STRIKING A BALANCE: A NEW AMERICAN SECURITY

SESSION TWO: TRIAGE: THE NEXT 12 MONTHS IN AFGHANISTAN AND PAKISTAN

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LT. GEN. DAVID BARNO: Well, welcome to our session two here, which is our panel on Afghanistan and Pakistan. I'm Dave Barno and I'm the director of the Near East South Asia Center at National Defense University, in a previous incarnation was the commander of U.S. Forces and Coalition Forces in Afghanistan from 2003 to 2005.

We've got a very exciting and experienced panel this morning for you to hear over the next about 90 minutes or so. And I think it's particularly noteworthy that we're meeting today on this topic. If any of you saw Tom Shanker and Eric Schmitt's piece in the New York Times this morning, he spoke about the departure last night of General Stan McChrystal confirmed late in the evening and getting immediately on an airplane and heading for Afghanistan via Europe.

And I would assert up front this morning that what we've seen take place here last night and now today is the ending of one era in Afghanistan and the beginning of another era. We're ending the era where Afghanistan was what in military terminology would have been called an economy of force effort – a secondary, less important theater; one that was always in second, sometimes further back in the placement behind the primary theater of war, which has been, since 2003, Iraq. And as we heard in our last panel today and it was very interesting to listen to the dialogue and the nature of the questions, the entire scenario in Iraq is vastly different than it was even two years ago and the scenario in Afghanistan is clearly moving to the forefront of international concern and American concern here in Washington.

I've had the opportunity to testify several times in the last year and a half on the Hill and I've noted in each of those cases that success in Afghanistan, success in Pakistan in many ways is a simple mathematical equation in my view. Success equals leadership plus strategy plus resources – leadership plus strategy plus resources. In the last five months of the new Obama administration, we've seen significant changes in all three of those dimensions with regard to the conflict in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We've seen a major change in the resourcing beginning to flow into the region now in terms of 21,000 American troops, some additional NATO troops as well, a significant number of additional American civilians and diplomats that are being lined up to assist Ambassador Eikenberry, and additional dollars – not all of which have been appropriated yet, but some substantial quantities of money being allocated for the first time not only for Afghanistan to expand our operations there and to invest beyond simply the military dimension, but also for Pakistan. And of course the Kerry-Lugar Bill will potentially provide significant impact there.

We've seen a new strategy, a new policy announced by President Obama very early in his tenure that cites some new broader objectives for the theater. And now we've seen last night with that departure of that airplane from Andrews Air Force Base a change out of the American military leadership following on the heels of the change-out of the diplomatic leadership at the embassy in Afghanistan, a wholesale review of leadership, strategy and resources, which is not yet complete, but again major change in all three of those dimensions, which I think bodes well and increases my sense of confidence in the direction that the overall effort is going.

Today we're going to have the opportunity to hear the newest report from CNAS on Afghanistan and Pakistan. It's called "Triage: The Next 12 Months in Afghanistan and Pakistan," and "triage" is the operative term. We recognize that there are broader strategic goals. There are strategies and campaign plans that must be executed over an extended period of time, but there's also a central requirement to decide what to do now. What's next? What is the highest payoff investment over the next year or so? And we are joined by a distinguished panel to critique that effort, but also the authors of that effort are here today.

And I'll start my intros with those two and I'll introduce the panel in turn when it comes their time to comment. Our two authors are what I believe is the beginnings and are representative of a new generation of Americans veterans who're going to have an immense impact on the U.S. policy dialogue and ultimately on the leadership of the United States; in our case, Andrew Exum and Nate Fick.

Andrew is a combat veteran, as is Nate, of the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan, one in the Army, one in the Marines, both young junior officers out there at the sharp edge of combat, the toughest positions, the most demanding duty that any of our young men and women face out there today. They've also now turned their efforts, as they've left the military and come into civilian life, into academic pursuits where they have a plethora of advanced degrees. They're published. They're widely cited across Washington in a variety of publications and journals. They are the new face of American leadership.

I was also joking to Andrew on the way in that in CNAS these two call John Nagl grandpa because of the age differential. And if I was John, I'd be nervous about having them on my flanks because they are clearly incredibly talented, unusually experienced, up and coming bright leaders.

So let me turn it over to those two first to introduce their paper. I'll make a few comments on it myself when they're complete, and then we'll turn to each of the panel members in turn.

Gentlemen?

MR. ANDREW EXUM: Great, thank you sir. We appreciate that and we appreciate the presence of the panelists up here. When I thought about who we were going to put on this panel, I couldn't think of anyone better to critique and think about the tactical and operational challenges of Afghanistan better than Chris Cavoli. I couldn't think of anybody better to talk about the strategy and operations at play in Afghanistan and Pakistan than General Dave Barno. And I couldn't think anyone better to shatter our comfortable bipartisan consensus here in Washington than one of the more eloquent critics of American foreign policy, Professor Andrew Bacevich.

I last departed Afghanistan in May of 2004, and over the past five years I've spent most of my time looking at an entirely different conflict, one in Southern Lebanon. But one of the advantages of building up expertise and specialization in one region and one conflict is that when you're asked to look at a new one. You more readily – to borrow a rumsfeldian phrase – "know what you do not know."

So this report draws on a lot of the outside expertise, as well as the expertise that my co-authors brought to bear. And I think before we'd begin, I just need to single out three people: Christian Bleuer, Joshua Foust, and Nicholas Schmidle contributed immensely to this report and we're grateful for their contributions. That, combined with the fact that I am from East Tennessee and thus by birth a specialist in mountainous, lawless regions populated by heavily armed religious fundamentalists – (laughter) – meant that I was right at home working on Afghanistan. I don't know why you're laughing. (Laughter.) The Pashtun Taliban are nothing when compared to the Scottish Presbyterians. (Laughter.) We wear less eyeliner and we're heavily armed.

All right, one challenge we encountered when we were looking at this report was that this came on the heels of four separate strategic reviews that had either recently been completed or were in the process of being completed when we first sat down to think about this problem set. By the time we put pen to paper, in fact, the president had released through his March White Paper a very clear policy, as well as a series of strategic objectives for Afghanistan and Pakistan. So our first challenge was to think of a way in which we could be useful, in which this report could be useful.

Our second challenge was that plenty of people had suggestions for exactly what they wanted out of this report and how we could be useful. This report, I should say, is not a be all, end all for Afghanistan or Pakistan. It's not an answer to the problem sets that everybody has presented. But what we have tried to do is we've tried to do two things.

The first thing we've tried to do is we've got this list of strategic objectives, strategic goals that were outlined by the president and we're going to try to offer up some operational recommendations for operationalizing those goals in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. We're going to provide two recommendations for Afghanistan and two for Pakistan.

The second thing that was missing, but that the president promised, was metrics and benchmarks to gauge our success or failure in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and that's another thing that we have presented.

With respect to the operational recommendations, I think that the one common threat that runs through all of them – well really there are two, but the first is the sense of urgency. I think if you read the strategic assessments that we have or the situation assessments for both Afghanistan and Pakistan that's laid out in the paper, I think one of the things you'll notice is we're very alarmed at the downward trajectory of events in both countries and that this report will – let's put it this way. It was named "Triage" for a reason.

We think there are a number of things we need to do in the near term in order to get the momentum back on our side. In addition, in both countries we propose something akin to an inkblot strategy. We deliberately avoided coming up with a strategy paper, but in practice when we started thinking about operationalizing these strategic goals, we thought a lot about proceeding from positions of strength and moving outward.

In Afghanistan, the first of our recommendations is that we have a concerted effort to protect the population above all other considerations. We recommend a population-

centric approach, rather than enemy centric or terrain centric, and that's going to cause some serious operational problems, many of which General Petraeus touched upon in his presentation earlier this morning.

Afghanistan is not Iraq. Iraq is largely urban. Afghanistan is largely rural. In Iraq you could secure Baghdad and you've secured a fifth of the population. In Afghanistan that's much more difficult. The population is spread out. So how you crack that nut – I think there were some very good questions that were asked of General Petraeus. You can't do mutually supporting patrol bases in the same way that we did during the Baghdad security plan of 2007. So how exactly do you do this?

One of our recommendations that we make is that commanders on the ground in Afghanistan need to make some very tough tradeoffs as far as thinking about where exactly they're going to put troops. If you see your main effort is being in RC-South, you might have to tell some very capable commanders – Colonel Howard, Colonel Dave Haight that are in RC-East – hey, we need a battalion. We need a battalion from your sector, a battalion from Paktika Province. We need to move them into RC-South. Those are the types of difficult tradeoffs.

And I was talking with Chris a few months ago about some of these tradeoffs. I was saying, "why are we in the Korengal Valley. It doesn't make sense to me." Well, there's a reason we're in the Korengal Valley and the commander on the ground will tell you exactly why. It may not be to protect population of the Korengal Valley, but it would be able to protect the population in the neighboring valleys.

And so the difficult thing for General McChrystal when he arrives in Afghanistan is he's going to have to look in the eye of some very capable brigade commanders, some very capable one-star generals and say, "I understand the realities of your operational environment, but we simply don't have enough resources to secure all of the population within the next 12 months and we have to start from a starting point.

The second recommendation we make is we really believe we – I noticed that General Petraeus did not use the phrase civilian surge. He called it a sustained civilian engagement or something like that. There's probably not going to be a civilian surge and I think that's dawned on us. We simply don't have the civilian personnel to have a true surge, so what type of civilians are we going to get? Well, we're going to get some very capable Foreign Service Officers, some very proven civilian aid workers, but we're also going to get folks that may not have the Dari and Pashtun language skills, that may not be Afghanistan specialists. And we believe that if you're looking to get the best bang out of your buck, it'd be to put them in the ministries. And one of the reasons we believe this is – this is going to make news here – Afghanistan has a corruption problem. (Laughter.) But not only that, Afghanistan has a rapidly worsening corruption problem. How much worse it can get? I'm not quite sure. In the last corruption perception index released by Transparency International, Afghanistan ranked 176 out of 180. That was down something like 60 spots just over a three year period.

So one of the things we talk about in our report, and I encourage you all to read it on full, is we talk a lot about perceptions and more about creating – we need to create a reality-based perception among the people of Afghanistan that they're safer with American troops.

We need to create a perception that corruption is getting better. And one of the ways you do that is with American eyes on in the ministries and the departments at the more senior levels. You don't want them – we don't need anymore civilians in the embassies and you might not even think about putting a lot more in the PRTs. We really put an emphasis on putting them at the Afghan and at the ministerial level.

With Pakistan, we recommend in the same way. Build from positions of strength. We believe that most important is the area east of the Indus, and Nate's going to talk a little bit more about that, and especially the need to boost the Pakistani police in the areas where we already control.

Over the next 12 months it's simply unrealistic to expect the Pakistani state to exert sovereignty as we imagine sovereignty over all of the FATA, over all of the NWFP. So what are you going to do as an alternative?

Well, we've invested about $9 billion in security-related assistance in Pakistan since 2002. And I don't know many people in this room that would say we've gotten a good return on our investment. Part of the reason is because we have a very different threat perception with the Pakistani military, at least until recently. We'll see if that has changed. But what we would like to do is we'd like to protect the population of Afghanistan and we see the threats – population of Pakistan – and we see the threats of Pakistan coming from mostly internal.

To put it mildly, the Pakistani military sees threats coming from elsewhere, but there is one security service in the Pakistani state that sees – that has sole interest in protecting the Pakistani population, vice engaging with the neighbor to the east, and that's the Pakistani police, which is why we encourage the government to shift some of our focus toward the Pakistani military over the past seven years towards the Pakistani police and start east of the Indus.

Nate's going to talk about the metrics with respect to attacks and the urban centers of the Punjab and Sind. If we want to head off these attacks, if we want an improved security situation a year from now, we believe that the police are key to that.

And then the final recommendation we make is probably the most controversial. I should say that we are not saying that drone strikes into Pakistan are not part of the solution, but what we are saying is that right now they are part of the problem.

In December of 2007, President Bush authorized an expansion of drone strikes into Pakistan to include not just members of al Qaeda, but also Pakistani Taliban and other elements aligned against the Pakistani government.

States often overestimate the degree to which a population can have an effect on a non-state actor and its midst. This is a problem that states habitually run into. And we're in danger of creating a siege mentality in the population, FATA and the NWFP, that runs counter to the president's stated objectives of making sure that the FATA and NWFP are not safe havens for transnational terror groups such as al Qaeda.

Further more, the drone strikes into Pakistan give every evidence as being a tactic as opposed to a strategy. They're not linked with a coherent strategy for Pakistan to include an information operations campaign and we have not established clear incentive structures for the people of FATA and NWFP for alternatives to bombing their villages.

What's missing from the president's strategic goals that were outlined in March are two things – first off, resources, and second, metrics.

In all four of these operational recommendations, all four of them depend upon resources. Strategic goals are one thing, but the strategy is when you match up those strategic goals with the resources necessary to implement that strategy. And so I worry, over the next year, whether or not Afghanistan is going to receive the kinds of resources that we devoted to Iraq in 2007 to make sure that we were successful there. And as far as metrics – I apologize, by the way. I'm a little nervous today. I've wrote this with my friend Nate, but I'm presenting it with my new boss, Mr. Fick. (Laughter.) And I will turn it over to Mr. Fick to deliver the metrics section of our report.

MR. NATHANIEL FICK: Thanks, Andrew. I liked George Packer's comment on the last panel about the importance of remembering what we don't know and even making lists of what we get wrong. And Dave, Ahmed, Andrew, and I approached this project with a great deal of humility. Among the four of us, one or more of us has served on the ground in Afghanistan or Pakistan in each of the years from 2001 to 2008, but we, with the exception of Ahmed, are not regional experts. And I think a panel like this is an opportunity to do what we can't really do with our printer, which is put a big question mark at the end of the report and say, let's discuss.

So metrics. It's a classic management dictum: you manage what you measure, so you'd better measure what you manage. And in his speech unveiling his new approach, back in March, President Obama promised, and I quote, "We will set clear metrics to measure progress and hold ourselves accountable. We'll consistently assess our efforts to train Afghan security forces and our progress in combating insurgents. We will measure the growth of Afghanistan's economy, and its illicit narcotics production. And we will review whether we are using the right tools and tactics to make progress towards accomplishing our goals."

Metrics are a popular topic right now. Just four days ago, the New York Times published an editorial called "Measuring Success in Afghanistan" that focused on General McChrystal's line in his confirmation hearings that a measure of effectiveness will not be the number of enemy killed, but is, quote, "the number of Afghans shielded from violence." This is pretty nuanced stuff in a major public forum and I think it's a sign of great progress.

We didn't see this sort of conversation as recently as only a few years ago. And last night I was flipping through ISAF's most recent unclassified metrics brief and you see in that slide deck some of the usual suspects, a 28 percent increase in coalition force strength from the first half of 2008 through the first half of 2009. A 62 percent increase in NATO and OEF deaths over the same period. And these are useful insofar as they help describe the situation on the ground, but they aren't especially valuable as measures of progress and the implementation of a strategy. Why?

In this report, we argue that effective benchmarks measure outcomes for the population, rather than inputs by governments. Too often we measure dollars spent or troops deployed, often simply because they're the easiest things to measure. But these are inputs and they measure effort. Outcomes measure effectiveness.

Better benchmarks track trends in the proportion of the population that feels safe, that can access essential services, that enjoys social justice and the rule of law, that engages in political activity, or that earns a living free from fear of insurgents or corrupt officials. This is emphatically not about building a Switzerland in Central Asia, but it is about achieving a modicum of each of these in the pursuit of the U.S. national interests of denying safe haven in Afghanistan and Pakistan and avoiding a broader regional meltdown. Because politics is about perception and the coalition's goals are political – to marginalize the Taliban, to bolster the government, win the population away from armed struggle and toward peaceful politics, perceived outcomes matter. It's not enough to make people objectively safer and better off. Before they're willing to put down their weapons and become a part of the government or support the government, Afghans and Pakistanis must feel safer and they must perceive the government is the winning side.

These trends are a lot harder to gauge than inputs, but they in conjunction with the inputs give a much more accurate picture than the inputs alone. But not all outcome metrics are created equal. Two of the least useful metrics that we most often use are related to outcomes – violence involving coalition troops and the numbers of Taliban or al Qaeda casualties.

The United States is going to deploy 21,000 new combat troops to Afghanistan in 2009 and as General Petraeus made clear this morning, with these additional troops in Afghanistan for the fighting season, violence between the Taliban and the coalition will spike and it'll rise whether the coalition is winning or losing simply because there are more troops fighting. Thus, this year high incident numbers and an increase in the number of Taliban killed will imply only that there's more fighting, without indicating much about progress. Civilian casualties, on the other hand, whether at the hands of the coalition, the Taliban, or the government – the Afghan government that is – will be a very telling measure of progress.

As noted before, the central goal of counterinsurgency is to make the population feel secure enough to engage in peaceful politics and to marginalize insurgents and other illegal armed groups. Killing noncombatant civilians fundamentally undermines this goal and so violence against civilians, whether committed deliberately by the Taliban or carelessly by the coalition, is a key metric.

So while the number of enemy fighters killed is not a good metric, signs of cooperation between former fighters or members of the local population with the coalition and host government forces are good indicators. Surrenders or defections are useful metrics because they point to disunity of disillusionment among the Taliban. And the absolute number of surrenders of defections matters less than do the trends over time.

Another indicator of cooperation is the number of roadside bombs that are found and clear versus exploded. These are lessons that we've learned before. I should say we

relearned them in Iraq, after learning them over the course of other wars, going back for decades.

A rise in the proportion of IEDs being found and diffused, especially when they're discovered thanks to tips from the local population, indicates the locals have a good working relationship with military units in their area. And that's a sign of progress.

Conversely, a drop in the proportion of IEDs found and cleared indicates the population is not passing information to security forces and is standing by while they're attacked and that's clearly a sign of deteriorating security.

Spontaneous tip-offs from the population, where local people volunteer information on the enemy, indicates confidence by the people in the government and the security forces, and that's another useful measurement of cooperation. Conversely, evidence that the pollution is tipping off the local Taliban about future coalition or Afghan government operations is a sign of deteriorating confidence.

Now, the really hard part – metrics for Pakistan are less clear-cut since the U.S. has less leverage there and less freedom of action than in Afghanistan. We based our metrics in this report for Pakistan on the premise that Andrew expressed in discussing the operational recommendations that what happens in Sind and Punjab, in the cities east to the Indus, such as Karachi and Lahore, will determine what happens in Pakistan. This is the Pakistani heartland, the home of the middle class, the home of the people who have the most to lose.

Two key metrics to watch, therefore, in Pakistan are the rate at which Taliban chapters continue to open east of the Indus and whether the coming year sees more attacks in the urban centers of Sind and Punjab. These developments would indicate that instability is increasing in the heartland and would suggest that the situation on the ground is worsening.

Picking the right metrics is important because, as Nietzsche says in one of my favorite quotes, "the commonest form of human stupidity is forgetting what it is that we're trying to do." And I suspect that you will see in the comments to follow that we've emphatically not stacked this panel with people who agree with us or with what we've said in the report. And so we look forward to the conversation.

LT. GEN. BARNO: Let me make a few reflections on the report and then I'll introduce once again Dr. Bacevich and then turn on to Colonel Cavoli. It was a very thoughtful product and one that's certainly timely, given the new energy here in Washington and really I hope as well in the alliance on Afghanistan.

So I'm going to turn to each of the recommendations briefly.

Population security – clearly a centerpiece of our effort there and I think perhaps a hidden aspect of population security is not simply if the population feels safe, but what they perceive the future is going to hold with regard to the outcome of the conflict. We can focus on the physical security of the population because we will have X number of additional troops, substantial more capability – although I would note on General Petraeus' chart comparing Iraq and Afghanistan, which I'll touch on a bit this morning, is that the

order of magnitude of the military effort in Afghanistan is substantially less than it is today in Iraq and was certainly at the height of the surge in Iraq. So while we might talk of divisions in Iraq of 15,000 to 20,000 troops, and there are multiple of those in Afghanistan, we're talking about brigades on his chart, of which there's typically 4,000 or 5,000 soldiers in each. So the number of troops available to effect this population security is substantially less than what we have committed even today in Iraq, yet Afghanistan is 50 percent larger than Iraq in land mass and has over four million more people.

So one of the key questions will be: can we affect that, but also not only the physical security of the population, but what's the psychological security that they attribute to the success of their own government and to the international forces there? And will they view that as durable or not?

On the so-called civilian surge and adding capacity there, clearly it's an essential. I would take issue, I think, perhaps with the idea of putting the bulk of that in Kabul because I think the direct impact from the population will come by embedding civilians with military forces in a joint civil-military enterprise from the bottom up, at the district level, perhaps in some cases at the village level, and at the provincial level. That's where Afghans live. That's where they face the challenges every day. And the Kabul ministries, which I was located in close proximity to, are a distant horizon to most Afghans out there, important but with fine outset resources, the local effort I think is going to require some crucial attention in the U.S. military with a small number of civilians who're going to be able to help enable that.

On Pakistan, as noted, is much more difficult in all respects than Afghanistan. And I personally disagree with the outlook of stopping the drone attacks in the tribal areas. I have concern that if that were to occur, that we would simply ratify that sanctuary in the tribal areas because of the lack of other instruments to either secure the population, attack the enemy, disrupt the sanctuary that exists today.

Clearly our toolkit for Pakistan is a much smaller toolkit than our toolkit for Afghanistan. We have to be careful that that doesn't, as the authors point out, drive our strategy, but we also have to ensure that we don't provide the enemy a high degree of sanctuary in areas where we have less reach to affect these results.

The police option I think is a terrific one. I think it has value nationwide there.

One comment finally on metrics. Metrics are essential. Fewer metrics are better than more metrics. I can recall when I came back from Afghanistan on a visit to Washington in '04 being brought to a room in the Pentagon that had the Iraqi metrics section. It had two dozen computers in it, each of which had a different set of metrics, all of which appeared to be red as I was walking around the room, which told me something. But there were clearly – the more we measure, the less we measure. We have to be very focused on what we're after.

In that regard, I would applaud the short number that's been offered as far as key metrics, but I also would introduce one note of caution. I think the metric of civilian casualties has to be carefully looked at. It's clear to me and in talking to military commanders out there, they're increasingly seeing the enemy looking for ways to take

coalition air power and coalition precision strike off the table, to take it away as one of the options that the military forces of the coalition have to use. And the way they're doing that is to exacerbate, increase, promote, publicize, and exaggerate the civilian casualties that are created by those strikes.

On General Petraeus' chart this morning you saw the large spikes of violence in Iraq in 2007 and a tapering off of that violence today, of civilian casualties. On the right side of his chart, we had those very small hills after the big mountains. On the Afghan chart he showed, you saw the big mountain on the right of the chart. If you were to superimpose those charts on top of each other and use the same scale, the size and the relative magnitude of Afghan civilian casualties today is very close to the magnitude of Iraqi civilian casualties today, which is the low point in Iraq, which is viewed as success in Iraq. But it's viewed as the worst case in Afghanistan. Again, same chart, same axis, the number of civilian casualties we're seeing in Afghanistan today are really very close to what we're seeing in Iraq today under the same conditions. We call success there. So we have to be very careful about who controls the narrative about civilian casualties and if that's becoming a tool that's being used in some ways to undercut our ability to even secure the population and conduct our operations there.

So with that, let me again briefly introduce Professor Bacevich and then Chris Cavoli. Dr. Bacevich, well-known to this audience, a distinguished soldier for many years, one of the smart cavalry officers and then went on to be an even more distinguished scholar today at Boston University, author of numerous books and a wide range of other publications.

Chris Cavoli, as Andrew noted as well, is a great infantry battalion commander, served in Afghanistan. He'll be able to give us the dirt soldier's-eye view of what the fight is there and be able to provide some perspective on this report from what it would look like for someone out there on the ground in a camouflage uniform trying to execute. But first, Dr. Bacevich.

MR. ANDREW BACEVICH: Thank you. My critique of the report kind of provides what I hope will be a historian's perspective. Yesterday, for a writing project, I was reviewing the documentary record related to the Kennedy administration's response to the Bay of Pigs fiasco, so-called Operation Zapata. And that response, back in 1961 was carefully tailored to leave unexamined two key assumptions that had produced the Bay of Pigs in the first place.

The first assumption was that the Cuban revolution posed an intolerable threat to vital U.S. national security interests. The second assumption was that covert action provided the most effective and efficient means to address that threat. Leaving both of these assumptions intact, the Kennedy administration embarked upon a renewed, more aggressive, and more reckless covert effort to eliminate Castro. This was Operation Mongoose.

Now, Operation Mongoose came no closer to success than had Operation Zapata. Operation Mongoose served chiefly to convince Castro that he was facing an existential threat – which indeed he was – thereby helping to give rise to an existential threat to the United States of America in the Cuban Missile Crisis.

So lest we repeat that experience this time around, I believe we should critically examine the assumptions governing current U.S. policy in Afghanistan. And those assumptions are these. First, that Afghanistan constitutes a vital national security interest of the United States. And second, that some blend of counterinsurgency and nation-building will provide an effective and affordable way to satisfy those interests. Both of those assumptions are wrong in my view.

Now, I know what the standard response is. The fight in Afghanistan is essential to keeping America safe. The events of 9/11 occurred because we ignored Afghanistan. Preventing a recurrence of these events, therefore, requires that we fix Afghanistan. Yet this widely accepted line of reasoning overlooks the primary reason why the 9/11 conspiracy succeeded; namely, that federal, state, and local agencies responsible for domestic security fell down on the job, failing to install even minimally adequate security measures.

So let me propose a heretical notion. Averting a recurrence of 9/11 does not require the semi-permanent occupation and pacification of distant countries. Rather, it requires the United States to erect and maintain robust defenses.

Fixing Afghanistan is not only unnecessary, from this point of view. It's also likely to prove implausible. Not for nothing has a place acquired the nickname "graveyard of empires," as General Petraeus reminded us. Yet, for those who despite this history still hanker to have a go at fixing Afghanistan, why start there? Why not first fix, say, Mexico? In terms of its importance to the United States, our southern neighbor, a major supplier of oil and drugs, among other commodities deemed vital to the American way of life, Mexico – (laughter) – Mexico outranks Afghanistan in importance by several orders of magnitude. Yet anybody coming to a gathering like this who proposed to send 60,000 U.S. troops into Mexico for an indefinite period and to spend tens if not hundreds of billions of dollars in order to try to eliminate the corruption endemic in Mexican politics, to suppress Mexican drug trafficking, to create effective Mexican security institutions, and to redeem the Mexican public school system would be laughed out of the room.

Meanwhile, those who promote such programs for Afghanistan are treated like sages. This contrast between Washington's preoccupation with Afghanistan and Washington's relative indifference to Mexico testifies to the distortion of U.S. national security priorities produced by 9/11 and still lingering today.

So the answer to the question of the hour, what should the United States do about Afghanistan, comes down to this. A sense of realism and a sense of proportion should oblige us to take a minimalist approach. As with Uruguay or Fiji or Estonia or other countries where U.S. interests are limited, the United States should undertake to secure those interests at the lowest possible cost. And neither the Obama administration's approach to Afghanistan, nor the approach proposed by this report satisfies that criteria.

At the outset of these proceedings, John Nagl referred to what he called "our ongoing global counterinsurgency campaign." And Nate, in his remarks, told us that the goal of counterinsurgency is to make the population feel secure. It would follow that the

aim or the objective of the global counterinsurgency campaign should be to make the global population feel secure.

And I would simply suggest that we really don't need to undertake such a grandiose effort and we cannot afford to undertake such a grandiose effort. As long as we maintain adequate defenses – let me say that again – as long as we maintain adequate defenses, al Qaeda operatives hunkered down in their caves pose no more than a modest threat to U.S. national security.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

LT. GEN. BARNO: Thank you, Dr. Bacevich. And I think we'll come around perhaps in questions to looking at the assumptions that lie behind idea of defense as an adequate response to the uncertainties that is reflected in this part of world, which include of course not only Afghanistan, but Pakistan as well.

We turn now to Colonel Cavoli.

COL. CHRISTOPHER CAVOLI: Thank you very much, sir. Thank you all very much for the opportunity to speak here today. It's a big opportunity for me – such a big one, in fact, that I've interrupted my move from Germany to El Paso, Texas, to stop here.

I'm going to El Paso to take command of an infantry brigade and with that brigade I'll go back to Afghanistan. So the topic at hand is very much of interest to me. But because that brigade is in El Paso, Dr. Bacevich's comments about fixing Mexico are also of vital interest. (Laughter.) So thank you very much for that, Andrew.

The opinions I express this morning obviously are my own. I don't speak for the Department of Defense or the United States Army. But I would like to do is try to use a little bit of my own experience commanding an infantry battalion on the ground in Afghanistan to suggest that there are some gaps in the report that the report admits to, but that need to filled in and explored a little bit before it can be considered a document that's actually operationally useful.

I don't have real big problems with any of the recommendations – the four recommendations in the report, but the report elaborates them a little bit in a way that brings up some issues that I think we should explore for a second.

So the report says, for instance, we should do an oil spot or an inkblot approach. I couldn't agree more. But it goes on a bit. It says we should do an inkblot approach right, do it correctly with a population-centric approach and we should achieve that – the density of resources and efforts necessary to do that properly – by triaging. Obviously, I agree, but there are some things that come to mind here.

First of all, oil spots require a pretext to exist. That is, your average Afghan is living in a small town and he has managed successfully for 30 years, if he's still alive, to avoid the fights that are swirling around him. And it is not infrequent to arrive in a small Afghan

village and to be asked by the people, "Why did you come here? Now, there's going to be fighting." Their definition of security might be different than ours because of the orientation of the security or of the situation when the security is there. Therefore, in order to go to a town and provide the sort of security we're talking about, you have to have a pretext. The pretext is usually some sort of a political initiative or perhaps a material benefit, a road or an election or something like this. But all of those things – those pretexts – have to come from outside. The unit typically doesn't have the resources or command the authority to arrive with the pretext itself. So that has to come from someplace else, from U.S. forces Afghanistan, from ISAF or something, which is a theme that I'll come back to in just a moment.

The second you need is, if you're going to do an inkblot theory, the operations inside the inkblot matter. The way they're done matters very, very much. Something discussed in the report, something I think we all know, something General Petraeus became famous for doing in Iraq was to align the nature of the operations and the nature of the attitudes of the organizations – the units performing those operations – inside those inkblots.

Those operations need to be consistent, year on year, as units rotate in and out. They also need to be consistent or at least contradictory from inkblot to inkblot. So there is a level of external control and direction that's required from above to make sure that what happens in the ink spots is consistent year after year, consistent from place to place, and is being done in the proper method.

Furthermore, ink spots need to be sewn – to mix a bunch of metaphors here – they need to be pulled together into a coherent whole. You can't have an oil spot here and an oil spot here that don't add up to some cohesive national program. That also needs to come from above, from the perspective of the unit commander. That has to be something that's brought to the situation from outside the oil spot.

Finally, in order to do an oil spotting approach, we need to triage. We need to decide who's in and who's out of these ink spots. Deciding who's in the ink spots, which populations we're going to provide the security to and the pretext for the security will have to be an extremely highly political decision. The question who is going to benefit, in what order, from this counterinsurgency is a very powerful question.

Likewise, if there are people inside oil spots, there are also going to be populations that are outside the oil spots. How to handle them? What to say to a population that says, "Hey, I'm not giving you any trouble over here. There's not an enemy situation in my valley and so you've gone to bring all your goodies to another valley." It's a powerful question. Both of those questions have to handled from outside.

So the first thing that I would say is that an oil spotting approach to Afghanistan is going to require a level of operational direction and control – a directive control that will be difficult to achieve. It will be very difficult to achieve inside a coalition. That is, ISAF as the headquarters will have to become much more involved in who does what, where, how over time than perhaps is easy to accomplish in a coalition.

That being the case, it makes it difficult for me to see how we will generate momentum, which is a central requirement of this report. How that will help to generate momentum. Andrew and Nate very rightly point out that in a counterinsurgency one requires momentum, but I'm not sure that oil spotting is going to generate it right away.

The second recommendation is to focus governance assistance on transparency and corruption. Very little for me to argue with there. With much time on the ground in Afghanistan I can't agree more. If you divide counterinsurgency into three big steps – separate the population and the enemy, then take actions to connect the people to the government, and the do something to inoculate the population long term against insurgency – that step two – connecting the population to the government – is the decisive one. But if the government is going to be connected to population, it has to be capable and worthy of the connection. So I have no dispute with that whatsoever.

I would say, though, it brings to mind something. It reminds me of when I was a high school wrestler. And when things were going very, very badly, and I was mostly looking at the ceiling, sometimes I would hear my mother's voice from the side of the mat screaming, "Christopher, just roll him over and pin him." (Laughter.) Easier said than done. More importantly, sometimes while I was struggling to get off my back, I ran out of time and the round was over.

The third and fourth recommendations actually General Barno covered much more succinctly than I could, so I won't say anything other than this. Afghanistan and Pakistan exist and have existed in sort of a symbiosis – the problems there have – in the sense that at sometimes Afghanistan is the operational area and Pakistan is the safe haven and sometimes that flip flops. But there is a relationship between the western side of Pakistan and the eastern side of Afghanistan that is highly – that is well explored inside this report. But if we look at the context of the campaign with that in mind, then we see that right now Pakistan, from our perspective, is providing a safe haven or there is a safe haven that exists within the state of Pakistan for the insurgency inside Afghanistan.

I don't have any problem with curtailing drone strikes except for, as General Barno pointed out, that removes basically the only thing we have putting pressure on that safe haven. Similarly, I don't have anything against working with the police. That's very important. But if we refocus attention from the military in the tribal areas and in the NWFP and focus it on police forces outside of that, it seems to me that what we've done is pull pressure off of the safe haven. In all counterinsurgency practice that I'm aware of, that's not the fast road to generating momentum.

So unless the report elaborates a way to keep the pressure on there while doing those two initiatives, I would say that the net effect probably is outweighed by the fact that it would leave continued safe haven there. But I think those are things within the report that can be – in the process of turning these recommendations into a campaign plan, could probably be fixed and could probably worked in there and thought through. And if it were implemented, would probably work. And I think the way we would know it worked brings me to your last point, which was metrics.

I think we would know it works because the fighting would increase dramatically. You mentioned this in the report. I think that is very accurate to talk about fighting

increasing when we do more operations, but I think that the real reason fighting increase and insurgencies is when the counterinsurgency force starts to connect the population to the government because the guerilla fighter can get out of any fight and still exist as a guerilla force, as an insurgency. But the one thing they cannot abide is losing their argument to get the support of the people. So when you start to win, it reduces them to the only thing they have left, the only argument they have left – just to come back and fight.

So for that reason, I would say the primary metric of short term success, if we're talking about a year, would be an increase in fights that we believe are being conducted or being launched because we are making progress with the population.

And then finally, I would say. I read an awful lot of very dire comments about Afghanistan and everything these days and I don't necessarily disagree with them, but I was talking to General Barno just after General Petraeus spoke and it was remarkable to me just how different – just how little effort has been put into Afghanistan as a theater of operations. General Petraeus showed a brigade commander in Iraq who, at one point had among other things, 11 predators – I think it was – circling overhead. During the exact same period in Afghanistan, I was responsible with 1,000 men for four provinces that were about 300 kilometers by 200 kilometers. And the mountains went over 20,000 feet in the northern part. I think during the course of the entire year I maybe had half a dozen UAV sorties over my area. So the difference in resources between the two theaters has been utterly remarkable. I think that our dire predictions are probably going to shift fairly rapidly when we start to increases forces and especially the enablers the way we have. And that may be the best way to generate the momentum that the report seeks.

Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

LT. GEN. BARNO: Thank you, Colonel Cavoli.

Let me pose the first question as the moderator and then we'll open it up to the audience here. And I'd like to take us up a bit higher on the on the mountaintop towards the strategic level and I'd like to focus a bit more on Pakistan because naturally enough where we have the majority of our resources going and the majority of our attention right now seems to be on the Afghan side of the Afghan-Pakistani border, yet most would argue that the more important strategic country to us, perhaps even a vital interest of the United States, is actually Pakistan.

There are some that would argue that the Pakistanis are and have been playing a hedging game for a number of years where they're always prepared to go with a plan B option while they overtly support the goals of the U.S. and international community there. One of the key elements of their decision-making – and this would be the question I would pose to the panel – may be what is the U.S. strategic choice going to be in the region?

We're in some ways at a strategic fork in the road now. Not today or next week, but certainly in the next 18 months to 24 months the U.S. is going to have to think very seriously about the long term option, the end game in this theater, the combined region of Afghanistan and Pakistan. And I think there's at least two options there and the panel may

suggest others in answer to this question, but one of them is what actually it tells us here it's called an option of invest and endure – invest and endure, a long term commitment to the region, to certainly both Afghanistan and Pakistan, not necessarily in terms of hundreds of thousands of American troops or billions and billions of dollars, but a long-term sustained presence and commitment to the region.

Another option, moving to the other side of the spectrum a bit, is a win and leave option, a succeed and depart option – that we achieve our objectives at point X out there somewhere in that timeline and then depart in large measure and leave behind just perhaps a traditional minimum force and minimum diplomatic effort and let the region go back to something that it was sometime in the past. If those are in fact our choices, and perhaps again there are others, which road should the United States take as we look ahead?

MR. FICK: Sure, I guess I'll start. First off, I want to thank the commentators for their challenging criticisms as well as you, the audience, for the catechism I'm sure that is about to commence. (Laughter.)

With respect to the question, General Barno presented two options. I think I know which one Professor Bacevich would choose. And I think what we are headed towards is a long-term commitment in both Afghanistan and Pakistan. We specifically focused in this report on the operational questions and the strategic – and some of the lower level strategic challenges that are presented by Afghanistan and Pakistan without getting into the grand strategy.

And one of the reasons we invited Dr. Bacevich was so he would challenge a lot of the assumptions, specifically the two that we mentioned. I think what he has presented was a gloriously heretical response and one that's completely divorced from the political realities facing this administration.

I do think that his contribution is extremely viable because it starts asking these questions about where exactly our interests are, but if you would ask me where I thought that the administration is going, I think that we're headed towards a long-term commitment to both Afghanistan and Pakistan. And I don't see the political realities in America undermining that over the next five or six years.

LT. GEN. BARNO: Other thoughts?

MR. BACEVICH: Oh, yes, I mean – (laughter) – I thought there might be. The heretic has no expectations that in this city any of these notions will be taken seriously. The historian would say, though, that – General Barno's depiction of the fork in the road, the choice, does assume that the United States possesses the capacity to determine the fate of AfPak. Now, that's an assumption. The historian in me would say, you know, back around 1980 with the declaration of the Carter doctrine, not South Asia relative to the Persian Gulf, the United States really embarked upon a project which was based on the assumption that in this region of the world that we viewed as strategically critical largely because of the presence of oil, the assumption was that somehow or other our efforts, and chiefly our military efforts, would enable us to determine the fate of what began as the Persian Gulf and now has become to determine the fate, in essence, of most of the Islamic world.

It seems to me that if we look back over the history, back to 1980, my own view would be that this has turned out to be an enormously, enormously expensive proposition, and it has not to this point delivered any meaningful benefit to the United States of America.

So would it not at least be possible to be – to consider an alternative rather than simply continue down this path, which I think by implication, will next have us making this long-term commitment to Pakistan – an undeveloped country of, I think, roughly 175 million people – it just seems to me there ought to be enough room to consider a radically different approach to U.S. national security and indeed a radically different approach that may, in particular, deserve to have some consideration at a time when we have invested a trillion dollars in this global counterinsurgency campaign over its first eight years, when the current fiscal year deficit of our federal government is $1.8 trillion, when CBO projections are we're going to have trillion dollar deficits for the next decade or so. So does it really make sense to continue down the path? I think we ought to think otherwise.

MR. EXUM: I think that with respect to the U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, one of the things that we're not very honest with is the fact that when we do wage counterinsurgency campaigns, we do so as a third party. And what that means is that we don't necessarily have the ability to win victory on our own. And that it's largely dependent upon that third party, upon reconciliation process to take place that are completely outside our control. That, I agree with. I'm wondering what is the alternative you propose.

MR. BACEVICH: I have for some time been writing about my unhappiness with what I view as an imperial project and with what I view as vastly overstated expectations of what American power can do. The one thing you could say for the previous American way of war, the American way of war that was based on shock and awe and the revolution in military affairs – and you're snorting because all of that turned out to be so bogus. (Laughter.) The one thing that you could say for the previous American way of war is it was based on a false assumption that the U.S. was going to fight short wars that were going to produce decisive outcomes and that would be sort of relatively cheap. The future was going to look like Operation Desert Storm.

I have to say that one of my problems with the new American way of war is that the new American way of war basically assumes that war is a perpetual condition – that these insurgencies, counterinsurgencies, Iraq and Afghanistan, are assumed to be projects that take 10-15 years and then yield an ambiguous outcome. A global counterinsurgency? How long's that going to go on? How much is that going to cost? It just seems to me that these are assumptions embedded in the infatuation – I would call it – with counterinsurgency that deserve to be scrutinized carefully.

MR. FICK: Well, I think I'd agree with your perception of global counterinsurgency and I certainly wouldn't recommend that, but I think with respect to Afghanistan and Iraq that you're exactly right. They do call on long-term commitments, which is precisely why we should avoid these campaigns in the first place.

LT. GEN. BARNO: All right. Let's go ahead and open it up for questions. And we'll start right here. We can get a microphone up there.

Q: Jeff Laurenti with the Century Foundation. One of the things I don't think we've been exploring is the degree to which the Afghan population will be patient for this continued American bacterial presence or Western presence. In the past three years – to the extent that polling is at all reliable in Afghanistan – we've seen a kind of public support or tolerance for the U.S. halving from mid-80 percent support to mid-40s. So one wonders if we're talking about flooding, even on the civilian side, Afghan ministries with Americans, rather than if you need external assistance on the civilian side why not rely on the much too righted UN to pull in Muslim country people and others.

If we are trying to own these ourselves at precisely the moment when the Afghan population is getting very, very tired of us, where does that take this? And so the real question, since I think American military power in the short term can buy space for a Kabul government to fill the gap, what are the prospects for Afghans themselves to be able to step up to their plate and maintain order because I think Professor Bacevich has it right that in the end the American interest is simply to keep al Qaeda from coming back in. Repugnant as the Taliban may be, it really doesn't matter to us if they are part of the government or not, so long as al Qaeda is kept out.

And this enormous cost on which I think the American public doesn't have a six-year stretch of patience in the future, certainly the president's political party is going to view this as something to cut short if it isn't showing success, and even Secretary Gates has said we have to give this a year and they'll be ready, I think, to then have to recalculate if this isn't producing. So what is that Afghan piece that seemed absent from the discussion today?

MR. EXUM: Yes, first off, there's a real weakness of this panel. One of the things that was present on the Iraq panel were Iraqis. And we specifically set up our murder board to where we had very smart critics that could specifically focus on policy, strategy, operations, and tactics from the American perspective. So you're right, that is a huge weakness of this panel.

The single thing is that previously here at CNAS, we've worked on the National Solidarity Project in Afghanistan, promoting that as a more effective form of aid, for example. Instead of going through Western aid organizations, which have a high overhead cost, which most of the costs and most of the money donated tends to go back to Western aid organizations, trying to utilize organizations which are run by Afghans and are executed by Afghans.

In the same way, if you really look at our exit strategy for Afghanistan, it's not a perpetual U.S. presence there. It's building up Afghan security forces. One of the key priorities that was in the president's White Paper was the emphasis on training Afghan security forces. That's so we can leave.

Now, there are some good questions that must be asked as far as whether the Afghan economy can support such a large security apparatus. And that may mean that we have a longer term investment in Afghanistan, even if we don't have troops on the ground. But I think first off, your questions are good. Second off, one thing that's in the paper that I didn't mention was the need to bring in – as far as the civilian surge, that's a wonderful

opportunity to bring in our European allies especially and also donors from other countries and really to have – not so much – well, unity of command is a good thing from the perspective of military effort and maybe I think the military would be predominantly American over the next 12 months. Boy, we'd love to internationalize the aid program in Afghanistan in the longer term. We'd love to internationalize that.

Does anybody else have a comment?

MR. FICK: I'd like to add a couple of things to that. You asked fundamentally about Afghan patience and one of the points we try to make at the outset of the report is how much trajectory and momentum matter. And it's something that General Petraeus echoed earlier this morning.

The perceived trajectory, indeed the real trajectory in Afghanistan right now is decidedly downward and the momentum is accelerating. And those facts affect patience. They affect patience among the American voting public, among our European allies, and certainly among Afghans themselves.

Just a couple of comments on that – and I'm not an academic, so I have the freedom to reason from anecdote, which I do liberally. (Laughter.) And I believe there's a myth of Afghan xenophobia and this myth states that, well, they drove the British out and the drove the Russians out, so they'll drive us out. And I would posit as a counterargument that Afghans on the whole are frustrated more with our incompetence than with our presence. And one of the people we consulted with in the course of writing this was Abdullah Abdullah, the former foreign minister of Afghanistan. And his basic position is these are people who need tea and they don't even need sugar in their tea. It's – the expectations at this point are fairly low, which ironically gives us a little bit of freedom of action. And we also derive some freedom of action from another historical strain, again, that I'll arrive at via anecdote.

I was speaking with a television producer who'd just purchased the rights to 24 to air them in Kabul, on Tolo Television. And I was sort of astounded by this and said, "Well, do you realize that the villains on 24 are Muslim terrorists." And he said, "Yes, and we've polled our viewers and it turns out they don't care if the villains are Muslims just as long as they aren't Afghan." (Laughter.) And one of the lessons you might draw off from that is something that I think we have seen echoed elsewhere; it's that many Afghans, most Afghans are not caught up so much in the broader regional issues in some of the pan-Islamic issues. And so I think we underestimate Afghan patience. And I say that in the context of everything we've written about the absolute essential need to dramatically reduce civilian casualties, to take other affirmative steps to provide basic services aimed at extending that patience. But I would argue that the reservoir on which we're drawing is actually a little bit deeper in Afghanistan than we think.

LT. GEN. BARNO: Next question. Right here in front. We'll get that microphone to you in just a second so everybody can hear.

Q: Don Hayes, currently from BENS, Business Executives for National Security, but I spent three years in Pakistan and four and a half in Bosnia. And I think that I would draw sorry conclusions from that experience and say that Dr. Bacevich is probably right in

the end. Your prescriptions are what Americans strive to achieve, but you have to remember the American have other challenges, other desires. They won't stay with this strategy long enough to make it happen. Secondly, you have a dearth of –

LT. GEN. BARNO: Don't forget we're getting a question in here in the second or third –

Q: – you have a dearth of political leadership in both countries, in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and vast poverty and ignorance. So I don't see in your strategy an American domestic strategy that keeps us there focused long enough to bring about any real change.

(END)