other parts of the world is, how does the US government as a state, engage with environments, and in environments where the train equip may not be at the state level. It may not even be at the central capital level. I think that's been a challenge with our policy in Afghanistan and Iraq over the years, and it's reflected in your reports.

Thank you for your work, because your work to bring transparency to these programs is really important.

Adam Schiff:

[crosstalk 00:58:41] Kim, that one thing I think, and Tom is exactly right, the military has often been far quicker to learn and adapt than other elements of the US government.

Sustainability is one area, I think, where we have often initially not recognized that what we were teaching, and training, and equipping, was unsustainable unless we were prepared to remain in such vast numbers. I think that problem persisted far longer with some of our USAID work and our other work. I think over time the military adapted more quickly to, okay, this is really sustainable and this is not, and logistically this is how we have to approach the problem, because using American logistical practices may not work here, and there I think we really have adapted.

Kim Dozier:

So, moderator's prerogative, I'm going to take the last question, lightning round. Are we about to make the same mistake with Syria by withdrawing US troops

and leaving the kind of vacuum that time and again has burned us in both Iraq and Afghanistan? Ambassador?

Tom Shannon: In the short term, no. In the long term, I don't know.

Kim Dozier: Okay.

Tom Shannon: No, I mean it depends obviously. We have a presence there that has effectively blocked Iran's efforts to build a throughway from Iraq into Syria and into Lebanon, which is hugely important to us and hugely important to our partners in Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel. It also gives us a bit of leverage in how we deal with the Russians.

I feel uncomfortable in using our troops there as that kind of leverage, because they are exposed, and any movement against them could trigger a much larger conflict, and this would be part of our larger calculation. If we do decide to pull people out it will be because we're fearful that the presence there will actually trigger a war with Russia or a war with Iran.

Kim Dozier: Anyone else have quick a-

Samantha V.: I'm just going to say, I'm reticent to compare the two. I think that our mission in Syria today is quite different than our mission in Iraq was back in 2001, or what our mission is in Iraq today, and the work that we're doing with countering ISIL campaign with, what is it, 77 other countries-

Tom Shannon: Yeah.

Samantha V.: We're not going it alone. I think we have to be careful not to compare apples and oranges and say it's all apples.

Juan Zarate: I also think in the Syrian context the broader regional and even global implications of the actors at play and the proxy wars underway are much more evident than in the context of how we've talked about Afghanistan and Iraq. That will play into the calculus.

On the economic resource side bear in mind US and US allied forces, in essence, surround and control very oil rich areas in Syria. I would imagine a debate about what happens to those oil resources, which are important to Turkey, important to Assad, and even important to ISIS as it tries to regain control and revenue.

Adam Schiff: I would just say that our military presence in Syria is obviously far smaller than anything we're talking about comparatively, but though it's small I think it is important, and particularly important to support the Kurds and other aligned fighters who have been fighting alongside the forces we've been training, and among our best allies in the region. The early indication that we might withdraw

and abandon them to placate Turkey, or for whatever reason, really terrified me, so I hope we don't make that mistake.

I also think that, given the complexity of the region, of the struggle there, that we have a vital role to play in making sure this doesn't become a conflagration between major powers in the region. Given Israel's equities, and Jordan's equities, and Turkey's equities, and Russia's equities, Iran's and our own, I think it would be a big mistake to withdraw the limited presence that we have.

Kim Dozier:

With that I would like to thank Clark, thank Rob, and the Aspen Security Forum, and all of our speakers.

PART 3 OF 3 ENDS [01:02:51]