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WAR WITHOUT END: COUNTERTERRORISM IN AFGHANISTAN
AND PAKISTAN

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WAR WITHOUT END: COUNTERTERRORISM IN AFGHANISTAN
AND PAKISTAN

(9:45 a.m.)

ADMIRAL OLSEN: Good morning. Good morning. Good morning, everybody. I am Eric Olsen, a former commander of the United States Special Operations Command, and it's my pleasure to introduce what is now the first session of the day. I'll begin by piling on my respect for the Aspen Security Forum and for the initiative and the leadership of Walter Isaacson and Clark Erwin. And I'm also proud to serve as a member of the Aspen Institute Homeland Security Group, co-chaired by Jane Harman and Michael Chertoff.

This session is titled *War Without End: Counter Terrorism in Afghanistan and Pakistan*. Before there was an ISIL in Iraq and Syria, before Al-Qaeda and ISIL subscriber groups in Iraq, the Maghreb, the Sahel, and elsewhere, the nexus of terrorism was the troubled region of the Durand Line, the poorest frontier boundary that separates Afghanistan and Pakistan. This area was, is, and will remain a focus of significant attention in the fight against a resilient Al-Qaeda, a resurgent Taliban, and an evermore dispersed ISIL.

This promises to be a fascinating panel featuring a prestigious trio of expert diplomats, and introducing them is Kimberly Dozier, who is well-known to this audience. Tough, scrappy --

(Laughter)

ADMIRAL OLSEN: -- thoughtful, always engaged at the core of the issues, Kim has reported for over 25 years on matters of global importance. In 2006, as I know many of you know, as a CBS reporter, with three years already in Iraq, Kim was critically injured in a car bomb attack that killed four other of her team. She chronicled her discovery in a book, *Breathing the Fire: Fighting to Survive and Get Back to the Fight*. And she came back strong. Her journalism has earned her many awards, including the prestigious Edward R. Murrow Award, a

Peabody Award, and three Gracie Awards for Women in Journalism. Her support of military-related charities has made a real difference where it really counts. She is currently a contributing writer to *The Daily Beast* and a contributor to CNN. Please give a warm welcome to Kim Dozier and our panel.

(Applause)

MS. DOZIER: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you, Admiral Olsen and thank you to Walter, Clark, and the Aspen Security Forum for continuing to have this panel every year for seven years. I have seen it go up and down in terms of importance, but it's still here. Now let me explain to you who these people are. You know some of them by reputation. I'll start at the far end with Ambassador Ryan Crocker. Now he's right now at Texas A&M University as Dean and Executive Professor of the George Bush School of Government and Public Service. But he was also Ambassador to Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Kuwait and Lebanon over the years.

Next to him is a man we're very lucky to have here, Ambassador Hamdullah Mohib, of Afghanistan. His wife let him escape, even though he has a brand new baby at home who is about a week old. So thank you very much.

(Applause)

MS. DOZIER: A son. And then we have Mr. Rizwan Sheikh, the Deputy Chief of Mission of the Embassy of Pakistan, in Washington, D.C. And he was also the first spokesman for the organization of Islamic cooperation. So he is used to tough questions in the Q&A portion. Remember that.

With that, now I wanted to start with the fact that, you know, every time we turn away from the region of Afghanistan and Pakistan dire things happen. After the Soviet Union left Afghanistan, U.S. and Western attention turned away, we had the rise of the Taliban, the rise of Al-Qaeda, the attacks of 9/11. The U.S. went back in, so did NATO. There was a recovery of the country and a formation of a mostly democratic government. U.S.

attention went to Iraq. The Taliban rose again.

We had the Obama surge of troops. The Taliban were driven back. Then we had a handover to the Afghan government, and the Taliban have come back again. The most recent report, as of this week, they got back 5 percent of the country, so the Afghan government controls about 65 percent of the country, and it's a tough fight for the rest of it.

I wanted to start there, but these gentlemen would like to start with the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which is much misunderstood, and over breakfast they explained to me that actually they talk a lot. And where does that conversation go? Why don't you guys kick off?

MR. SHEIKH: Well, thank you Kim, and through you, to the Aspen Forum, for having us all at this panel on such an important issue as you've already mentioned. Well, Afghanistan and Pakistan have a longstanding relationship. It's a relationship that has historical, geographical, economic, social, ethnic, and security imperatives. So it is an essential relationship. It has been there and it is going to continue. I think Ambassador would certainly bear me out on that.

Well, there are issues in the relationship, the way that would be there in any relationship. They may appear maybe pronounced. The best way to understand it is that historically, not just for the last four decades that international attention is there on our part of the world, South Asia, and broadly has been -- it can be best understood, has been narrated and perhaps would continue to be described in a security idiom. We are in a security forum, so that is where these issues may appear more pronounced, or more, because of the security implications for each country in the region, each of the constituent countries in South Asia. Since it has security implications, so they appear to be differences that are from a distance unsurmountable, but we keep talking.

Pakistan and Afghanistan have been engaged in dialogue even before, you know, on so many issues even

before the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan. So it's a historical trend and a continuation of history, based on a geographical and security imperative that is bound to continue. That's how it should be understood, and we can go into specifications.

MS. DOZIER: And yet it is a troubled relationship. Your two countries recently came to blows at the Torkham border crossing. Pakistan is about to eject 1.5 million Afghans back to Afghanistan. You have accused each other of supporting militant groups that go into each other's countries and cause great violence, kill a number of people. How do you get past that? And where is that relationship right now?

MR. SHEIKH: Well we have gotten past even more difficult times in history. You used the word "eject" for 1.5 million Afghan refugees in Pakistan. They have been -
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MS. DOZIER: I'm a journalist. We always use the worst words.

MR. SHEIKH: I'm --

(Laughter)

MR. SHEIKH: I am a diplomat and we choose our words carefully.

(Laughter)

(Applause)

MR. SHEIKH: But Pakistan has hosted over 3 million Afghan refugees for almost four decades now. And it has taken a heavy toll on a country which is already facing a resource crunch. We have a high population density. We are the sixth largest country in the world. And it is certainly drawing on our resources. So it is not to eject or to talk of you know sending them back abruptly, but there is this imperative, and we are talking about security. We have, as you have mentioned, the two sides blaming each other of supporting this and supporting

that, and people crossing borders. Then in the presence of 3 million refugees, in the presence of borders which are not controlled as any border would be controlled, you cannot discuss security. So those issues have to be there.

We have started discussing those with our Afghan brothers and partners. Only three days ago on the 26th of July there was a meeting in Kabul to discuss border issues between the two countries. So we are past that phase of accusations as you have mentioned and we basically now -- we are sitting down to discuss matters threadbare and find solutions.

MS. DOZIER: Ambassador Mohib, you worked for President Ghani as his aide before taking this current position. He said some strong things about Pakistan in recent months, saying that they've got to get more serious about fighting all militant groups. How are the discussions going?

MR. MOHIB: Well, let me first say it's great. I'm grateful to be here. Thank you for giving us this opportunity. I see a lot of friends of Afghanistan, a lot of friendly faces. It's wonderful to see so many people who know so much about my country and have been involved, and we appreciate all your efforts.

To come to the more specific relationship with Pakistan, I think the people-to-people relationship has always been there. It's very historic and it always will be. When it comes to state-to-state relationship, it is slightly complicated and difficult. And we have stated since this new government, national unity government was formed, the President has clearly said, and this was not refuted by the Pakistani authorities government, and military, that there has been an undeclared state of hostility towards Afghanistan.

Some of those policies are extremely outdated and we would want them to be revised. So we have begun an outreach to the Pakistani administration, including civilians and the military, to revise what the status is. And so it's a process that has gone through its ups and

downs.

But you mentioned, and Mr. Rizwan mentioned, the security implications. I think the word militancy was mentioned. Every country has its criminals and it has its political opposition. We are a democracy. Thankfully we have a democracy that has survived the test of time, survived the test of transition, and most democracies, that is the biggest test. If it manages to pass on power to the next elected administration, that's when we know that it has the roots. And otherwise it will continue to remain that dictatorship, and people participate in parliamentary election and presidential elections. When the political opposition and criminals find safe havens, find logistical networks, and funding sources, and the ideological support elsewhere outside, they take upon.

MS. DOZIER: By "elsewhere," do you mean in the territory of the gentleman sitting next to you?

MR. MOHIB: Across the Durand Line. And we mentioned that there might be the Durand Line, and the refugees, I think that's detracting from the actual issue. Refugees, we have accepted about 4 million refugees back into Afghanistan, repatriated over the past 14 years, and more of them are coming in every day, each day.

The government is working hard to make sure that every Afghan who wants to return to Afghanistan has that opportunity. And more of them would come in the coming years, but it's never the crossing of the border that was the issue. The militants or the leadership has been in cities in Pakistan, not just on the border they're crossing. They're raising money, openly fund resources in Pakistani cities in Karachi, for example, and with the guard or watch of the Pakistani military or security establishment.

So the issue here is: How do we address that State-to-State relationship with Pakistan, where we see this common threat? This is a threat to our people and to the Pakistani people, and terrorism across, and the region, and the world. How do we address that issue and beat that?

MS. DOZIER: And I've heard from Pakistani diplomats that they believe militant groups are sheltering your country. Mr. Rizwan, how do you answer that? Before we go to Ambassador Crocker.

MR. SHEIKH: Well, you've partly answered that that there is this belief or blame game on both sides that has been going on for a while. We have militants who have managed major attacks in Pakistan, including the army public school attack, where over 140 children lost their lives. And we, as a nation, have learned the hard way that the smallest coffins are the heaviest to carry, and we have suffered the most in this war against terror.

So doubting our commitment as a nation and a country which itself is the biggest victim of terrorism in any way that we are not sincere or we have certain things up our sleeves is rather unfortunate. And we basically need to get beyond this blame game and sit down, discuss these issues candidly with each other, and find solutions. Because there is this belief, I mean people are there in Afghanistan, who have claimed responsibility of attack on (inaudible), of attack on the Charsadda Educational Institution, and similar institutions.

So we have to, as a country -- I mean I remember, as you have mentioned, that I was the spokesman of OIC. The former secretary general of OIC, just a small anecdote, shared once with me his personal opinion. He said, "Well your country is in a difficult situation, being in between this war, stuck in this war. If Taliban settles a score with America, your country suffers. If America settles a score with Pakistan, your country suffers." So we are a victim of terrorism. And doubting our intention in any way that we are not sincere, nobody has the stronger or the strongest motivation on this account than Pakistan, because we have suffered, and we continue to suffer on a daily basis in a war which is not of our making. That's important.

MS. DOZIER: So may I remind everyone that they asked me to start with this question.

(Laughter)

MS. DOZIER: And -- well--

MR. MOHIB: That doesn't mean -- let me just address that point. It's beyond blame games. All right? Where was Bin Laden found?

MS. DOZIER: And --

MR. MOHIB: Fact. Where was Mullah Mansoor, the head of the Taliban? Where was Mullah Umar, the head of the Taliban? Where is Quetta Shura? It's not on the Durand Line. It is in Quetta, a city. The Peshawar Shura is in a city. Now we don't doubt the intentions of, or we don't doubt what is being said. I think all the right things are being said. What we are waiting for is action.

Now on the Afghan side, we do not take any terrorists. We think they're a threat to the world, not just to us. We put ourselves on the line and make sure we target any terrorist who would bring harm to anyone, Afghan, Pakistanis, or anywhere in the world. We do not tolerate them. What we are asking for is to do the same, reciprocate that, and the Pakistani side, to not tolerate, not give them the sanctuaries, not provide them with the logistics that --

MS. DOZIER: And I have to interject. The Pakistani military has taken me to the border areas to show me their counter-insurgency program. I want to turn to Ambassador Crocker. It used to be your job to get -- we have now seen what divides them. It used to be your job to get the two sides to talk to each other. How did you?

(Laughter)

MR. CROCKER: I -- it kind of goes like this. It's a --

(Laughter)

MR. CROCKER: I had the privilege of being the

American ambassador to both Pakistan and Afghanistan, so I can literally see both sides of the line. Let me stress though that unlike my two colleagues here, I do not represent my government. You can actually tell that by looking at me. Not only am I not wearing a tie. I'm not even wearing socks.

(Laughter)

MR. CROCKER: So the opinions I express are my own. I would take this back to where you started, Kim. The anti-Soviet jihad, which we organized, along with Pakistan, it was staged out of Pakistan's northwest frontier, and it was successful, but then once the Soviets were defeated, we decided we were done. We could see the Afghan Civil War coming. The mujahidin groups would turn on each other when they didn't have a common Soviet enemy to focus on, but we didn't care. It wasn't going to be our problem.

And on the way out, we completely degraded a relationship with Pakistan, which had been our most allied of allies, and became, as we discussed this morning, our most sanctioned of allies, or even adversaries. And the rest, as they say, is history. The Civil War led to the rise of the Taliban, the Taliban hosted Bin Laden, and that was the road to 9/11.

So I would argue that yeah, it may seem like an endless war, but you know far better to be fighting it somewhere other than New York City, and Washington D.C., and Pennsylvania. We've got to commit for the long haul here, and it will be a long haul. I think the stage is well set. We've got a force level that will maintain just under 9,000, through this administration. The next President will have something to start with. And we've got to work with both governments, both militaries, both countries, and we've got to do it over the long haul. Yes, it's going to take money, it's going to take resources, but we have to make that commitment. We've seen this movie before. I don't want to watch it again.

MS. DOZIER: And with that, lets pivot to something that I know you both agree on, which is

President Obama's moves and NATO's moves to continue to shore up the Afghan National Army, and the efforts to fight the Taliban and the rise of ISIS. Are the troop levels that the U.S. is committed to and the engagement, plus the NATO commitment to train through 2020, is it enough to turn things around?

MR. MOHIB: Well, I would say let's begin on why the United States and the international community went into Afghanistan in the first place. Now it was not to fight an internal militancy. It was to fight international terrorism. And that terrorism continues to exist in one form or another. Now the names may change, but the ideology is there. We never talk about how much international assistance or what are the numbers required to provide assistance to beat that international terrorism.

It's the level of activities by the terrorists that would define what numbers are required. For the time being, this is their appropriate number, this is the number that was, or the numbers that came out of the assessments, or joint assessments, Afghanistan and the United States, that this was required. And this may vary in the future. We have a bilateral security agreement, where we both have mutual responsibilities. We are doing our bit and the international community provides support where it sees fit.

I think Warsaw, what we saw in Warsaw, with NATO, was extremely important, because I think there was a notion that people are perhaps exhausted in Afghanistan, and perhaps they're not seeing results, which was proven wrong, and NATO continues to see, in that there is importance to maintain fighting terrorism in Afghanistan, with the Afghans, and sees the Afghanistan as a credible partner, the Afghan State, and fighting what is a common threat to all of us.

And I want to address this point to Mr. Rizwan's point earlier. When an attack happened in Peshawar on children, we cried with the Pakistanis. We didn't take that lightly. And we just last week -- recently the president ordered the -- when we found that the person who

was involved was targeted inside Afghanistan, we have not seen -- that's exactly what we're expecting to see there.

MS. DOZIER: So you targeted the person that you believe who was responsible for that school attack?

MR. MOHIB: For that attack. You know, as soon as we found -- and whenever there is any terrorist, like I said, if we had -- we do not tolerate it. And that's the point I wanted to make earlier, that that's the expectation that we have of our Pakistani counterparts too, to reciprocate.

MS. DOZIER: And was that appreciated on your side?

MR. SHEIKH: It was certainly appreciated, but he was just one of the accomplices. The major person, Mullah Fazlullah, the guy, which reminds us of the Swat operations, he was the --

MS. DOZIER: Mullah Fazlullah is also on the U.S. targeting list. And the U.S., just to remind everyone, because most of us were here yesterday, General John Nicholson gave his first press conference since taking the position as Head of U.S. Forces, Afghanistan, and he said that since the gloves have come off on U.S. operations, together with the Afghans, they have cut in half the number of ISIS fighters in part of the country. And Ambassador Crocker, you were also talking earlier today about some of the advances. So one has to think that person is on the targeting list, and if the U.S. can't get them -- there's a question of capacity, just like on the Pakistan side, it's a vast area to patrol.

MR. SHEIKH: There are capacity issues. There are issues of impact as well. You know, Pakistan has suffered, as I've already said the most in this war on terror. And recently, since we had this major security operation in Zarb-e-Azb, which may not be the largest, it perhaps is the largest security anti-terror operation anywhere in the world, but it is certainly the most successful one. 185,000 of our troops were deployed in that area, in an otherwise difficult security situation in

our region. You know, on the situation on our eastern borders, it has a history. But the fact remains that since we have taken security a notch up, increasingly soft targets are being hit in Pakistan. And now we have to take calibrated steps in terms of looking at the blowback.

Hence, the insistence on first securing our borders, first getting the issue of, you know, refugees resolved. Look at the ideology. It's a franchise, as Ambassador has mentioned, that it can take different shapes. Al-Qaeda, Taliban, ISIS, those are different names. But you're playing into the hands of those people's ideology by not securing borders, because they think the world is borderless, and they can go anywhere.

So you have to counter that ideology by securing your borders in the first instance, and Pakistan wants to consolidate the gains made in Zarb-e-Azb operation, and we are well within our right to do that. We believe that our Afghan friends understand that, and hence we are having this discussion on how to go about managing it in a consensual fashion, while --

MS. DOZIER: So --

MR. MOHIB: I must address that. The difficult conversations are not the reason not to have a conversation. That's exactly why we need to have conversations, state-to-state conversations, on how to address issues, whether they're perceived or real. So we could make that distinction between those threats that are evaluated. Now when it comes to, again, terrorism, it kills us both on both sides, absolutely, and we appreciate that the Pakistanis administration took action against elements in the Taliban and during the Zarb-e-Azb operation.

But the distinction should end. There should be no distinction between good and bad terrorists. There are no good or bad terrorists. They targeted the ones that were affecting Pakistan, but not the ones that are targeting Afghans. And again, it's not a border issue. It's not an issue on the line. They're fund-raising their hospitals. They're in the cities. They're in Pakistan,

and, again, those are the ones that we need to be (inaudible).

MS. DOZIER: And this is a point that you made once before, so I'm going to move us onto the question of -- I can see the differences that divide you.

MR. MOHIB: Yeah.

MS. DOZIER: And we've talked about how both countries -- it's arguable that one has suffered more than the other. Both countries are suffering from terrorism. There was an attempt at peace talks with the Taliban. And my question is: Where does that stand, now that Mullah Mansoor was taken out by a U.S. drone strike in Baluchistan, which your country has criticized. Is there a way to get back to peace talks after that has happened? And also, is there a way to get back to peace talks when the existence of ISIL horizon gives the right wing fringe of the Taliban somewhere else to go if they don't want to negotiate? Ambassador Crocker?

MR. CROCKER: Well, I do not think the circumstances are conducive to a successful negotiation. Not before Mohammad Akhtar Mansoor, and not after. There is going to have to be a change in conditions on the ground before I think the Taliban will be ready to negotiate seriously. I think the quadripartite structure is good. I think it's particularly good that China is at the table. They have major interests in South Asia that they often have not acted to protect, including stability and security in Pakistan and Afghanistan. So the mechanism is right; the circumstances are not. That's why our continued engagement I think is very, very important to not only show our Afghan and Pakistani friends that we're in this for the long run; to show the Taliban we're not going away.

One of the most important things we did in the last couple of months was to change our rules of engagement, particularly for our air support. We now will use close air support in support of Afghan offensive operations, not just defensive. And that is already making a difference in the southwest. So we, Afghanistan,

Pakistan, all need to change the conditions on the ground in a way that will persuade the Taliban that there is no military victory for them. They're going to have to talk it out.

MS. DOZIER: But you're also arguing for a long term presence there, ala Korea, Germany, where there's just going to be a long-term US NATO presence ad infinitum?

MR. CROCKER: You know, who knows. I think Hamdullah said it very well. This should not be about calendars. It should be about conditions, that the size and the nature of our military presence should depend on conditions, nothing else. That will be a multiyear process. Is it going to be a 30-year process? Who knows? But we need to be focused on conditions, not calendars.

MS. DOZIER: Ambassador Mohib, do you think the peace talks with the Taliban are worth revisiting?

MR. MOHIB: Well, we have to distinguish between those who do want talks. There are political elements. Those with political grievances, who may want to talk, and those that the government would be --

MS. DOZIER: And you're Afghan intelligence service has been trying to divide and conquer among the different groups, hasn't it?

MR. MOHIB: It's not about the divide and conquer. It's about distinguishing between which Taliban are ready for peace talks. And those who do not want to talk, do not want to want peace. The criminals who benefit from the insecurity in the region and the terrorists, those as defined in the quadrilateral process, agreed to by all four countries, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and the United States, that action would be taken against a irreconcilables. What do we do with those? You cannot talk to those who do not want to talk, who are a terrorist, who want to continue the war, instability. We have to target, and I think again action was not taken against every irreconcilable. Those commitments that were made in the quadrilateral process to take action against

the irreconcilables, to evict them, were not done. So there will be a process. We have to identify who are willing to talk, and our doors are always open to those.

MS. DOZIER: Mr. Sheikh, your thoughts? And your senior leaders were quite angry about -- they thought they could've worked with Taliban leader Mullah Mansoor, and they're not so sure about the current one.

MR. SHEIKH: Well we have to look at a slightly -- history one year before. It is not the first time that such a thing has happened. Even last year there was a sincere effort by Pakistan to bring Taliban in (inaudible) talks to the table, and it started but suddenly the death of Mullah Mansoor was announced, and the process was jeopardized.

Again, as part of this QCG understanding, there was sincere effort on the part of Pakistan to bring Taliban on the table, and then we had this drone strike. Now we have had a lot of kinetic and action in that part of the world. Had it been in terms of taking, had it been that simple, that if you take one or the other figure out in this war on terror, things would have been solved much earlier. Peace needs to be afforded a chance. Things have to be discussed on table. There is sincerity in the QCG process, we believe, and it has to be given its time. We have seen 15 years of kinetic action.

MS. DOZIER: So you haven't given up either. And before I turn to --

MR. SHEIKH: But it will be difficult, of course, to revive it after it has taken this setback. But sincere efforts on the part of Pakistan, as well as -- I'm sure that the most important thing in this whole equation has to come from Afghanistan itself, because it is the government in Afghanistan that has to determine what incentives it can offer to the people on the table. And they would count very much towards determining the future in this equation.

MS. DOZIER: So before I pivot to questions from the audience I had wanted to ask you about U.S-Pakistani

relations. They haven't been great of late. There was a disagreement over whether to fund UF16 program. And there was this particular complaint that, to some of the other comments here, Pakistan turns a blind eye to some terrorists within its midst. Recently the leader of Lashkar-e-Taiba, who has a \$10 million State Department reward on his head, was allowed to go free, and lives openly -- the AP sat down and had an interview with him at his home. So there is this dichotomy. How do you explain that?

MR. SHEIKH: Well Pakistan and U.S. have a long-standing relationship. It has been a result-oriented relationship. A number of foreign policy achievements that the U.S. had since the Second World War. Your relations with China, the jihad in Afghanistan --

MS. DOZIER: But so why not turn over somebody who has a \$10 million bounty on his head?

MR. SHEIKH: No, it's -- you know, it is in accordance with the international law. If you're referring to Hafiz Saeed, he is sanctioned under 1267, the Resolution 1267 coming from United Nations, which includes a travel embargo, which includes freedom of movement, and other things, but detention is not a part of it. He was detained for other reasons, and it has to be court procedures that have to be followed in Pakistan, but Pakistan is certainly meeting its international obligations, in terms of the resolution, the governing resolution, 1267, when it comes not only to Hafiz Saeed, but all the other sanctioned entities and individuals under that framework.

MS. DOZIER: With that, does anyone else have some tough questions for the panel? They're shy.

MR. SHEIKH: Please don't be shy.

MS. DOZIER: Yes. Looking for hands up. Sir, Mr. Ambassador. The microphone is almost there.

MR. WESTMACOTT: Thank you, Kim. Somebody had to put the hand up. Fascinating discussion. Peter

Westmacott, used to be a British ambassador here. I wanted to ask a little bit about what it would take to make the reconciliation process work? You've all been talking about what the obstacles are at the moment. Kim, you mentioned that you thought the Taliban had control of 65% of Afghanistan's territory, which is a lot. I hadn't realized it was quite so much. Clearly, if there's going to be a solution, they're going to have to be brought in, but what would it take in order for the Taliban to agree, or the ones who you can talk to in the Taliban, to agree to lay down their arms and become part of a political process? And is whatever it is that they would need something that the Afghanistan government will feel able to give? Thank you.

MS. DOZIER: And just one quick correction. 65.6% of the country is under Afghan government control, which is down from 70% in January. Sorry.

MR. MOHIB: We have to go to what control means. I've witnessed the Taliban administration. The country was a ghost town. Everybody left. If you're calling controlling a desert, then yes, maybe; controlling a mountain, sure. No people in it. When governance is a different -- a different issue, and that they need to be able to bring to the table. Those who want to talk -- again, we'll get back to that point. Those who are reconcilable, and who are willing to negotiate, if this is what they're asking for, if there are political grievances, and they want to talk and be included, the government has had its doors open always.

Now is the issue with the Taliban or are there issues with -- again, we can keep coming back to it, but that is the fundamental question, and that's why I wanted to identify between a militancy and terrorism. And the fact that the ideological basis continued to be in -- the madrasas in Pakistan continue to be function that provides recruiting grounds for the Taliban. It's never going to end while the criminals and those who are invested in this war continue to want to keep instability. Those who do, do come to the government, and we continue to keep talking, and those doors are always going to be open. Peace is our utmost priority. Those who do not want peace

and want to terrorize our people, and those of our partners, and kill us and our partners, then Afghanistan will have to fight.

MS. DOZIER: Sir, in the blue shirt.

MR. RISHIKOF: Harvey Rishikof, with the American Bar Association and Crowell Moring. I guess my question is, we know we're going to have a new administration, and you have a lot of experience on the panel, what would be the top three pieces of advice you would give to a new U.S. administration? And Ambassador Crocker has emphasized the notion of conditions over calendars. He's also famous for the concept of strategic patience. So I'm curious as to what you three would say to the new president?

MR. CROCKER: Well, let me start. My three pieces of advice would be: Engage, engage, engage. The perception throughout the region is that the -- and I was just in Jordan last week -- is that the US has fundamentally disengaged all the way across the region. And this process of disengagement has not gone well, not for the region, not for us. When I left Iraq as ambassador in 2009 it was a period of general stability and a fair amount of optimism. Then we decided we were done.

So the space we once worked with the Iraqis to control is now held by Islamic State in one sector and by Iranian-backed Shia militias in another. Could it have happened anyway? Yes, of course, it could. But we've seen an unprecedented period of turmoil throughout the broader Middle East during an unprecedented time of U.S. engagement. So that would be my message for the next administration.

MS. DOZIER: Ambassador Mohib?

MR. MOHIB: I'm in no position to advise the American administration.

MR. CROCKER: Oh, go ahead.

(Laughter)

MR. MOHIB: From our perspective, Afghanistan has come a long way. I think people do not realize, because the snippets of news headlines cover mostly what is happening on the security front, it doesn't take into account the amount of progress Afghanistan has made. It's not the Afghanistan of 2001. We have a 135 universities and institutes of higher education alone, over 7,000 kilometers of road was paved. We have schools, 4 million children going to school.

This is a population that is extremely grateful to the achievements that we have made over the past 15 years. And our security forces are today fighting in a combat role to prevent terrorism from again taking root in our country, so that they no longer have a base in Afghanistan or a safe haven in our country. It's a country that has come a long way, and is a credible partner in both fighting terrorism, but also in economic development in the region, and bringing stability to the region. So I think for us to turn our backs to the achievements that we have made, or the investment, may not be the right approach. I think we need to invest and keep our investments.

MS. DOZIER: So to the next administration, don't forget Afghanistan again. And Mr. Sheikh?

MR. SHEIKH: Well if a former ambassador and a serving ambassador are not in a position to advise the U.S. government, a DCM should not be expected. But still, I mean from our perspective, we would also want the U.S. to build on the longstanding relationship that we have between our two countries, and stay engaged in the region, of course.

Of course, we both need both U.S. and Pakistan in this relationship, need to draw lessons from the past, and not to repeat certainly the mistakes that might have been committed earlier is what can be said. And also to perhaps remember in this country, whether it is the administration, or whether it is academia, or any discourse on our region, that history basically didn't

start at 9/11. It was a turning point, but there has to be a larger broader view of history.

And we need to look at all issues, all the context, the sociological, economic, political, security aspects, all the facets in dealing with the situation in South Asia, and ensuring stability and progress, economic progress in that region with all countries partnering, and nudging and furthering that economic relationship. It's a region full of potential by the way. Only the negative side has been exposed so far to the world. But we are a region full of potential, and that can only be tapped through international partnership.

MS. DOZIER: I'm afraid we actually only have a minute-and-half left now. So I warned you guys I would do a lightning-round last question of 30 seconds each. Why should the U.S. continue to invest in your region after so many billions have been spent? I'll start with you.

MR. SHEIKH: Well, because the situation in the region, in particular, the war on terror, the topic that we are discussing today impacts the larger world. So that is why it is imperative on the part of the international community, the U.S., in particular, which has had a history of playing a role in that region, to ensure and play its role in stabilizing and ensuring that the region is on the path of economic progress.

MS. DOZIER: Ambassador?

MR. MOHIB: We live in a globalized world. Afghanistan and the United States have shared interests. While we talk about fighting shared threats, we have a lot of shared interests. And to further those interests, I think it's important that we continue to engage. It's a two-way process. I think Afghanistan has, like I've mentioned earlier, come a long way.

We are realizing that potential even with, I think we focused a lot of security in Pakistan, but we recently signed the TAPI, the Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, India pipeline. We just inaugurated CASA-1000, which will be transmitting electricity from Central

Asia to South Asia. Afghanistan is shaping itself into becoming what we always envision as a roundabout for South and Central Asia, to be a land bridge connecting --

MS. DOZIER: Back to the Silk Road.

MR. MOHIB: Back to the Silk Road, back to playing its traditional strategic role in the region, and bringing stability and economic development to that region.

MS. DOZIER: So you're saying that eventually it's going to be worth the investment?

MR. MOHIB: It is worth it, and it's already proving -- think we don't have enough time to talk about that, but we have -- if anyone has those questions, more than happy to answer. It has paid off, those investments, very close to achieving the self-reliance goal. Yeah.

MS. DOZIER: Ambassador Crocker?

MR. CROCKER: I would agree with both of my colleagues, but I would say something slightly different as well. This is about America's national security. We disinvested in Afghanistan and Pakistan after the Soviet defeat. That led to the Afghan Civil War, the rise of the Taliban, the introduction of Al-Qaeda, and ultimately 9/11. We don't need to go through that again. For what I think are manageable levels of investment, we can sustain a path towards stability and ultimately development in this vital region, but fundamentally it's about American national security.

MS. DOZIER: Thank you for a spirited discussion, and thank you everyone.

(Applause)

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