RESPONSIBLE TRANSITION: SECURING U.S. INTERESTS IN AFGHANISTAN BEYOND 2011

INTRODUCTION BY:
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MODERATOR:
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FEATURED SPEAKERS:
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1:30 PM – 2:45 PM
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TRANSCRIPT PROVIDED BY

MR. JOHN NAGL: Ladies and gentlemen – ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon. My name is John Nagl. I'm the president of the Center for a New American Security. And it's my great pleasure to welcome you here to discuss the report "Responsible Transition: Securing U.S. Interests in Afghanistan Beyond 2011."

I'd like to thank Finmeccanica North America for their generous support of this even today.

Before we begin, I'd like to ask for a moment of silence to remember Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, who passed away last night. Ambassador Holbrooke lived a life of service to the United States including duty in Vietnam, the former Yugoslavia, and most recently in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Our thoughts are with his family and with those who loved him and who served with him in his important work around the globe. Thank you.

A year and two weeks ago, President Obama made an important speech at West Point after a thorough review of American strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In that speech, he committed an additional 30,000 troops to the fight against al Qaeda and its allies and he promised that in a year he would review the progress that had been made and the work that remains to be done.

The National Security Council is now completing that presidential review and the president is scheduled to address the nation this Thursday in order to announce what he's found.

While we wait for that announcement, we're fortunate to have with us today three people who've been intimately associated with the national security policy of the United States in Afghanistan and Pakistan over the past decade: retired Lieutenant General Dave Barno, former Army Ranger Andrew Exum, and Washington Post investigative journalist and editor, Bob Woodward.

Dave Barno graduated in the United States Military Academy's now famous class of 1976. He served in Army Ranger battalions in combat in Grenada and Panama. And in 2003, Dave was selected to establish a new three-star operational headquarters to take command of U.S. and coalition forces in Operation Enduring Freedom, leading that mission until 2005. After retiring from the Army the next year, Dave became director of the National Defense University's Near East and South Asia Study Center. He did that for four years before joining the Center for a New American Security earlier this year as a senior adviser and senior fellow.

With Andrew Exum, Dave wrote "Responsible Transition: Security U.S. Interests in Afghanistan Beyond 2011," which we released a week ago today. Andrew Exum is a fellow at CNAS and a former Army Ranger who served in combat in both Iraq and in Afghanistan. Andrew later served as an advisor to the CENTCOM assessment team and as a civilian adviser to General Stan McChrystal in Afghanistan. He is today literally just off a

plane this morning from Afghanistan, where he spent the last few weeks in battlefield circulation and discussions with commanders and diplomats on the ground.

Welcome home, Ex.

And we're honored to have with us to moderate the discussion of "Responsible Transition" a man who truly needs no introduction. Bob Woodward has been one of America's most famous investigative reporters since he and Carl Bernstein broke the Watergate story for the Post in 1972, some years before Andrew Exum was born. (Laughter.) Bob has since authored or coauthored 16 national bestsellers, including most recently Obama's Wars which detailed the behind the scenes story of the Afghan Strategy Review that President's Obama National Security Team conducted last year. And during the writing and the research of that book, Bob also visited Afghanistan.

Bob will draw out some observations from Dave and Ex before opening the floor for 30 minutes of questions. Any members of the media who have further questions are invited to remain for press availability immediately following the event from 2:45 p.m. until 3:15 p.m. And now I'd like to welcome these three experts to the stage.

Gentlemen. (Applause.)

MR. BOB WOODWARD: Let's see. Are the microphones on? I just wanted to say a couple of words about Holbrooke, who I knew for almost 40 years, one of the most engaged people I've ever met, not just in government but also out of government. He's somebody who literally threw himself at and into history with the determination and passion in a sense like Teddy Roosevelt, somebody who was always in the arena. I remember this year at one point he told me – a classic Holbrooke statement – people were picking on him about the United States in decline and his rejoinder to them was, we may be in decline but we're still number one. He is – I like to think of him as the persistent patriot because he was a patriot, somebody who often disagreed, spoke his mind freely, but in the interests of the United States.

Now, to turn to the report. Andrew, let's start with you. You're just – you still have Afghan sand on your shoes. You just got –

MR. ANDREW EXUM: I left them out in the office, but yes.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. You got back – tell us what you told General Petraeus.

MR. EXUM: Yes. I met with General Petraeus before I left on – I left just yesterday – before I left on Friday. I was there for about 10 days at the invitation of the ISAF headquarters traveling around Afghanistan and coming up – you know, making general observations for the command group. I stayed in Kabul for an extra few days just meeting with some journalists and civilian researchers on the ground.

I'll go through three good things and three bad things that I noticed in Afghanistan. This is exactly – in the interest of full transparency, this is exactly what I told General Petraeus.

First off, I noticed our political intelligence has gotten a lot better at the battalion and brigade levels. Some of you remember a paper written by Matt Pottinger and General Mike Flynn for the Center for a New American Security on fixing intelligence in Afghanistan.

We've gotten a lot better. You know, like 18 months ago when I traveled around asking folks about their area of operations, they'd predominantly talked to me about the enemy. This time around they talk about their area of operations, who live there, the tribes that live there, the human geography, if you will, and only then started taking about the enemy. That's important because a lot of what's driving the conflict in Afghanistan isn't necessarily the presence of the –

MR. WOODWARD: So it's an improvement, but how much of an improvement?

MR. EXUM: Well, it's a tactical improvement. And, you know, I'll get to that. You know, war takes place at four different levels, obviously: the political, strategic, operational and tactical. Your tactics can be completely right, but if you're strategy is off then you're still going to lose.

And, you know, two more tactical improvements that I noted. I think we're doing counterinsurgency at the tactical level better than I've ever seen it. I think our special operations forces and our general purpose forces are synced up better than I've ever seen it.

However, the three improves that I guess I would offer in an after-action review would be almost entirely strategic.

First off, General Petraeus told us when we first got to Afghanistan that he's got two strategic Achilles' heels: one being sanctuaries – enemy sanctuaries in Pakistan and elsewhere. And the second being governance. Everywhere I went in Afghanistan, every one I spoke with, be they Afghan officials, regular Afghans on the street, company commanders on the ground in Arghandab Valley hit back with the same two strategic Achilles' heels. I don't think we have a good strategy for dealing with either of them.

The second thing with regard to governance, first off, if you plot me down in the middle of Afghanistan and you asked me, what is it that the NATO/ISAF forces – what is it that they treasure, what do they value, well, I'd say based on the resource allocations, based on the type of metrics that are being briefed, based on the types of intelligence requirements, overwhelmingly we value killing the enemy. That's a good thing. We need to kill the enemy in Afghanistan, but at the same time if governance is one of our Achilles' heels, we have to weight our resources there as well.

And then, finally, as we begin to transition in Afghanistan – which, of course, is the subject of the paper that General Barno and I wrote – I think our interests between the

United States and our allied governments and the Afghan government are going to really diverge. I think it's still one of the planning assumptions in Afghanistan that our interests are broadly aligned with those of the government of Afghanistan. I'm not sure that's the case right now.

I know it's not going to be the case as we begin to transition because we're going to be focused 80 percent on security, 20 percent on development. And the Afghans are going to want to focus in the exact opposite way: 80 percent development, what are you leaving us with, what kind of infrastructure are you building for us, and then only 20 percent security.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. General, summarize the report in two sentences. (Laughter.) Kidding.

LT. GEN. DAVE BARNO: Not one?

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. I'm kidding. Summarize it.

MR. EXUM: You're generous.

LT. GEN. BARNO: I would say the report, number one, is worth reading so I encourage all of you to take it home and actually read it cover to cover because there's a lot of really interesting things there.

Most importantly, though, it argues that the U.S., despite the fact we're in an area of different strategic contexts where our deficits and debt now are beginning to have a tremendous impact on our future role in the world, the U.S. still has vital interests in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area.

And to protect those vital interests, we have to develop a sustainable strategy that allows us to maintain, in our view, a military presence there not only beyond July 2011, but into the future beyond July and the end of 2014.

But that presence takes a different form than it does today. It become an unconventional warfare-led operation, special operations forces focusing on attacking and keeping what we call relentless pressure on al Qaeda because that's one of the vital interests – to prevent another attack on the United States from that part of the world. But also, those same forces helping to enable the Afghan military to carry the fight to the Taliban and pick up the counterinsurgency fight.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. You say in the report that we would have a residual force of 25,000 to 30,000, right?

LT. GEN. BARNO: Thirty-five. Yes.

MR. WOODWARD: Where did that number come from?

LT. GEN. BARNO: We actually crunched out what we thought those numbers should look like. I've got a very detailed troop list with me, just in case you wanted to see it, Bob.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. I do.

LT. GEN. BARNO: That lays it out in a bit of detail. And I think as I ran through the numbers, not normally what they'd come out to be, I think my number – and this is U.S. only – was 28,100. And it comprised essentially a substantial special operations capability that was both the specialized, special mission units, the regular special forces and a whole – (inaudible) – of differences.

MR. WOODWARD: So you've done traditional troop to task analysis.

LT. GEN. BARNO: Yes.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. Now Joe Biden reads this report and he's going to say, hey, this is exactly where I was last year, counterterrorism plus you scale back, you get out of the counterinsurgency business, which you kind of in a sense in the report say we're going to turn that over to the Afghans. Why isn't this Biden?

LT. GEN. BARNO: Well, I'm not sure we knew exactly what the Biden Counterterrorism-plus was beyond that particular phrase. I think we've got the details in this to really make the argument that not only should this be the force we go to, but we go to it three and a half years from now which provides it a space to build the Afghan security forces up to take on this other mission. We would not recommend this strategy next summer. We wouldn't recommend it the summer after that. We recommend going to this gradually out in the 2014 timeframe.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. Now Les Gelb in a blog today that he does said, when you really step back and look at the war in Afghanistan, the United States doesn't have real interests in the United States. What's your answer to that in terms of this report?

LT. GEN. BARNO: You want to take a stab?

MR. EXUM: Yes. I think we're very clear about what we think our interests are. I think we have a lot of interests in Afghanistan and Central Asia. I think we have only two vital interests, meaning those interests by which we should continued to expend blood and treasure. And one has to do with al Qaeda and associated movements.

MR. WOODWARD: Which is not in Afghanistan, by the way, which is in Pakistan.

MR. EXUM: Right. For the most part in Pakistan.

MR. WOODWARD: I mean, almost 99 percent. Okay.

MR. EXUM: Yes. Absolutely. And as the president –

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. So we kind of – we could set that one aside. No?

MR. EXUM: I don't think you can.

LT. GEN. BARNO: I disagree. I think what you have to say is Afghanistan is not an island in the middle of the Pacific Ocean and it's part of a region and the region is what we're really talking about in this report. It's not simply about the nation state property of Afghanistan. That neighboring region has a tremendous influence on what's going to happen here in the United States and it influenced how we wrote this.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. What's the second interest?

MR. EXUM: Well, first off, if the Durand Line was in fact like the great wall of Pakistan, yes. Then maybe we could talk about them as being two separate interests, entities but we can't. The reality is that along those borderlines it's extremely fluid. We see this on a daily basis in Afghanistan.

The second interest has to do with the stability of Pakistan. Pakistan has nuclear weapons. Pakistan is a fragile state and we don't want to see a Pakistan that collapses. That has horrible implications for regional security.

MR. WOODWARD: So is that – I mean, isn't somebody going to look back at this war at some point and kind of say, now, wait a minute. The United States had 100,000 troops in Afghanistan, and you look at all the rhetoric and all the documentation, all the discussion it is to defeat, dismantle al Qaeda. Now you say, well the border is porous, but al Qaeda is not moving into Afghanistan. They're staying in Pakistan. It is the Taliban fighters that are moving into Afghanistan, is it not?

MR. EXUM: Well, I mean, you've created an interesting problem set there because is al Qaeda not in Afghanistan because we have 100,000 troops in Afghanistan or is al Qaeda not in Afghanistan because – I don't know – they prefer the climate in Pakistan?

MR. WOODWARD: Well, you know, the answer – but you go –

MR. EXUM: Let me just set it up.

MR. WOODWARD: – the argument, if I may interrupt, is do you really need 100,000 troops for them to come in? And Vice President Biden last year argued, look, if we control the intelligence, control the air space, have sufficient special operations forces, we can make sure al Qaeda does not come back into Afghanistan. I'm just – I'm trying to think like President Bush on what would Joe Sixpack think about this. And there seems to be a disconnect here, no?

MR. EXUM: I think – well, first off, when you look what we're trying to do in Afghanistan as expressed by President Obama in the March, 2009, white paper, in the 1st December 2009 speech as West Point, it's really quite minimal, right, as to deny, disrupt

and dismantle al Qaeda or what is that – disrupt, defeat, disable al Qaeda. But anyway, it's pretty minimalist. But at the same time there is the assumption that in order for you to do that in Afghanistan you have to create – or you have to go down some pretty maximalist means, at least temporarily, meaning you have to build up certain key institutions in Afghanistan –

MR. WOODWARD: Nation-building.

MR. EXUM: – to make Afghanistan –

MR. WOODWARD: Nation-building, right?

MR. EXUM: Institution building because, hold on. We're not trying – I mean, yes. To a degree but it depends on where you're standing.

MR. WOODWARD: That's a shift in language, isn't it though, I mean, to say – I mean, President Obama was clear in his orders we're not – this isn't nation-building, right? And if you switch the language to, well, we're institution building, isn't that a little sneaky and don't you think the law professor in Obama might catch you?

MR. EXUM: But, you know, I learned in this book, Obama's Wars, that the one thing – (laughter) – the one thing that Obama said that did make sense to him was doing counterinsurgency operations in order to buy time and space to build up the Afghan national security forces. That, he said, made sense. And that's exactly what we're trying to do in Afghanistan – to make an Afghanistan that's resilient against those types of transnational terror groups that took root there before September 11th, 2001.

LT. GEN. BARNO: And let's go back to al Qaeda's role because we can't look at al Qaeda without recognizing the Taliban exist out there. Al Qaeda and the Taliban have sympathetic objectives in many ways. We don't believe the Taliban writ large has an objective back in New York City or in Washington, D.C., necessarily, although we've seen some –

MR. WOODWARD: But they do now. It turns out the intelligence shows that.

LT. GEN. BARNO: We've some shifts in that. But the reality is that we have to look at the problem set holistically. We can't simply look at the al Qaeda problem set, then look at the Afghan governance problem set, then look at the Taliban problem set. Those all overlap each other and we have to have a strategy that takes into account all of those and how they mesh together.

MR. WOODWARD: Are you're worried that we're buying into this idea of transition too easily? Because you talk to military people and a lot of them will say, and were saying last year quite passionately, you can't do war on a timetable. As soon as you start using the language of transition, doesn't that send a message, we're kind of out of here? And isn't that problem that we had earlier in this war?

LT. GEN. BARNO: Well, the most important points this report makes is that the U.S. has to dispel that uncertainty. We have to commit to a long-term strategy and a long-term military commitment, not a large one but a sustainable one in Afghanistan. Today, if you're a Pakistani national security adviser, if you're an Afghan adviser to President Karzai, you're operating under the assumption the U.S. is leaving and it's only a matter of time, that the clock is running out on the U.S. effort. We have to dispel that notion if we're going to be serious there.

MR. WOODWARD: But the president – NATO has said 2014. And, you know, from 2010 that looks far but all of a sudden – time tends to creep up. Doesn't that still send that message, we're exiting?

MR. EXUM: Well, first off, let's acknowledge that where we were – well, not – yes, this time last year. We were all talking about 2011. And that had a good effect in some senses in terms of spurring movement on the part of the Afghan government. But for the most part, I mean, I'll go out there and say I think it was a strategic blunder to put that 2011 marker out there in the December 1st speech. I understand why the president did it.

MR. WOODWARD: Do you agree, General?

LT. GEN. BARNO: I think it's worked against our interests.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. So that's less than a strategic blunder. (Laughter.)

MR. EXUM: Twelve months later, we're talking about 2014. I mean, the fact that we were able to get the NATO allies to commit to 2014 – and oh, by the way, the genesis of that 2014 date, that comes from President Karzai. That's from the second inaugural address.

MR. WOODWARD: Yes.

MR. EXUM: So, you know, one of the questions that I think people have had about this report is, okay, is this time driven or conditions based. You know, explain that.

And the reality is is that certain time limits have been established not by us, but by President Karzai himself. He wants full sovereignty by 2014. So one of the things that we tried to do in this paper was think about, okay, in between 2011 and 2014, how do we transition to that full sovereignty.

And after that – and let's be under no illusions. This is not Iraq where they're sitting on $60 billion worth of oil. With respect to Afghanistan, President Karzai wants a long-term security relationship with the United States and its NATO allies. So I think it's –

MR. WOODWARD: Most of the time.

MR. EXUM: No. He does. He explicitly –

MR. WOODWARD: Well, as we reported in the Post yesterday, he said, you know, I have three enemies and one of them is the United States.

MR. EXUM: He's been – yes. (Laughter.) He's been explicit about the fact that the Afghan government does want this and President Karzai has been explicit about desiring a long-term security arrangement with the United States along the lines of the status of forces agreement we negotiated with the Iraqi government. That's something that's desired and I think that gets back to that ambiguity that's feared.

I mean, when you talk about the people of Afghanistan, you talk about a people who've suffered through 30 years of civil war. It's very difficult in that type of environment to plan past six months.

But when you're given the type of guarantee that, you know, we're not going to leave in 2011, we're not going to just abandon you, we're going to be there for the long term, that's amenable to U.S. interests.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. Do you agree with that?

LT. GEN. BARNO: I think so. And I think, as Andrew pointed out, one of the questions I've gotten in Afghanistan over and over again when I was there from '03 to '05 wasn't when are you Americans leaving. It was you Americans are not going to abandon us again, are you? I heard that on the Pakistani side of the border, in Islamabad. I heard it in Kabul. I heard – (inaudible).

MR. WOODWARD: And now the answer is not until 2014.

LT. GEN. BARNO: Well, I think that gets to the point of our report, which is to say that there's a future beyond 2014.

MR. EXUM: Yes.

LT. GEN. BARNO: That's there's a military future beyond 2014, and if you're an Afghan National Army brigadier, you're going to have an American partner and a much smaller force beyond 2014. But that's part of this commitment to the future that we – (inaudible).

MR. WOODWARD: Do you think you could get President Obama to sign on to at least the concept, maybe not the numbers of 25,000 to 30,000 but the concept we're going to have a substantial presence in this kind of advise and assist mission beyond 2014? Do you think you could?

LT. GEN. BARNO: I think we could make a very good case for that and I think – again, there's political risk the further out you get on the calendar, clearly. But I think from a logic standpoint and from an impact in the region, the psychological impact of this on the government of Pakistan, government of Afghanistan and on the Taliban as they look at what their future is going to look like could be very substantial.

MR. EXUM: And let me add to that because we're talking mostly about the attitudes of the elites. But if you're a regular Afghan that's living in a civil war environment, you're just trying to survive and you'll survive any number of ways. You'll hedge. You'll just be passive. You'll say a pox on both your sides and sticking out of conflict. And what we need the Afghan people to do, at least – I mean, we at least need them to send their sons into the Afghan national security forces. You've got to convince the Afghan people to make a choice, and not just make a choice, but make a choice towards the government of Afghanistan. And you do that –

MR. WOODWARD: And how do you do that?

MR. EXUM: You do that by a long-term commitment to Afghanistan. You don't do that by reinforcing this persistent fear that we're going to leave.

MR. WOODWARD: You actually talk to them, don't you Andrew?

MR. EXUM: Absolutely.

MR. WOODWARD: You speak the language and –

MR. EXUM: No. I speak Arabic. I don't speak Dari or Pashto.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. Okay. But you go out and play knock-on-the-door journalist, right?

MR. EXUM: Yes.

MR. WOODWARD: And do they say, oh, I'll do anything you want if you stay?

MR. EXUM: I think there is – no. No. Not at all. Of course not.

MR. WOODWARD: What do they say?

MR. EXUM: There's a tremendous fear that General Barno communicated that we will leave. I mean, one of the things I did after spending 10 days with the ISAF command was just stayed for three extra days in Kabul and spoke to not just journalists who are on the ground and civilian researchers, but regular Afghans, from Afghan businessmen to Afghan politicians to just regular Afghans. And there is that fear, that palpable fear that we're going to leave, if not in 2011, then in 2014. And we have to act against that.

MR. WOODWARD: Tell the story when you were there, when you left as commander in 2005, what the feeling was and what your intelligence friend told you because this is –

LT. GEN. BARNO: We're in a very different war than the one in '05 and this illustrates the point, which is by the spring of 2005 we had just completed the first ever

Afghan presidential election: 10.5 million Afghan registered to vote, one third of the population, 8.5 million came out to vote all across the country. It was a serious security day, but the Taliban didn't effect – it couldn't effect – (inaudible).

MR. WOODWARD: And on the average day the violence was what? Zero to three –

LT. GEN. BARNO: Zero to three –

MR. WOODWARD: Attacks –

LT. GEN. BARNO: – attacks a day across the country.

MR. WOODWARD: And what happens now, Andrew?

MR. EXUM: Now, I mean –

MR. WOODWARD: A hundred and twenty a day?

MR. EXUM: The irony is it's a lot more peaceful than Baghdad. It's a lot more peaceful than Iraq. I don't have the exact numbers but really, you know, over 66 percent of the violent attacks in Afghanistan that occur each day happen in just three districts: Helmand, Kandahar and Kunar provinces. But that's deceptive, though, because in areas where, you know, the violence maybe go up in places in Helmand because we're trying to push the Taliban out.

MR. WOODWARD: So what did your intelligence friends say?

LT. GEN. BARNO: Yes. By the spring of 2005 the intelligence read on looking at the Taliban was how do you know your enemy is defeated was the chart and half the blocks were checked off on the chart, which was very interesting to watch. And by a year later we saw a very different Taliban.

As we've talked about before, I've got a good friend who's an intelligence analyst here in town, works not too far from here, who has said the U.S. actually won the war in Afghanistan twice. We won it the first time by December, 2001, when the Taliban was driven out of Kabul and Kandahar. We won it the second time by the end of 2004 when against all expectations we had a very successful transition of power to an elected government in Afghanistan with version 1.0 of Hamid Karzai, a much different Karzai.

MR. WOODWARD: Aren't you a little worried that it's going to look like we won it a third time in 2014?

LT. GEN. BARNO: I think the key is how you build that consolidation of success. You're going to build the Afghan army out in the next three and a half years to a much larger level and a much more capable level than it is today. How you manage this transition is going to be crucial to whether we're going to be able to sustain it.

MR. WOODWARD: What's the big mistake that has been made from the beginning of the war in October, 2001, to this day? What's the biggest mistake anyone made?

MR. EXUM: Aside from the Iraq war?

MR. WOODWARD: Well, let's set that aside.

MR. EXUM: No, but I mean, I think that's legitimate because one of the things that you do in 2003 is you shift a vast amount of not just U.S. military resources, but diplomatic resources, development resources over to another theater. And Afghanistan becomes the forgotten war.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. Fair point.

LT. GEN. BARNO: My vote would be to lack of continuity in our leadership, our U.S. leadership in Afghanistan – that we've changed military commanders. We're on the sixth military commander in the last five and a half years. No university could survive that kind of turnover. No business could survive that kind of turnover.

MR. WOODWARD: When you went out to take command, how long did you meet with Rumsfeld?

LT. GEN. BARNO: Once or twice before I went out there, very briefly.

MR. WOODWARD: For how long –

LT. GEN. BARNO: Probably not more than for 45 minutes.

MR. WOODWARD: And what was on his mind?

LT. GEN. BARNO: That was actually more of a discussion about whether I should go out and take command of the effort in Afghanistan. But he looked more through my military history than we talked about Afghanistan.

MR. WOODWARD: I mean, how is that possible? You're sending the commander out to fight a very important war and it is a discussion, as I understand it, about, well, you've had all these jobs only for a year or 18 months. How could you have any impact?

LT. GEN. BARNO: Well, more from a – that was more a critique of the military personnel system, which was a valid critique – which is a valid critique.

MR. WOODWARD: Which is valid, but for the commander going out I find it strange that there isn't a kind of – these are your marching orders. I want you to report. What do you think? Give me a 60-day assessment, all of the things.

LT. GEN. BARNO: Those were discussions I would have had probably more with John Abizaid, who was the CENTCOM commander between Rumsfeld and I in the chain of command, which I did have.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. Do you think it was a mistake when we turned command in Afghanistan over to NATO? And I think Rumsfeld in 2005 – didn't he announce 2,500 troops are going to be withdrawn from Afghanistan? There actually was a drawdown? Was that a mistake?

LT. GEN. BARNO: I think we sent the wrong message in 2005 twice; once in the summer when we very publicly announced that we were turning over the overall military effort in Afghanistan to NATO, and then, as you point out, by the end of the year we announced the U.S. was withdrawing 2,500 combat troops which was well over 10 percent of the force we had in country at that time.

So what that was a message to friend and enemy alike was that the U.S. is moving for the exits. And brand USA had a lot of recognition in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the region. Brand NATO had no recognition out there. So I think that that sent absolutely the wrong message.

MR. WOODWARD: Last two questions before we get to the audience. How is Karzai doing now? In the White House review, one of the questions very specifically is him and the relations with him, the persistent distrust, how is Karzai doing? You look like you don't have a ready answer.

MR. EXUM: No. I do. I mean – well, I do to a degree. I mean, first off, within the U.S. government it's very – it's tough to think of high level U.S. officials who've developed a good rapport with Hamid Karzai. One of them is sitting to my right.

I think that after about 2008 we lose the ability to have a relationship of trust with Hamid Karzai. I think he knows that we are looking for alternatives in late 2008. And then, again, you don't have to have this orientalist conception of, you know, the conspiratorial Eastern mind to understand how President Karzai might have been a bit offended when he sees the American ambassador showing up to opposition political rallies through the summer of 2009.

And so, I think we've sunk our ability to have a relationship built on trust with President Karzai. Having said that, going forward we still share a lot of interests and we have to build our relationship built upon those shared interests.

MR. WOODWARD: General, what do you think?

LT. GEN. BARNO: I still have a lot of regard for Hamid Karzai. I think when I was there, I joked earlier, that it was Karzai 1.0 in the software. And he was a tremendously respected leader. And he was a world renowned leader.

MR. WOODWARD: In fact, they were talking in Iraq about can we get a Karzai for Iraq?

LT. GEN. BARNO: I heard that regularly. And now we have a very different Karzai. And a lot of this different Karzai is our fault. It's not simply Hamid Karzai. It's Hamid Karzai reacting to that continual revolving door of commanders and ambassadors and our inability to rebuild relationships that I saw that were very good back in the '05 timeframe.

MR. WOODWARD: You keep talking like this and they're going to send you back. You realize that.

LT. GEN. BARNO: Not much risk of that.

MR. WOODWARD: So you think – okay. Last question. What are the strengths and weaknesses of President Obama as a commander-in-chief in the war in Afghanistan as you see?

LT. GEN. BARNO: Andrew? (Laughter.)

MR. EXUM: I mean, I think it's difficult because of the domestic agenda that he inherited, largely against his own will. He didn't ask for the financial crisis, for example. But I think that if I look at the former president, who I did not vote for, compared to the current president, who I did vote for, I think – you know, President Bush really took ownership of the wars he was fighting, especially the Iraq war. And I think one of the things that President Obama is going to have to do and has to a degree – but I think one of the things he's going to have to do is really take ownership of this war in Afghanistan.

MR. WOODWARD: And he never uses the words in public since the review last year, victory and win.

MR. EXUM: Yes, and that's another –

MR. WOODWARD: If you were a speechwriter for him, would you throw those words in?

MR. EXUM: I would because I noticed that even though I know he's trying to be very careful about the language that he uses, one of the things I admire about the president is the precision of language that he employs. The fact that he doesn't talk about winning this war is noted in Kabul and in the rest of Afghanistan, not just among –

MR. WOODWARD: And in the field, in the – I mean, you're a soldier out in the field essentially risking your life all the time and you don't – is there that match up with the commander-in-chief as a kind of a soulful I'm there with you. I want you to win?

MR. EXUM: Well, you know, I'm not going to pass judgment on the president from the junior officers of the United States military. But I think it was much appreciated,

the president's most recent trip to Bagram out there when he visited a few weeks ago. That's the type of thing that I would encourage if I were on the president's national security staff.

MR. WOODWARD: General.

LT. GEN. BARNO: I would concur. I think on the positive side, I think he's built a very good relationship with the U.S. military. I think he's respected inside the military. I think when he came into office he brought the right outlook in terms of building bridges across. And I think his visit to Dover, his visit to Arlington, his visit out with the troops on a number of occasions, what Mrs. Obama, the first lady has done, has all resonated very well inside the military.

MR. WOODWARD: But is it enough? I mean, he went to Afghanistan recently for four hours. Why not splurge and stay for eight or 12 or 16 to – you know, it's a long trip.

LT. GEN. BARNO: I think it gets to Andrew's second point, which I tend to agree with as well is that the president views the war in a sense as something he inherited, as something he wants to get rid of. But I think –

MR. WOODWARD: He does. He does.

LT. GEN. BARNO: – to do that he has to prevail. He has to ensure that our policy objectives are met and that our vital interests are protected there. And I think he's going to have to devote more attention, more focus to making sure that happens, to making sure that people under him direct that to happen.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. Good. Let's stop here and go to questions. How are we going to do this, John? We have microphones? Gordon Liddy is doing this sound system. (Laughter.) There aren't enough old people here. (Laughter.)
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MR. WOODWARD: Yes. Right. Go ahead. Here. Right here. Yes. Fine.

Q: Thank you.

LT. GEN. BARNO: You might share who you're from as well we just give us a feel for backup.

MR. WOODWARD: Yes. Stand up if you would. That would be great.

Q: Masut Aziz from Afghanistan. I like the report that is comprehensive. It is detailed and it's a welcome report. I'll pick on two issues that are critically important. One is the issues of sanctuaries, of course, that General Petraeus actually publicly has communicated about. In the report you talk – you brush over this issue.

MR. WOODWARD: Of the sanctuaries in Pakistan?

Q: Of the sanctuaries in Pakistan, the issue of the Taliban having protection, institutional protection.

MR. WOODWARD: Second point real quick because we're on the clock here.

Q: The second point is about the – so the issue of sanctuaries and what to do about it. It is broader than fighting a fight. It's really related to Pakistan's perception of India.

MR. WOODWARD: Go ahead.

Q: If we don't do that, we can't. The other one is, of course, the issue of the Afghan security forces. It's good to have a goal to build the Afghan security forces, but we shouldn't be under the illusion that eventually the Afghan security forces are going to have to be able to handle a security that has a specific regional character to it so they can't protect the border. So we should be clear about what that really means.

LT. GEN. BARNO: Yes. Let me take the first one there if I could. The report makes clear that I think we need to use the leverage we have on Pakistan more effectively. And if that means publicly, then we have to go down that road because the realities are – and Secretary Gates heard this in his recent visit to Afghanistan from American commanders up there on the border in eastern Afghanistan that the enemy comes right across the border regularly from Pakistan and attacks their outposts.

We've got to do more to help Pakistan to be able to shut that down and we've got to be able to do more to pressure Pakistan to take that action. And we've been somewhat reluctant to do that.

We've got a tremendous amount of leverage on Pakistan with the amount of aid that we're providing them, in the amount of leverage we have in other arenas and in the international financial world. We need to use it better.

MR. EXUM: Yes. And just with respect to the ANSF, the Afghan National Security Forces, I think – I don't think anybody is under the illusion that our train and equip mission for the ANSF is going to go away anytime soon. So even though, first off, over the past 24 months, really 18 months we've started to take the training of the Afghan National Army and especially the Afghan National Police seriously in a way that we haven't in the earlier phases of the conflict. That training and equipping mission is going to continue going on in the future.

MR. WOODWARD: But the president last year rejected the military's request for trying to get to 400,000 police and army, and said, we'll do a year by year quota.

MR. EXUM: Yes.

MR. WOODWARD: Is that enough? Do we still need the 400,000?

MR. EXUM: That's what's taking place right now. I mean, it depends on how you're going to do your counterinsurgency ratios. It's not an exact science how many troops you need per population. But I think you're going to see that cap steadily grow.

MR. WOODWARD: And you do say in the report the security situation for remaining U.S. forces a couple of years from now, executing their drawdown or later, those in residual force mode – I love the terminology – could become untenable. In other words, they're going to be at risk quite possibly. You say that.

LT. GEN. BARNO: Yes. The Afghan army is not to be part of the security equation here. I mean, there's no question about that. And that's one of the distinct things about this report is the amount of that residual force it's devoted to help make that army effective against the Taliban.

MR. WOODWARD: Question here. Where are the microphones? This lady here.

Q: Hi. Barbara Slavin, independent journalist. I wanted to ask you about the regional context. What are your recommendations in terms of improving U.S. relations with Iran, say trying to work with the Central Asians, to give Afghanistan alternatives beyond Pakistan in economic terms, trade terms and so on? Do you see any sign that that is actually happening? Thank you.

LT. GEN. BARNO: Yes. We talk to the importance of – particularly at the national level of using U.S. development aid to work on infrastructure development to open up Afghanistan to the potential of north-south and east-west trade. So those countries become very important.

They just recently, here in these last two weeks, signed an agreement for a pipeline from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Huge economic potential there. There's a tremendous transport potential, north-south and east-west as well.

So I think that that's got to be part of the economic equation which in many ways I think will help jumpstart Afghanistan into a different place than it is today. That's got to happen.

Quick note on Iran. Iran continues to play very much of a double game in Afghanistan. They're helpful and they're hurtful. We see reports regularly in the news of armaments and weaponry they're providing the Taliban, the same Taliban that they were absolutely the declared enemies of 10 years ago. So they're watching their interests and they're watching the U.S. involvement there very carefully.

MR. EXUM: And I'll just add to that just briefly by saying that this report that we've just written is actually part of a larger yearlong project that we have called "Beyond Afghanistan" that's been generously funded by Smith Richardson Foundation to look at our larger regional interests going beyond 2011.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. Where's the microphone? Give it to this gentleman here.

MR. EXUM: Don't give it to T.X. Hammes.

MR. WOODWARD: Yes.

MR. EXUM: Here we go.

Q: T.X. Hammes, National Defense University. Ex, you stated that the problem we've got is Pakistan's unwillingness to close the border. I might also add their capability to do so.

MR. EXUM: Yes.

Q: And second, Karzai governance.

MR. EXUM: Yes.

Q: If you look three years from now and all our wishes come true and we get the bump in the cap, we will then have an army of about 240,000 people with say 30,000 U.S. So that's 275,000 troops and they have to replace the 255,000 that are there now, the 140,000 – excuse me – they've got to replace 275,000 – 140,000 U.S. with 35,000.

MR. EXUM: The 140,000 right now. Yes.

Q: What is different? Troop numbers are less. Troop quality is significantly down. Governance isn't solved. Pakistan isn't solved. Is that worth $500 billion and 1,500 lives?

MR. EXUM: Yes, I mean, T.X., you've written very eloquently on some of the assumptions that we've gotten wrong in Afghanistan thus far. There are a lot of assumptions that you just made in that of the future scenario you just brought on that it seems that governance flat-lines, that assumes that quality of the ANSF flat-lines, that assumes that the insurgency maybe gets worse or continues along steady states. I don't think that's going to happen. I think that we can make –

MR. WOODWARD: Why? Why? But what's the evidence to refute those assumptions?

MR. EXUM: Sure. I think that, first off, I mean, there have been important – and then let me caveat this by saying that I think there have been important tactical gains in the south and the east. I'll caveat it twice.

First off, we're not going to know whether those are going to hold beyond whether there's going to be semi-permanent until probably next year because of the cyclical nature of the Afghan conflict. It's all well and good if you do well in the fall of 2009, for example,

but if the violence is up in 2010, you haven't consolidated your gains. I think we're going to have to, first off, see what kind of improvements take place.

I'm generally hopeful that we're going to continue to improve the ANSF, that we're going to continue to achieve tactical gains. Where I'm worried, and I think this comes across with what I just said, is that we're not going to make enough progress with respect to the sanctuaries and that we're not going to make enough progress with respect to governance. And what that leads to is an insurgency that's able to regenerate itself. And that is – that's one of the many spoilers that we've outlined in this report.

LT. GEN. BARNO: Well, one of the things I'd add to that is that one of the things the report suggests we're trying to do that we really haven't attempted to do before is change the strategic calculus in this part of the world, change the Pakistani calculus from one that's based upon on what will this decision look like the day after the Americans are gone?

Change President Karzai's calculus from how do I make sure I'm positioned to be in a stronger spot for when the Americans leave. Change the Taliban's calculus from we're going to run out the clock on the Americans by 2011 or 2012.

Those dynamics change if you believe there's going to be a long-term American security presence in that part of the world. And that allows some of the other factors to start moving in our favor in terms of Pakistani sanctuary, in terms of the Taliban willingness to negotiate, in terms of the Karzai government and how it views the Americans. That's part of what this intends.

MR. WOODWARD: So in a practical sense when President Obama addresses the nation on Thursday, he should do two things, perhaps step back from July 2010 and say, you know what, I'm not taking out any, not 10, not 2,500 because I think you rightly identified that is a big mistake that was made in 2004, 2005. And he should say after 2014 we're going to have some substantial commitment, at least psychologically that would send the right message as you two outline it. Is that correct?

LT. GEN. BARNO: Yes. I would agree very much with the second one for next Thursday's speech.

MR. WOODWARD: Yes.

LT. GEN. BARNO: The first one I think he should make that comment if it's appropriate next summer. I think he's got to look at things then as opposed – this early report is such a midterm incomplete on our report card. I'm not sure he came make that call.

MR. WOODWARD: But isn't there something strange about this report, this review that they're doing? He sets a policy through a very prolonged process which I and others have outlined in detail. And it's been in place for one year. Essentially he's asked to give a report card on his own strategy. And I think the likelihood of him giving a C or a B

is not there. He's going to say what Petraeus and Gates have been saying, we've been making some progress and so forth. And isn't that –

MR. EXUM: Maybe and maybe not. I think it's actually been a pretty dynamic discussion amongst various stakeholders within the U.S. government. And I think they're competing the suspense better feeding into this December review.

MR. WOODWARD: Sure, but what's going to come out of his mouth it's going to be basically optimistic, is it not?

LT. GEN. BARNO: Primarily because it's an interim report. I mean, the reality is though he may have announced his policy a year ago. It didn't actually hit the ground full force until the 1st of September, which was three months ago. So, I mean, to actually make a serious end of story report now is probably not a good – (inaudible).

MR. WOODWARD: A good point.

MR. EXUM: General Barno is correct. I mean, the surge doesn't reach its completion point until October when the 10th Mountain Division, Division Headquarters gets into Kandahar. That's when the surge begins and that was 60 days ago.

MR. WOODWARD: Two months ago. Okay. Let's go right here. Sir.

Q: Yes. Anthony Scerbo. I'm an independent analyst and also a psychological operations NCO. And I'm just wondering based on your recommendations on drawing down general purpose forces and moving toward largely special operations forces if you could expand upon what your expectations are both doctrinally and maybe at the operational and tactical levels where we're going.

LT. GEN. BARNO: If I understand your question right, I think the way I would outline it is that from a force structure standpoint we're going to shift probably about 50 percent of the force to become special operations. We detail in the report itself roughly how many Special Forces A detachments we're talking about. But basically, the guts of two Special Forces groups in Afghanistan.

I didn't get down into footprinting them out on the map sheet in terms of where they would go but they would have a role clearly in the east and in the south in Afghanistan and they would have kind of a multi-faceted role, much as they do today, both a direct action role, a foreign internal defense role and the ability to, in some cases, to do an advise of Afghan security forces.

One of the things that Andrew may talk about that he saw out there that is gaining some traction in the country is local security forces.

MR. EXUM: Yes. That's exactly what I was going to say.

LT. GEN. BARNO: I see Special Forces A detachments, a much later complement of them having a key role to play in that accelerant for the Afghan security force structure that's really been below the noise level here in the United States.

MR. EXUM: Yes. One of the things that I spent some time with General Scotty Miller and – (inaudible) – Alpha and one of the things that you hear a lot of the Special Forces officers talking about is that they're kind of dusting off the old foreign internal defense manuals and really digging into that in a way that they haven't previously in Afghanistan, arguably the Special Forces who have been in Afghanistan have maybe been too focused on direct action and now I think you see a lot of our Green Beret brothers getting back to maybe their institutional history some with foreign internal defense, with the local security forces, with village stabilization operations, et cetera.

MR. WOODWARD: Next question over here. Give it to this woman here – pass the – we only have one microphone. Are you on some budget? (Laughter.)

MR. EXUM: The short answer to that is yes.

LT. GEN. BARNO: Of course, of course.

MR. EXUM: Yes.

Q: Hi. My name is Elizabeth Cochran with the Reserve Officers Association. And speaking of budget, with all the talks about defense cuts not only here, but also with numerous allies, it seems concerning. I haven't heard any talk about budget and what effects that could have on Afghanistan because one of the biggest issues is our equipment is so overused and it's beat up, not only over there but also state side to train to prepare to go over there. And if we do have cuts, what's that going to mean if they don't have their equipment?

LT. GEN. BARNO: Well, one of the things that the report does note is that you're going to bring your force totals down from about 100,000 American forces down to 25,000 to 35,000 over the next three and a half years. That 25,000 to 35,000, it's worth remembering, is inside of an active duty force of about 1.2 to 1.4 million people.

And so the demands on the U.S. force structure, the Marines and the Army in particular, are going to go down to a level that they haven't seen since probably 2002 in Afghanistan and across the theater. So that by itself allows the force to reset and to be recapitalized back here in the United States because only a relatively small component of the force is going to be committed in this longer term strategy.

That part of the force, though, is the special operations part and the demand on them are actually going to grow I think in this shadow war that we're going to find ourselves in here for the next 10 years or beyond. And that ought to suggest to us that we might want to look at how large those forces are and what kind of capabilities we have there.

MR. WOODWARD: Do you think you understand President Obama and his priorities in all of this, because the best – from my work on this, my take is he looks at all of this as a larger project of finding money that can be shifted from – as he looks at – George Bush's wars into the domestic problems we've got here in a substantial way. And he puts the cost a year in Afghanistan I think $113 billion. You use a different number. They're all kinds of numbers. I mean, do our people really understanding and getting a grip on, Mr. President, where is your mind on this?

I just wonder if this is – I mean, there's a tone here of optimism that we can fix this. This is doable. By God, we're going to shoot to 2014. And you talk to people on the ground, as I know you have, and there's not that level of confidence that this is going to be a straight shot to 2014.

MR. EXUM: Actually, I disagree. I think that you see – and this may be more a culture of the U.S. military type of thing, but you talk to soldiers and officers and non-commissioned officers at the tactical and operational level, they're on it. There – I mean, the spirits are pretty high in some of the worst places in Afghanistan that I visited. I think the pessimism actually gets up –

MR. WOODWARD: I'm not saying the spirit's not – I'm not saying – but in terms of optimistic about the ultimate mission and accomplishing the mission?

MR. EXUM: Yes, I think the –

MR. WOODWARD: Is that new now? Two years ago, was it this –

MR. EXUM: I mean, it depends. I think first off – and there have been – it differs in a unit by unit basis. There are some units that went through a pretty torrid 2010 that were extremely difficult. I commend "The Last Patrol" which was a great article in the Atlantic a few months about an 82nd Airborne platoon on the ground in the Arghandab.

But on the other hand, I spent a day with another company on the ground in the very same Arghandab river valley where there's a tremendous amount of optimism because I think they've seen the changes.

But, again, that's all at the tactical level. I think there is more reason for strategic pessimism as you go up and maybe that explains that.

LT. GEN. BARNO: But I would also add that I was there two years ago in RC South for several days traveling all around and there was nothing like a sense of optimism at that point in time. So there's been a bit of a change from when I – (inaudible).

MR. WOODWARD: If we take that. Okay. Good. Here, in uniform.

Q: Dave Buffalo, U.S. Army. Andrew, in the report you talked about some of the challenges of reconciliation, especially with Haqqani and – (inaudible) – Taliban. But what about the issue of reintegration at the local level? I mean, in a country that doesn't have a

strong history of strong central government, all politics is local and that seems to me a key aspect of where we need to go, you know, targeting the accidental guerilla for reintegration.

MR. EXUM: Dave, that's a great question. Thank you for asking it because there is that difference between reintegration and reconciliation is not well understood. In Afghanistan we've been able to see over the course of 2010 a number of different reconciliation or – I'm sorry – reintegration opportunities present themselves.

Unfortunately, you look at the map, they seem to be quite limited. We haven't yet seen a lot of reintegration opportunities present themselves in the south and the east. Maybe that's a little bit worrying.

On the other hand, you know, positive, I think we've got a good structure that's in place now at ISAF headquarters to take advantage of those reintegration opportunities, not just within ISAF, but also within the government of Afghanistan. You've now got those –

MR. WOODWARD: Is there a lot of field work being done –

MR. EXUM: Yes, there is now.

MR. WOODWARD: Were there reintegration teams are actually out and that's their primary mission?

MR. EXUM: There is now. When they sniff an opportunity, they're on it now. There's a problem there. I mean, we have to think also strategically about it. Maybe we don't want to be going for reintegration opportunities in December because what you're doing is you're allowing, yes, come reintegrate. And they reintegrate for the winter and then going back and fight when the summer hits. Maybe we want to think about –

MR. WOODWARD: Or they're imposters.

MR. EXUM: Yes. There are. Maybe we want to think about reintegration maybe in late February.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay.

MR. EXUM: And maybe we want to have a price on it. Maybe we want to say, okay. Yes. You can come down. But, oh, by the way, we want phone numbers and names of the people who've been facilitating your operations.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. Who's got the microphone here? This gentleman with the grey hair.

Q: I'll take that as a compliment. Stu Reuter, retired Cold Warrior. I haven't devoured your report yet, but what do we make of corruption and the poppy crop both of which seem hand in glove and antithetical to what we'd like to accomplish?

LT. GEN. BARNO: Yes. That's certainly a cancerous tumor on any future of Afghanistan. And I think one of the good pieces of news in that is that, as Ex pointed out to you, Brigadier H.R. McMaster now, the man in charge of the anti-corruption effort in the ISAF headquarters, which is a pretty serious bullet to shoot against that problem. But one of the problems we have that we need to recognize and be able to do deal with is that the money we're providing is actually fueling a considerable amount of the corruption there.

And Ex actually has a chart he's about to show you here – I've seen it already today – on the issues of how much money you pour on the top of this bucket and then what that actually does to the ability of the bucket to absorb that. So I'm going to let you punch that up.

MR. EXUM: Yes. Look, this is a – let's take this as a generic international intervention, okay, time going this way along the X axis. Right here, you've got money. Typically at the beginning of the intervention, your money is the highest. That's the amount of funds that are available.

Your capacity at the beginning of an intervention means the government's ability to absorb that money is at its lowest. Your capacity goes up overtime. Your money goes down overtime.

Where you see that delta, that's where corruption takes place. I think there are a number of ways in which we're feeding the problems in Afghanistan with the tremendous amount of money we're putting into the system and we're creating a dynamic whereby the government of Afghanistan and certain insurgent groups actually have the same interests. They need this war to keep going because they're making a tremendous amount of money off of it.

We can fix that by doing things a little bit more intelligently. Just one example that I'll use, is there any congressional aides in the audience? Start taking notes now.

All over, the money that we spend in Afghanistan each year for development purposes into the next fiscal year that would help us out to a tremendous degree for Army officers in the group.

MR. WOODWARD: How much money would that be?

MR. EXUM: It depends because right now you have incentives to spend it all at the end of the fiscal year. Army officers here know what spendex is where you spend all the ammunition at the end of the fiscal year you haven't used in the previous fiscal year. The same thing in Afghanistan. It's we're putting too much unsupervised money into the system and if we can stop and think about the money that we're putting in and make sure that it's accounted for and properly overseen, I think we can crack down on the corruption to a large degree. But again, that's a negative incentive that's built into our government that's helping feed this problem.

Q: What about the poppy issue?

LT. GEN. BARNO: Yes. The counter-narcotics issue is part and parcel of the same corruption issue that we're finding that the Taliban is fueled more and more by narcotics dollars. We've, in a sense, removed that as a priority issue I think because of the near term requirements of the last two years. We're going to have to take a run on that, but I think eradication is the wrong answer. I thought that in 2005. I think that today.

What we've got to do is get at how you can build the Afghan agricultural economy in a way where you can get a guaranteed price for your product. You can get transport to market. You can get fertilizer. You can get seed. And to do those things, you're not growing poppy. That's the poppy system today, by the way.

MR. WOODWARD: And that's something the late Ambassador Holbrooke was working on very hard.

MR. EXUM: That's right. That's right. It's one of the first things he changed.

MR. WOODWARD: And people were kind of, oh, agriculture doesn't matter.

LT. GEN. BARNO: It matters.

MR. WOODWARD: Actually, it does matter. And it's kind of the lifeline for the people there, isn't it?

MR. EXUM: Certainly in the Helmand and in Kandahar. That's one of the first things that the late Ambassador Holbrooke changed when he came in a few years ago.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. How much more time do we have here?

LT. GEN. BARNO (?): About 10 minutes.

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. Sir, here. You've got the microphone?

Q: Hi. My name is Jack Bianchi and I'm with the Young Professionals in Foreign Policy. You mentioned before about Pakistan and how we need to put more pressure on them to go after the safe havens on their side of the border and you referenced some of the things that we could do very briefly. But I was wondering if you could go a little more in depth into those, what specifically the U.S. could do to put pressure on Pakistan in an effective way.

LT. GEN. BARNO: Well, perhaps two areas. One is that we have both development aid and military aid going to Pakistan in the billions of dollars per year category. That has an immense impact on Pakistan, on their government decision making. We've got to I think condition that money better than we are today. We wrote the legislation in a way that didn't require explicit conditioning of how that money was spent. That might be appropriate two years ago or so when that passed. I think we've got to get in and take a look at how we can use that money to better condition the Pakistani response.

MR. WOODWARD: But isn't it a fact that we have really not found a formula for leveraging and coercing them, whatever it might be, to do something from our point of view that makes total sense? In other words, you've got to stop. And as President Obama decided secretly last year, you know – and actually determined safe havens are no longer acceptable. Now, that's one thing to declare. To do it is another thing. But shouldn't there be – you know, as President Obama said at one of these meetings said the poison is Pakistan?

LT. GEN. BARNO: Let me make a quick point and turn to Andrew. This gets back to how the Pakistanis define their vital interests. And one of their vital interests is to make sure they're prepared for what happens next inside of Afghanistan with regard to India, with regard to instability in the region. If we change that incentive structure, if we change their calculus by committing to a long-term, enduring, smaller military presence out there, they might start re-looking that and start worrying more about the Talibanization of Pakistan which they're starting to see loom on their horizon.

MR. EXUM: Yes. I think that makes complete sense from a logical perspective. Unfortunately, if you look at the very short history of Pakistan, whenever they've come to a strategic fork in the road, more often than not they've taken the wrong fork. They've lost half of their territory through the course of their history and don't have effective sovereignty over more.

So it's a – I wish we could trust that with the proper incentive structure in place the Pakistanis would make a decision that would be in their interests. I'm not sure you can make that assumption.

MR. WOODWARD: And the question is the Pakistanis, the civilian government, the military, the intelligence service –

MR. EXUM: None of which are unitary actors, right, all of them?

MR. WOODWARD: Exactly. And where is the power?

MR. EXUM: Right.

MR. WOODWARD: And clearly the power is with the military and the intelligence service.

MR. EXUM: And factions within them.

MR. WOODWARD: Yes, unfortunately.

Over on this side here. Raise your hand. There. Right there.

Q: Gareth Porter, independent journalist. Your report asks the American people and the U.S. government to basically trust the military leadership, that you know what

you're doing and that you're confident that this is doable and everything is going to be okay.

But my question is isn't this really skipping over stages there, because we're still in a very serious aspect, phase of this conflict in which it's not at all clear that the U.S. military understands the situation in Afghanistan well enough to be able to make these sorts of claims.

There's a lot of inconsistency here on the record of the last year or year and a half between what the military leaders have said publicly about what needs to be done, what can be done and then what we find out they actually do or what their actual policies are.

A couple of examples: in the case of night raids by the special operations forces. General McChrystal in his report said this is the worst thing, the most serious problem of aggravating the feelings of Afghans against the foreign troop presence. He said it publicly as well in the early part of this year. Then, of course, we find out that he increased the number of night raids by double or tripling it and then, of course, in the present year we've seen another doubling or tripling –

MR. EXUM: Is this about night raids or civilian casualties?

Q: I'm talking about night raids. I'm talking about night raids by the special operations forces. And then there's the question of governance. Petraeus made it very clear before Kandahar that the issue is governance, that we had to put highest priority on that. Well, it turns out that's not the highest priority at all because we find out that Walid Karzai's people are the ones that we've used to go in and try to seize Arghandab and so, you know, basically there was a big shift that took place there between – or contradiction between the public and private positions. Or he changed his mind for reasons we don't understand.

My point is that there are a lot of questions here about whether the military leadership really has the understanding that would be required to ask the American people to make this kind of commitment.

MR. WOODWARD: That's a very good question.

LT. GEN. BARNO: Let me start. Number one, I would say this isn't about trust of the military leadership. Every American ought to take an active role in understanding what's going out there, making their own judgment. And they've got to look beyond just what they're hearing from the military leadership.

We obviously have a U.S. ambassador. We have a U.S. country team there. We have 1,000 American civilians who are deeply involved in the governance issues, in the civil – part of the civil-military equation in Afghanistan every day. So it's not just about listening to one individual wearing a uniform out there.

This is – and this is a – as we described in the report, a wicked problem. It is a problem whose nature changes on a regular basis. We have not helped that any by continuing to change the actors we've had in charge of the problem as we rotate commanders – we've had, by my count, six commanders in the last five and a half years. During that same period of time, four U.S. ambassadors in Kabul.

So part of what you're hearing I suspect may also have to do with the fact that we've lacked continuity, as I pointed out, in our overall effort there. But I think every American is going to have to look at this and learn and make judgments on their own. I don't think it's a matter of trusting some large hand over the map wave that getting into the details of and understanding the dynamics. That's true of the people here on Capitol Hill to the White House.

MR. WOODWARD: But what the questioner is asking is not what the citizen can understand. He's asking essentially do we know what we're doing? And I think at the root of the question is do we have the intelligence, the ground intelligence about this tribe, that group, that faction within here and at least as of six months ago we did not have it in a way that made the most optimistic committed people.

MR. EXUM: Right. Right. With Gareth's question, of course, there's kind of an undertone, a kind of antagonistic relationship with the military. You know, is the military telling us the truth. And I think the useful correction that General Barno made is that we have a civilian and military infrastructure and leadership in Afghanistan, here in Washington. This is not a civ-mil rivalry here.

The second thing is commanders on the ground in Afghanistan, diplomats on the ground in Afghanistan – I forget who the Oxford's moral philosopher was that passed away a few months ago that developed the idea of trolley problems, the idea of a trolley driver you see – you're coming up upon another trolley that's coming in the opposite direction. If you switch tracks, you're going to kill a maintenance crew.

And you have to make that very difficult decision on the ground. Commanders on the ground, whether you're talking about platoon leaders, USAID officers, diplomats, field commanders, they're making those hard calls. With respect to night raids, night raids antagonized part of the population. On the other hand, they also have been devastating on the insurgent networks. Air strikes – air strikes cause civilian casualties.

On the other hand, in some cases, they're the right answer in terms of protecting troops that are under fire. We trust our military officers. We trust our diplomats. We trust our USAID officers to make those hard decisions on the ground in Afghanistan at the tactical and operational level and we elect the leaders.

MR. WOODWARD: Let me simplify the question because I think it's about intelligence, ground intelligence. What grade would you give the ground intelligence in Afghanistan. If we went to an average battalion commander and put him on sodium pentothal and said, tell us how's your intelligence, what would they say, the average –

LT. GEN. BARNO: You compare that with 18 months ago.

MR. EXUM: Yes. I mean, the first comment that I made was when I went to Afghanistan and surveyed battalion commanders and intelligence officers 18 months ago, I thought it was quite poor. When I went back and did the same thing last week and the week before I found a dramatic improvement. I found it was quite sophisticated. So actually, you know, I'm not punting.

Gareth, quite honestly, you're going to make these decisions at the tactical and operational level in an uncertain environment and with a certain amount of – you know, to borrow our friend, Donald Rumsfeld's phrase known unknowns and unknown unknowns. But having said that, you've got to make these difficult choices and – (inaudible).

MR. WOODWARD: We have time for one more question. In the back here. Good. Either one.

Q: Thank you. Said Ashana with – (inaudible) – Afghanistan Service. My question is to you, Mr. Bob. Compared to the Pentagon and other advisers, how much influence would you say Ambassador Holbrooke had on President Obama's decisions on Afghanistan? Did he have last word with President Obama in this issue?

MR. WOODWARD: Okay. I'm going to pass on answering that and give you a copy of my book and you can read it. (Laughter.) You won't have to pay for it. Let the gentleman behind you ask the last question.

Q: Yes. Thank you. Alexis Billow, graduate student at Johns Hopkins SAIS. Quick question and perhaps a good last question: what about negotiations? Seventy-three percent of the Afghan population would be in favor of a negotiated settlement even if it involves Taliban returning to government positions. So what about a negotiated outcome?

MR. EXUM: Sure. Yes. Two days ago I sat in a living room in Kabul and listened to two of the most well respected civilian researchers on Afghanistan, both of whom speak Dari, both of whom have spent years in Afghanistan. And one of them very pointedly told me that you have to negotiate with the Taliban. There are people you can negotiate with. And as soon as she said that, the very next researcher said, no, I don't think that's true. I don't think you have people within the Taliban and the Haqqani Network that you can negotiate with.

So having said that, that's a topic on which, you know, a lot of reasonable people disagree. There was a letter that was published I think just a few days ago, a bunch of prominent academics and experts on Afghanistan telling President Obama that you must negotiate with the insurgency. I turned that around and said, yes, send that similar letter to the head of the ISI, the presidents of Afghanistan and Pakistan, to Tajik, Uzbek, Kazakh leaders in Afghanistan.

Quite frankly, it's a lot like telling President Obama fix the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. Well, you know, local leaders on the ground have to move first. There has to be willingness

on both sides to negotiate with. I'm not sure personally that even if we decided we wanted to talk to the Taliban there would be a lot of willingness on the other side to talk to us.

MR. WOODWARD: But isn't that our ticket out ultimately?

LT. GEN. BARNO: I take some issue with that. I think in my view, if you're going to negotiate and you're going to negotiate with an objective of trying to achieve some if not most of your objectives, then you have to have leverage in that negotiation. Right now, the U.S. certainly a year ago, six months ago the U.S. had little to no leverage in that discussion.

And I think we should also keep in mind as Americans that negotiations are not a microwave sport. Negotiations take years. The history of all recent negotiations I can think of over the last 30 or 40 years have two, three, four, five year long efforts. During that time where your leverage is around that negotiation table, where your leverage is on the battlefield makes an immense difference. We haven't gotten quite to the point of having the leverage we need yet.

MR. WOODWARD: And that's why Richard Holbrooke was in this fight, because he believed that if he ever got that leverage, it got to the table, then the ability which he is a really genius negotiator in Dayton for the Bosnia accords showed that he would be able to solve that problem.

Anyway, thanks for a great report. You taught me that it was Thucydides who said wars are fought for three reasons, fear, honor and interests. I think you have addressed all of them in your report. Thanks.

MR. EXUM: Thanks. (Applause.)

(END)