

TRANSCRIPT

"THE AMERICAN LEGACY IN AFGHANISTAN"

A Conversation With Anand Gopal and David Sedney

Moderator: Steve Coll

ANNOUNCER:

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STEVE COLL:

Good evening everybody. Hello and welcome. I am-- your eager moderator, Steve Coll and-- from Columbia University and also-- involved with the U.S. programs (UNINTEL) here at Open Society and-- very pleased to be a part of this tonight, because we have-- two-- really thoughtful-- individuals, one a journalist, the other a-- career diplomat and-- policy maker across-- a number of ad-- administrations. And-- both have spent-- you know, quite a lot of time in Afghanistan on the ground-- across different eras of-- the country's experience of international interventions since 2001, and have-- very hard-won, and I think, very well-grounded perspectives-- that will probably partially overlap and partially differ, but will be very valuable to hear.

You-- you're hear under the rubric of the American legacy in Afghanistan and I think that's what our two speakers will address in their initial remarks. But-- I hope will range far and wide in our conversation as we go along. And-- and in particular I want to mentions Anand's-- new book-- the title of which is *No Good Men--*

MALE VOICE:

You should have-- you should have this--
(OVERTALK)

STEVE COLL:

--*No Good Men Among the Living*. (LAUGH) And-- I noticed it on a table outside. And of course, I'm sure some of you are here because you already know that Anand is-- has been one of the most-- intrepid and original-- reporters in Afghanistan over the last-- five or ten years. He-- traveled with the Taliban-- successfully-- and voluntarily. And-- spent a lot of time in-- Kandahar and other parts of southern Afghanistan and central Afghanistan that were generally inaccessible to international reporters.

And-- more than his intrepidity-- is the depth of his analytical work and his thinking and his-- and his research, which really-- veers into scholarship in many cases. The-- the papers he's done about the complexity of the origins of the Taliban and-- and the sort of political-social mapping of Kandahar-- you know, really are beyond journalism in a lot of ways and more in scholarship and ethnography.

And in David's case-- I don't know how much you'll hear from him, but-- he was-- sent to-- Kabul as a-- as a diplomat very early-- in the period after Operation Enduring Freedom. Essentially helped to open up-- the decrepit American embassy that had been mothballed in the late-1980s in Kabul. And-- and through a whole series of-- roles and iterations from that initial deployment-- right through to-- shaping policy at the-- at the Pentagon and in the inner (?) agency setting-- has had a long and a very, as I say, grounded, independent minded experience of Afghanistan throughout.

And-- and I find him a very-- sort of forthright-- and committed-- diplomat, not-- somebody who was trying to polish his career all along, but just trying to do the job and to-- and to try to-- describe the facts as he saw him, which is as-- as-- those of you-- interview diplomats know is-- a rare (LAUGHTER) and-- and prized-- characteristic.

So-- it's really a great combination. And-- so our format's fairly simple. We'll have each of our speakers-- address the subject-- at hand for-- for ten minutes or so. And then I might ask them a few questions up here to get the conversation started and then we'll invite you in and-- get you on your way in time for-- dinner or-- play-off basketball, or whatever it is that's out there. So-- Anand has agreed-- to begin.

ANAND GOPAL:

Thanks Steve. So, in-- in thinking about the legacy of the American war in Afghanistan-- which is why-- why we're here-- I-- I thought back to the last time I was in the country, which is three months ago. And I had actually in the course of writing my book I'd been away for a couple of years.

I had lived in the country from 2008 to about 2011 and then I'd been away writing. And-- and so, when I-- went back to the country I was very interested in seeing how much had changed. And so, I decided to take a trip. And I started in Shomali, which

is-- a bit north of Kabul. And-- I started there because I-- I started my book there as well.

On the eve of 9/11 Shomali was a ravaged part of the countryside. It-- it had been for generations a place where Afghanistan had produced grapes-- that had gone throughout South Asia. Under the Taliban's rule (COUGHING) against-- in their fight against North-- Northern Alliance they essentially had a scorched earth campaign on Shomali, where they devastated the countryside.

They drove thousands of people into exile. They summarily executed people. And keeping that in mind-- when I went to Shomali it was striking to see how different things had become. The roads are now paved. Hundreds or thousands of Afghans have now come back to the Shomali. There were schools that are open. There were many girls schools. Of course, we know famously the Taliban had outlawed female education. There was electricity everywhere. I talked to people about the elections. This was about a month before the presidential elections. And there was hope. There was anticipation. There was excitement to take part in an election in which Hamid Karzai was not going to be involved. (LAUGHTER)

And-- and, you know, see-- seeing-- talking to people there and-- and seeing their experiences and seeing how much it transformed in just ten years, it really gave you a sense the-- Afghan spirit, which is-- pretty impressive. I went from Shomali to Kabul.

And again, there was a similar story. If you talk to Afghans about how life was in the 1990s under the Taliban, Kabul was a ghost town. We all know that the Taliban famously imprisoned women in their houses, but even men didn't leave very much, 'cause there was no jobs. You-- you would go outside and you could be caught by the religious police. And if you didn't have a beard that was long enough you would be whipped, (NOISE) you'd be jailed.

Today-- if you go to Kabul you'll see bumper to bumper traffic. There are cafes. There are supermarkets. There is-- a thriving entrepreneurial class. There are students, young students, who-- who now speak English, who are integrated into the global world-- through the internet, through television. And of course, there are also girls that are going to school, which didn't happen in the Taliban.

So, th-- and for many years, I think, Ka-- Kabul epitomized the-- the boom that Afghanistan had experienced post-2001. and so I spent a few days in Kabul. Saw some friends. And-- and then I went southwest through (UNINTEL) called Kampani (PH), which is the very limit of Kabul. I passed a-- a nondescript police checkpoint. And you wouldn't know it crossing through at the moment, but on the other side of that checkpoint was really a different country from what I've just described.

The other side is a province called Wardak Province. There the Afghan government controls just the towns, and there's only one or two towns in the province, and the highways. Outside of the towns and highways everything is controlled either by the Taliban insurgency or by American-backed warlords.

I went to a district called Saidabad District, where there is two war lords who are holding power. Both of them are people who were small time businessmen in the

1990s. They had become contractors delivering fuel to NATO bases in the last ten years. And in the process they became incredibly wealthy and incredibly powerful. And they're the real authorities in Saidabad District, not the Afghan government-- not-- not even the U.S. forces which are-- there are very few left there, not the Afghan army but-- but these two powerbrokers. When I was there-- I-- I was caught in a fight between these two, because-- what had happened is one contractor had supported one Taliban group, and these are pro-American contractors, but they-- they also have ties to the Taliban.

One contractor supported one Taliban group and another contractor supported another Taliban group. And in the process there was a fire fight across the highway, which killed three people and destroyed three homes. I went from Saidabad District to Nerkh District, which is another district-- in Wardak, which-- is-- is home to a different sort of fight, and this is between insurgent groups.

One group is the Taliban and the other group is another insurgent group called-- Hezb-e-Islami. And these two groups had been fighting for the last year and a half. And you wouldn't hear this-- in the media, because no one's really gone there, but this is something that's-- brought life to a standstill in these villages.

I went to an area where people are living on this big mountainside. On the top of the mountain, which is controlled by the Taliban, people have-- apple trees. And for generations they've been growing apples and bringing 'em down the mountainside and selling 'em in the bazaar. The Taliban today controlled the top of the mountain. And the bottom-- bottom of the mountain is controlled by Hezb-e-Islami, the other insurgent group.

And because there's a war between the two-- if you bring your apples from the top to the bottom they won't let you pass. They say, "Those are Taliban apples." They'd say, "You-- you can't go through." And so, people have been driven to (UNINTEL) because of this fight. Some people, because they have no choice have decided to brave going through the mountain-- through the summits of the mountains and trying to take the long route to the bazaar. And so, when I was there-- half dozen people-- had just-- bodies had just survived the hospital from frostbite. They had died because they were trying to do this.

From this-- from this in Nerkh I went to a village called (COUGHING) Ibreohill. Ibreohill is-- a village that's been, again, the center of the fight between the U.S. and-- and the Taliban forces. When I went there most of the villages talking about an incident that had happened four months prior.

There was a-- man who (UNINTEL) called-- (COUGHING) Janan (PH). And-- and Janan was a (COUGHING) wood seller. So, he would take wood that was chopped up from the forest, he'd put it on his truck, and he'd drive it five miles to the bazaar. At the same time the special forces unit in the area had-- received intelligence that there was a suicide bomber that-- that was driving around with a wood truck.

So, three days later-- three days after they received that intelligence Janan was driving his truck near his village when the special forces stopped him, forced him out of the

car (COUGHING) and in full view of a dozen villagers, all of whom I had interviewed, he was beaten close to death.

And then one of the soldiers, either a translator, Afghan translator o-- translator or the-- the-- a soldier himself, climbed into the car, drove over him and then threw his body into the river. I mean, this may sound shocking, but in fact-- Matthieu Aikins wrote-- a great piece in the *Rolling Stone* detailing the activities of this unit-- this special forces unit in question, (UNINTEL)-- I think it came out-- six months ago or so, in the same village. And then-- and this is just one of many stories like this.

His body was tossed in the village. His family fished it out. And they rushed him to the hospital but he had died. I went from-- from-- that village to Saidabad-- back to Saidabad. And I was interested in the question of-- female education. In Shomali and in Kabul I saw girls going to school. I-- I met people who were excited, enthusiastic about the-- about the change that happened in the last ten years.

And I was curious to see if this would hold in the middle of the war zone. There are stats you may read about x million, I don't know what the number is, but there's some x million number of girls are going to school after 2001. There's a great report out by SIGARs-- Special Investigator General for Afghanistan Reconstruction-- who casts doubt on these sorts of figures just because these figures are produced by the Afghan government who have incentive to produce those figures. And (UNINTEL) no way to actually vet them. Nobody's actually going to these schools. So, that day I went to six schools, six girls schools (UNINTEL)-- which I took from the official Ministry of Education list. All six were closed and hadn't been (COUGHING) open for years.

I-- I spoke to somebody who was-- a good friend of mine-- she's a gynecologist, one of the bravest women I've ever met. She-- ran a women's health clinic under the Taliban, without the Taliban's knowledge. And post-2001 she's been continuing to do extraordinary work in her village in Saidabad.

And I asked her to take me around to-- to schools and-- and to explain to me what the s-- how things have changed. And she told me that in 2001 there were 22 girls schools in Saidabad District. Today there's one. I went from Saidabad further south. I went to-- left Wardak and went to Ghazni, Logar, various other provinces that are war torn. And I-- I ended up in the outskirts of a province called Paktika, which is-- which borders-- Pakistan. In Paktika province the most powerful person is not the governor. He's not the chief of police. In fact, the most powerful person in this province does not actually have a position in the government at all.

His name is Azizullah. He's a commander. He-- he gets paid and he's funded-- he's armed by the s-- U.S. Special Forces. And in Paktika whatever Azizullah says goes. And so, I spent three days interviewing people and asking them how life was in Paktika.

And every single mentioned how Azizullah was making the life-- basically a living hell. And I'll just give you one example. I met somebody-- I'll call him-- Wahidulla (PH). And he told me a story of something that happened to his cousin. His cousin

was 13 years old and this was last year right after the new year in Afghanistan. His cousin, 13 years old, was arrested by Azizullah's forces on suspicions of being an insurgent. He was taken to Azizullah's base and kept for a night and gang raped by six militia (INAUDIBLE). He was released the next day and said he was free to go home.

So, I'm telling you these stories not to shock you or just to tell something-- outlandish, but to-- to-- you know, to-- to-- put the spotlight on the reality of Afghanistan, which is really two realities. Late-- late, great David Foster Wallace said in commencement speech a few years ago, he said-- that the value of education is not so much teaching you how to think, it's to teach you that you have a choice in what to think about.

And when we think about the legacy of the United States in Afghanistan we also have a choice in what to think about. We can think just about the areas in Kabul and in the north which are peaceful and which have seen tremendous gains, and we can close our eyes to the everyday dep-- depravity that's happening in the countryside. Or we can choose to think about both and recognize that the American legacy in Afghanistan is extraordinarily complicated. And-- and I-- I bring this up, because I don't want to-- I guess, a few more minutes.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

ANAND GOPAL:

I bring-- okay. (INAUDIBLE) I bring this up, because if we want to think about where Afghanistan's going we need to have a reckoning of how it's gotten where it is and our role, meaning the United States' role, in this. And that's a lot about-- that's basically what my book is really about, is looking at how we have been wittingly or unwittingly complicit in this state of affairs in Afghanistan today.

The book follows the lives of three Afghans. One is a Taliban commander. He-- he surrendered-- or he quit after 2001 like thousands of other Taliban fighters. And-- tried to open a shop. He tried various other ways to integrate into Afghan society. And it turned out he couldn't, because of the war lords and commanders that we were backing. He was driven back into the insurgency and he rose to become a prominent anti-U.S.-- insurgent over the last few years. So, the book tell his story from 2001 to today.

It also tells a story of-- somebody who is Af-- a prominent Afghan politician or war lord. His name is John Mohammed from-- from Urozgan province. And he was-- somebody who was-- an anti-Taliban, I guess, activist or figure in the 1990s. He was arrested and tortured very severely by the Taliban.

He was released and after 2001 he-- he rose to incredible levels of wealth and power, because of his alliance with the United States military. And through that alliance he actually fingered (?) a lot of his own enemies who ended up being sent to Guantanamo to being sent to Bagram prison-- and he became very powerful in the

process.

The-- the third person that I follow is a housewife-- who-- g-- grew up in Kabul-- and during the Civil War of the 1990s was forced to flee into the countryside. And-- you know, through what I learned was very surprising to me through speaking to her and recording her experiences that-- the stark differences between how life is for a woman in the countryside versus the cities where we usually hear news from Afghanistan.

And for the next ten years she was forced to navigate between various forces, between the Taliban and U.S.-backed commanders, and find a way to survive-- which ultimately I think is what most Afghan actually are trying to do, even though we tend to think of'em as stripped ca-- strictly delineated categories between good guys and bad guys. So, that's what the book is about. And-- where the book leaves off is-- you know, setting up-- w-- how we've gotten to where we are. So, I just want to talk a little bit, since we are talking about a legacy of the United States in Afghanistan, talk a little bit about where we are leaving (?) Afghanistan after 2014.

Most troops are expected to leave. And something-- you know, here are some facts that people may or may not know. 1) is that the-- the Afghan governments gets 30% of its-- expenditures come from domestic revenue. That means the rest of it, 70% come from foreign aid.

In other words, the Afghan government cannot survive if foreign powers do not prop it up. This is no different really than the mi-- early-1990s when the Afghan government then, which was communist could not survive if the Soviet Union did not prop it up. So, in other words we have bequeathed upon Afghanistan a state which is not sustainable. And I say, "we have bequeathed," because it's not-- th-- this state of affairs doesn't exist because the Afghans are just preternaturally corrupt or they don't know how to run a state. It's actually because of conscious policy decisions over the last ten or 11 years by the United States and others.

A-- I'll give you a-- a couple of examples of this. 1) For every dollar the United States spent on state building or nation building or e-- sent-- spent on the Afghan government itself, they spent more on war lords and powerbrokers outside of the Afghan government.

It s-- it spent on people like Azizullah, the person I described in Paktika, who-- whose people (INAUDIBLE PHRASE). This creates a culture of impunity, because as long as-- there are powerbrokers who don't rely on popular mobilization for their support, they rely on foreign patronage, then questions of legitimacy are irrelevant to them. As long as they can pay their men to fight for them they are continue to do whatever they want. And they exist outside of the rule of law. Azizullah is not alone in this. There's dozens of other commanders that are like this. Hundreds I say even of commanders like this.

It creates a very weak state in which the state basically exists in the cities and in the town and it struggles to compete with these war lords for legitimacy. And one of two things happen, either they enter the same game as these war lords to keep up for

patronage, for funding, or at-- at worst or at best they try to absorb these war lords into the state.

A lot of these guys become police chiefs. What-- and what ends up happening is these war lords bring their militias into the state. And the impunity continues and it bleeds into the state. And this has been the story over the last ten or 11 or 12 years. And this is why when you talk to Afghans in places like Wardak or Kandahar or Paktika they tell you that they feel that they are trapped (NOISE) between on the one side the Taliban and on the other side pro-American commanders.

I was in Kandahar in-- in February. And I-- I met a guy named Noor Atal (PH). Noor is from-- Pajwa (PH), a very-- violent area of Kandahar province. And-- two years ago the Taliban showed up at his house and accused his brother of being an American spy.

They reason they did that is because his-- his brother worked for a de-mining agency. His brother had never met an American in his life. But he-- but he worked for a de-mining ag-- de-mining agency and for the Taliban that was enough to brand him as a spy. So, they pulled him out of the house, brought him to a field, invited his family, invited the rest of the (INAUDIBLE) leaders and summarily executed him.

Because of this his family fled to Kandahar city where the government has strong control. Six months ago his other brother was working in a wood field, of like a-- a wood yard, selling wood on the side of the street, when an Afghan police truck pulled up, pulled him into the tru-- pulled him into the-- into the vehicle and drove off. And that was the last time he saw his brother alive.

Four weeks later he-- or, I'm sorry. I'm sorry, four days later he-- he got a call from the-- from the tribal (UNINTEL) who found his brother's-- brother's body in a police morgue. There were signs of torture, electrocution and one of his eyes was ripped out.

This is not a mistake. (INAUDIBLE) sometimes I-- I mention this to people and say, "Oh, we made blunders. We supported the wrong people as a mistake." This is not a mistake. The person-- the-- the-- the person who did this was Abdul Raziq. He's the police chief of Kandahar. It was not an error that we support Abdul Raziq. My book goes into detail about cases like this, but there are also news reports about Abdul Raziq. The-- the most recent-- State Department report on human rights has a lengthy section on Abdul Raziq and the Kandahar police and the tortures they've committed. So, there's full knowledge of what's happening.

The reason he is supported is because he kills (?) Taliban very effectively. And we've-- we've ignored human rights in the name of the war on terror. And that is not just a case of Abdul Raziq, that is a case with commanders and strongmen across the board.

So, to wrap up there are two legacies here really in Afghanistan. There is a legacy of people in the cities who-- (COUGHING) and-- and-- and it's a fleeting legacy, because if we stop funding it then it will disappear tomorrow. And there is the-- everyday live (?) legacy of people in the countryside. And we should not is-- ignore, which means real-- really being ruled by fear-- and-- and de-- and-- and-- perdition (?) every single

day. Thank you.

STEVE COLL:

Great. Thank you, Anand. David.

DAVID SEDNEY:

Thank you Steve and thank you Anand. And I want to-- commend-- Anand's book to you. I think it's important that people read it-- because I think the kind of-- testimony of individuals, of communities-- that Anand reports on is important-- for Americans-- to read and to-- and to (COUGHING) think about and to realize and to analyze along the ways that Anand said.

And looking-- to look at the entire picture of what-- we have been part of in Afghanistan and what we are part of today and what we're gonna be part of in-- in the future-- I know that the title of this-- se-- of this session is-- is-- has legacy in it.

Well, I would make a big circle and crossed out the word legacy and I would say future, America's future in Afghanistan. Because legacy implies that-- that it's something we can put behind us-- that we don't bear any really responsibility for, we have no continuing-- moral responsibility for it, no continuing political interest in it, and that it is past history. (SNEEZE) And I-- think all of those are-- are drastically wrong.

Why do I-- why do I say that? Well, let me go back to the first-- few briefs sentences that Anand mentioned about the reality of Afghanistan today. On April 5th-- there was an election in Afghanistan. On the morning of April 5th-- my hometown newspaper, the *Washington Post* published a story saying, "Taliban threatened elections; turnout likely to be low."

That of course was completely wrong. In fact, the turnout was twice what it was-- five years before. And the turnout-- along the lines that Anand described-- the people who-- reported back, both Afghans and the small number of-- western-- reporters and observers who were there-- but-- was one of hope, one of optimism and it tracked (?) very well will a rechen-- with a recent-- Asia Foundation-- study that was released-- in December.

And I can-- I urge everyone who's interested in Afghanistan to look at it, because the Asia Foundation has been doing surveys in Afghanistan and Afghan people-- and their attitudes-- for-- the last eight years I believe. Their survey-- are-- people say, "How can you do a survey in Afghanistan?" Well-- look at the back up there. They have some very serious professionals doing it.

And they come up with startling figures, such as, 70% of Afghan people think their country is headed in the right direction. And of course, if you-- you know, the statistics for the U.S. you realize is about three times higher than it is here-- and a lot

higher than it is elsewhere. You'll come up with many other-- startling figures such as, 80% of the Afghan people support the Afghan army. And-- a smaller percentage, but not much smaller, about 70% support the Afghan police.

And then you'll listen to anecdotes such as Anand has des-- has-- has recounted, all of which are accurate, and you'll say, "How can that be?" Well, the answer of course is there's more than just a few anecdotes and that-- and I'm-- and it-- there's more than a few.

Anand has mentioned, there are scores, there are hundreds, there are thousands of such-- stories as he recounted. But there are many other stories that are a different kind of story-- that are very positive. And-- if you talk to Afghan-- young people who have-- in-- in college now, if you talk to many Afghan women, if you talk to not just people in Kabul, but if you talk to Afghans in Jalalabad, in Herat, in Mazar-i-Sharif, even in Host (PH)-- the major city (UNINTEL) Paktika province-- that-- Anand described, but even in Khost-- where the-- where the-- the findings about people's hope in the future were really surprisingly high.

In-- throughout Afghanistan-- and-- just to beat-- give comparison, Kabul is a s-- is a city somewhere between five and eight million. Those are the various estimates that I've heard-- certainly well more than (NOISE) about 400,000 that were there when I first arrived in-- March 2nd of 2002.

And-- (INAUDIBLE) the population of Wardak province-- is about somewhere between 200,000 and 300,000. So, it's-- so, in terms of what's happening in Afghanistan it is by far the most important to pay-- pay attention to for Afghanistan's future what's happening in urban and city areas. But at the same time-- I'm not-- saying it's not important what ha-- happens in the rural areas. But there's been a major shift in Afghanistan over the past ten years-- in population from urban to rural areas. It's very similar to-- in fact, it's almost identical to the shift from ur-- from rural to urban that happens everywhere-- where you have-- an explosion in the population.

The average age of the population in Afghanistan (INAUDIBLE PHRASE) is-- is under 20. And-- the-- population keeps getting younger every year. The-- the-- urbanization of Afghanistan-- is proceeding at pace. In some cases-- because of what's happening in the rural areas, it's driving people away from conflict.

Because people-- don't want to be killed, but in many cases, because they see better economic-- and s-- personal opportunity in cities. And so-- particularly this is the case with people who have returned as refugees from-- Afgha-- from-- Pakistan or Iran, 'cause once people have lived in refugee camps and had access to healthcare, education and-- the-- some of the accoutrements of urban lifestyle, they find it very hard to go back to rural areas. And-- again, that's not just a situation that's unique to Afghanistan. It's pretty much similar to almost every other conflict I'm aware of.

Once people (UNINTEL) refugee camp they feel much more comfortable in cities when they go back. So, you're having this major change in Afghanistan of-- of the-- rural to the urban. And-- in the urban areas-- you can certainly see lots of girls going

to school.

And-- so, in terms of the figures of girls going to school, if you look at all of Afghanistan and not just-- some of the rural areas near Kabul-- but if you look at-- areas from the Pahshir (PH)-- to Herat-- to-- Jalalabad-- you'll find-- that-- the figures for girls' education-- that-- that-- Anand's referring to are plu-- pretty reflective of reality. But I want to go back to Anand's comments, 'cause I mentioned-- I think it's very important-- and that's why I urge people to read his book-- as I've done. The kinds of abuses that he describes, abuses by U.S. forces, abuses by Afghan forces, abuses by individuals allied with us-- those are kinds of things that not only-- do we not expect, that we abhor.

Why do they happen? Well-- that's a subject that I think needs a lot of reflection. And-- the-- the-- the-- the book lays out this testimony. But as you step back and look at why-- for example the U.S. relied on war lords-- in-- two-- in 2001-- if you go back in our history to the period ni-- after 9/11-- when there was this huge outpouring in the United States of the desire to, 1) make sure that the attack on the World Trade Center never happened again, and 2)-- and this is a strong strain in our-- in-- in our national character as well, to get vengeance.

So, we went into Afghanistan-- with a never again-- philosophy. We didn't go into Afghanistan with a nation building philosophy. We didn't go into Afghanistan with a plan of any kind about what we were going to do in Afghanistan. We went in to make sure that it never happened again.

But we went in-- under a philosophy-- that-- smaller was better. We did not invade Afghanistan. If anyone says the U.S. invaded Afghanistan that they don't understand what happened there. What we did is we sent a small numbers of Special Forces and-- intelligence people into Afghanistan.

But they relied for the intelligence they got, they relied for the majority of the-- the manpower-- on local people-- who were in many cases people who we had funded-- in the 1980s. We-- we had provided the funding through the-- the ISI in Pakistan. And-- we tend to go back to the people who we had worked with before. That put us into exactly the kind of very difficult moral situation that Anand-- described. Because these were people with long track records of human rights abuses, long track records of-- of using the-- money-- and weapons that they had gotten from the United States, from Pakistan, from Saudi Arabia, to carry out-- activities that-- during the civil war as Anand described-- des-- describes-- so horrifyingly in his book-- activities-- that are so abhorrent that it's difficult to read about them.

And I can tell you it's much more difficult to talk to people as Anand has done, as I have done, who have suffered through-- through-- through these-- horrific events. But-- we had this national imperative and we had a-- a-- a approach to war fighting-- at the top levels of our government, including in the Department of Defense at the time, that this small is better.

That light footprint-- shock and awe, all those phrases that you've heard of, all of which meant you had to rely on these-- war lords-- and-- their-- associates in order to

try and have any hope of what you were doing. But, as I said, the United States didn't invade Afghanistan. When I got there in March-- we had 15,000 troops-- in Afghanistan.

And that's the same amount we had-- for-- essentially the first-- 18 months we were in Afghanistan. In fact, for a good portion of that time we had less than 15,000. Afghanistan's a country of well over 20 million-- incredible difficult to reign-- to-- to-- to-- (INAUDIBLE)-- incredibly difficult to reign.

You can't occupy a country with 15,000 troops no matter how many-- aircraft you have in the sky about it. What you do is you have little spots-- where you take action. And-- in order to take action you-- you rely on intelligence. And as Anand describes in his book-- a portion of that intelligence-- was not just false intelligence, it was intelligence that was designed deliberately to manipulate what the United States-- and our allies were doing. And Anand lays out a number again of horrific stories about where that happens.

But-- I'd say if you step back from that, why were we-- in that position? The reason we were in that position is because we sent too few troops into Afghanistan. We had to rely on local people. And there was a conscious decision to rely on local people.

We had to rely on them, because we didn't have anything else-- and-- we also-- as we did that-- we had-- as I said, we didn't go into Afghanistan with the-- intention of nation building. In fact, if you look at the-- budget that the-- Bush administration submitted-- in the-- in-- February of 2002 to the United States Congress for assistance to Afghanistan, you'll find it was one million dollars for assistance-- for new assistance to Afghanistan. In our original-- plan, and if you read the various memoirs by Secretary Rumsfeld and-- Secretary Fife (PH) and a number of others, our original plan in Afghanistan was we would go in, we would attack and then we would pull out and leave Afghanistan to its xenophobic-- isolationistic-- natural state of being.

The problem was when we got to Afghanistan (CLEARING THROAT) what we found was a completely different place. The Afghanistan that we thought we were going into wasn't the Afghanistan-- that was there. And-- what happened at policy making levels was there became huge-- disconnects between-- the policy of fighting a war lite, not using very many troops, not providing much in the way of assistance, with the demands-- from-- people to help Afghan women, help Afghan children-- to try and-- make a difference in Afghanistan.

The-- those of you who follow politics will know that in the 2000 elections-- George Bush ran on a policy of no more nation building. Well, it's one of the very strong national security-- theme-- that he ran on.

In-- 2009 President-- and since two-- 2009 President Obama has repeatedly stated the United States is not in Afghanistan to do nation building. That our objective is to build-- our (COUGHING) (INAUDIBLE PHRASE) not to build-- the nation of Afghanistan.

So, we've had two successive presidents who don't want to do nation building in Afghanistan. And I would submit that what Anand describes is a-- are the result of--

trying to have a major impact with less than minimal resources. And-- the example that-- Anand refers to of Wardak province-- in 2002, 2003 and 2004 when I was-- in Afghanistan, we regularly went to Wardak.

We drove our own cars there. It was a-- considered fairly safe place. Because it was considered a fairly safe place we didn't spend much money there. We didn't do-- much in the way of reconstruction. We didn't have many projects there, because it was consid-- we didn't have my money.

So, we decided to focus what we spent on the more conflict-ridden areas. As a result of that-- of that-- analytical failure, because of course the situation in Wardak was much more complicated, was not at all stable-- the peace that we-- thought was there didn't exist.

And there's a lot of-- a lot more history to why Wardak by the time 2004, 2005, 2006, 2007, 2008 when Anand went there had deteriorated-- from the place that it had been in 2002, 2003, 2004. But I would submit the biggest one is because-- for example in 2005-- then Secretary of State Rice zeroed out all systems to Afghanistan. The budget that we submitted to Congress, Congress added some additional money, but we zeroed our assistance to Afghanistan. There was a very strong shift of emphasis both in terms of money, but more importantly in terms of people from Afghanistan-- to Iraq starting really in 2002.

I saw that happen in March, April and May of 2002 when I was in Afghanistan. Saw the shift of resources then from Afghanistan to Iraq. And that was a situation where-- the resources we had Afghanistan were way too small. Flip forward, because I am trying to be-- responsive to Steve's-- desire to keep us-- keep us on track--

STEVE COLL:

Thank you.

DAVID SEDNEY:

Flip forward to 2009 and we had a president who was elected who said of (?) Iraq was the wrong war, Afghanistan was something we should have done right-- and conducted a series of policy reviews-- with-- which I was a very junior part of.

And-- resulting in the president's speech in December of 2009 where he announced a surge of 30,000 troops-- which was 40,000 less-- than the-- commander-- had asked for-- General Stanley McChrystal had asked for. And-- by the same time that we surged those 30,000 troops that we were gonna withdraw 10,000 in a-- 10,000 in 18 months.

And what that meant was-- that we had to make choices-- about how we use the ex-- the additional-- resources, military resources. There were some additional financial resources, there were some additional (COUGHING) civilian resources, in my view

all-- especially on the civilian side, way too little-- which meant that we had to r-- again, we had to rely on the existing cr-- mechanisms-- that had a lot of the consequences that a non-- that are not mentioned.

And that-- and we had to make choices. (COUGHING) So, we put our resources into 1) Helmand, 2) Kandahar. Wardak, Logar-- were going to be the second-- stage of the process that never really happened. So, in 20-- 11 and 2012 when according to the original campaign plan we should've gone in there-- with sufficient force to make a difference we (COUGHING) went in with a smaller amount of force.

We had troops on the-- we had-- we had (UNINTEL). We had troops on the ground in both Wardak and Logar for about 12 months. And then they withdrawn-- the-- the-- last-- troops that were-- were pulled out in October of-- last year. So, we left an area-- that-- was-- that w-- that we didn't start well and we finished poorly.

And the situation that Anand describes-- I think is a natural-- unfortunate, but natural, result-- of us putting too little resources in, too little thought in-- and-- leading to the kinds of disasters and horrific (INAUDIBLE)-- tragedies that he describes.

But-- (UNINTEL) let me shift-- your attention to-- to-- to other places. And-- first one on those is Helmand province-- where we put our first efforts into following the surge. And-- look at say for instance (?) the election in 2009 and the elections of a month ago in terms of turnout.

And-- the-- there was virtually-- essentially virtually no real voting in Helmand in 2009. 2014 there was very successful voting-- in a wide number of areas-- particularly those areas-- naturally, where the Afghan-- security forces are in-- in-- reasonable control, including some of the areas that we went into first such as the Marsha (PH) district of Afghanistan, the area-- the city of Lashkar Gah, which-- is now a functioning city as opposed to a nonfunctioning place that it was-- five years ago.

So, we've found-- in-- I was-- at a panel in-- in London last week-- and afterwards had a chance to discuss-- with-- the situation in Helmand with-- Katrina Lang (PH), the last head of the British PRT. By the way, the British understood how to do the civil military part. We never really got it right, but the British PRT went there was very good.

But the situation in Helmand-- has the capability-- of having-- of being sustainably affected (?) in a very positive way, by what-- what happened over the last five years there. Is it a guarantee? No. Does it depend on what happens in the future? Yes. And that's why I say that-- the real topic-- of discussion here-- here, and elsewhere in the United States, should be our future role in Afghanistan. Because if we were as some have-- h-- have recommended, to adopt something called a zero option. We pull out troops, cut all our systems and pretend Afghanistan never happened, then the future that Anand sketched is g-- is inevitable. However, we have learned a lot of lessons. And Anand has helped teach us some of those lessons. We have a lot of-- of-- things that we had done wrong in Afghanistan. A lot of things we know how to better and we know how to be better in many cases because of the mistakes we have

made.

But we need to continue learning from those mistakes. And we need to, both for national security-- and, I could talk about the issue of-- resurgence of an Al Qaeda-- in Pakistan and Afghanistan later-- afterwards people want to hear more-- but also-- for the very moral reasons that Anand has laid out-- implicitly in his book, because of the many, huge tragedies that-- that we and our allies and the people we have paid are responsible for.

We can-- and the Afghan people are prepared to work through this as well as they showed in their turnout in the election despite-- some really massive efforts by the Taliban to prevent the election from taking place-- w-- we have-- the opportunity to-- to get Afghanistan much better than we ever have. But we won't do that-- be able to do that unless we stay the course, which means continued military assistance, continued military presence, but also means an even bigger-- focus on-- the effective ways of-- providing civilian assistance which-- which-- we know about-- which we know how to do.

I'm happy to talk to-- and we'll have a period for-- for questions and answers. I'll be happy to stay afterwards and talk to anyone who has additional questions beyond that afterwards. One final point-- I wanted to note that-- I, along with a number of other people-- cup-- some who are here in this room, are member of a very loose amalgamation of voices called the Alliance in Support of the Afghan People.

It's people ranging from-- Eleanor Smeal and-- Gloria Steinem-- to-- Ryan Proper (?)-- (UNINTEL PHRASE)-- people who come from many different areas of the ideological spectrum-- republican, democrat-- all of whom believe-- that the United States-- m-- commitment in Afghanistan is one that should continue, not just past 2014 but well past 2014.

That the successes we have had there and that balancing of-- of balancing of-- analyzes-- that Anand describes-- those-- we and-- all of us-- lived or worked, spent a lot of time in-- within Afghanistan over the last-- 12, 13 years believe that that balance is in the positive now and can be much in the positive in the future if we continue that commitment.

So, I'll close with a-- I'm sorry. I will-- almost close-- I'll close with a-- with-- with an urging that you look at-- AfghanAlliance.org is the website. In it you'll see a list of not just signatories from the U.S., but Afghan signatories. Afghans who believe that a continuing partnership with the United States despite-- and these Afghans know the things that-- that-- that-- Anand has written about, despite-- those-- those terrible things that have happened to their society, they believe that a continuing partnership with the United States-- is the best way to secure the kind of future for Afghanistan that they want and we should want.

This is about Anand's book, but I'm gonna mention another book. This is-- book called *The Wrong Enemy*-- by Carlotta Gall-- who-- has lived and worked in Afghanistan and Pakistan for the past 20 years. Both books came out-- within a couple of weeks of each other. They both take very different tacks.

The title of Carlotta's book-- *The Wrong Enemy*-- it's pretty clear-- just from (?) the title, and if it's not-- as soon as you read the book, it's pretty clear who she thinks the real enemy is. And-- you know, I'll just close by saying that-- the issue of Pakistan and how to deal with Pakistan-- and the-- problems and challenges that Pakistan would pose both for itself and the region-- as-- not just Afghanistan but the broader region in the world, is one that I think deserves very serious attention-- and-- one that I don't have any answers for.

But-- I do-- if you read Anand's book you should also read Carlotta's book. You'll come up with very different perspectives from those, but I think that's very important as people look to come up with a-- clear picture that you-- that you listen and read about these-- different perspectives before you come to your own judgments. Steve?

STEVE COLL:

Great. All right, well-- (APPLAUSE) so-- so, thank you both. And obviously there's an opportunity for you to-- reply to one another as we go along. I guess-- though for my portion of the-- questioning I would-- I'm gonna try to cross-examine each of you once and see-- where that leads. And then-- and I-- I guess, I think we probably all share, not withstanding the fact that we all lapse into it, a desire to avoid the kind of half full/half empty sort of argument in broad strokes.

Because as-- our friend Bernie Ruben (PH) once-- said memorably, at least I've never forgotten this line, "Optimism is just a state of brain chemistry." (LAUGHTER) And-- it's really better to analyze what we think the structure of events and the structure of the current strengths and weaknesses of that-- of political stability, inclusion, rights in Afghanistan really amounts to.

What-- what is the structure of the insurgency? Are we seeing the whole picture? What are we missing? And then trying to stitch together-- and I think you both did a great job of that, but I want to keep us focused on that kind of map rather than on the-- the sort of-- narrative of optimism or pessimism.

And so-- Anand, in the context of the American legacy and your very powerful account of the instrumentalism of the Abdul Raziq-s of the American policy-- and recognizing as, you know, you-- you would have-- occasion to do from the ground up, that the Afghanistan-- that American policy arrived in again in 2001 was utterly shattered, I mean, really-- by the human development index met-- metrics, by any governance metric, by infrastructure, by immortality-- was-- one of the three or four poorest countries in the world.

And-- as you point out-- all of this-- investment and money and-- not to mention the flow of troops-- carrying out policies like COIN for intermittent periods, you know, had a provocative effect, unintended consequences that were often-- damaging, if not outright-- sort of horrifying in some cases. I guess, my question is-- what's the alternative policy that you would-- argue for looking ahead?

It's not surprising-- that in such a shattered place, and there are many other shattered

lands where we find war lords and criminal gangs linked to government. And you know as well as anyone else that the alternative of Afghan governance in these places is just as criminal-- an operation in many cases as Abdul Raziq's outfit.

Certainly, you know, in Kandahar-- the government was running private jails and extorting civil and criminal defendants and (SNEEZE) essentially a systematic bribery machine. And it's still-- mistrusted by many Afghans for that reason. I guess, from your experience what are the instruments of international policy in Afghanistan looking ahead that ought to be emphasized-- to slowly, gradually, and in a realistic way, make it less-- likely that the John Mohammed-s and the Abdul Raziq-s and thrive and more likely that they can be held to account without destabilizing the country?

ANAND GOPAL:

I think first we should start with a little context, which is that-- you know, there are poor countries and then there are poor countries that have war lords and narco-terrorists and-- et cetera. Afghanistan (UNINTEL) a lot of case war lordism in Afghanistan is actually a modern phenomenon, something I also describe in the book.

Before 1979-- there were all sorts of problems in the country. And-- and, you know, corruption and poverty, but there were no war lords. That's a-- that's a-- consequence of the Soviet invasion killing thousands and tens-- tens of thousands of tribal elders and village heads and of the U.S., which (INAUDIBLE) Steve is, you know, m-- the main-- person who's written about this and described how this has happened-- the CIA's patronage of-- commanders and (INAUDIBLE) and in the process creating the (COUGHING) war lords we see today.

But looking ahead-- so, the point there is that war lordism isn't necessarily natural to Afghanistan. That also is a consequence of policies. But looking ahead-- I would identify three main problems-- that-- or challenges that Afghanistan faces. 1) Of course is the Taliban insurgency and-- which is supported by Pakistan.

2) is the system of dual power, a very weak government-- in Kabul and in towns and a very powerful network of the war lords in the countryside. And 3) is a state that's completely unsustainable as I described. So, to address these-- it's-- we-- we should (INAUDIBLE PHRASE) each in turn. First, if you look at the network of war lords, they exist because of U.S. patronage, because of the war on terror.

And instead of supporting people like Azizullah, who is the person I described in Paktika, we should support-- we should fund the Afghanistan government. And what that means-- today 80% of all aid that's going to Afghanistan actually bypasses the Afghan state. And you may think, okay, the Afghan government is very corrupt. How could you give money to the Afghan government?

But in fact, there's various mechanisms around this. There's trust funds; that the police are paid out of a trust fund and which are-- which are jointly managed by the

international community and the Afghan state. You know, there are various ways to do this.

But the point is it's a direct patronage to the center not to the periphery. If you direct patronage to the periphery you weaken the center and you ensure the-- the continued existence of the Taliban and-- of this culture of impunity that I've described. That's the first step.

The-- the second step is, the Afghan state is not sustainable. It would not survive without the U.S. and foreign countries-- supporting it. So, we need to really rethink-- the Afghan economy. We cannot have this situation where the Afghan economy exists because of foreign aid, okay?

Afghanistan actually now has mineral resources. But the-- the dominant paradigm, the intellectual paradigm, political paradigm over the last ten years has been privatization and giving all these resources to the highest bidder. And that lead-- opens the door to corruption.

We can actually look to the way in which developing countries in the '50s and '60s actually came-- came-- you know, were able to develop a resource base, were able to tax-- their citizenry. That includes for example, think about nationalizing some of these industries. This is a system that people in Afghanistan remember because of the communist time, right? Of course there's an issue of capacity building, which can be done. But-- you know, we need to start thinking about how do we get the Afghan government to be self-- self-sustainable, not to be what's called in political science a red tier (?) state, which is what it is today.

And third, in terms of the Taliban insurgency that we need to-- we need to redouble our efforts to (UNINTEL) negotiate itself. T-- I don't believe, I'm actually very pessimistic at the possibility that the Taliban today will negotiate. For the rain-- for the same reason why they did try to negotiate in 2001, which-- I describe in the book.

In 2001 their backs were against the wall. And so, they had no choice and so they tried to negotiate. Today their backs are not against the wall. And so, they're le-- there's less incentive to negotiate. But there is confidence (?) building measures that can happen, including say training the-- the-- the (UNINTEL) people in Guantanamo for the U.S. POW that's there.

I think this negotiation's process should happen in addition to-- it shouldn't be a backroom deal between the U.S. leadership and Pakistan and Taliban. It should actually be inclusive. It shouldn't-- it should-- incorporate sections of Afghan civil society.

But even if we can't get there, even if we can't negotiate and get to-- get to sort of the grand bargaining with the Taliban, then (INAUDIBLE) act of-- of trying to do so, I think, will yield a number of positive benefits-- which in the long run will get to state in which we all want, which is-- an Afghanistan that's not at war.

STEVE COLL:

Great. We can come back to some of these themes. David, an implication of your history about the under-investment in Afghanistan, both in reconstruction aid, but also in-- forces in the period after 2002 is that there was an alternative history that would have made things better-- in terms of, you know, massive aid flows in this broken, weak state with-- these kinds of-- war lords in the countryside, 'cause they were in control of course in those days in many places, in Herat and in-- in-- Balkh and in other places.

And that also-- that if we had brought in-- more s-- either peace enforcement troops out of-- NATO or somehow blue helmeted-- the-- international forces in Afghanistan and spread them out that this might have succeeded. But how confident are you in that alternative history?

Because we did surge all of these-- troops into the country in 2009-2010. They found themselves in a very provocative-- fight in the south with Taliban that seemed to rise up almost-- to challenge their very presence-- as much as for any other reason. And-- while we can accept that this hypothesis of xenophobia that governed the Bush administration in 2001-2002 was profoundly misplaced and led to policy mistakes. It doesn't necessarily follow that a large international troop presence immediately after the fall of the Taliban would have stabilized the country. What's--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID SEDNEY:

I think that's-- a-- an excellent set of questions. And-- I'm not so sure the real question is: How confident am I? Because (LAUGHTER)--

(OVERTALK)

STEVE COLL:

Well, you're my guest.

DAVID SEDNEY:

--my-- my-- my level of confidence is-- is not so relevant. But-- let-- let's take-- three-- specific areas. The-- the first and most important one is-- the issue of Osama bin Laden and Al Qaeda. That's why, of course, we went into Afghanistan. We didn't go into Afghanistan because in 1998-- then-- spokesperson for-- Ahmad Shah Masood testified before the United States Congress saying that Afghanistan is going to become a threat to you because of Al Qaeda's presence there.

And if you want to go back and look at that testimony you can see some pretty

prescient statements by Dr. Abdullah-- to the U.S. Congress in '98. But we didn't go in there because we were warned. We went in there because-- we died. And-- we went in-- to go after Al Qaeda.

But we went in, as I said, with this very light footprint. Anand has a very telling-- and I think quite accurate-- story in-- in his book about-- his discussions with one of the war lords of Jalalabad-- one of the people who actually made a lot of-- he-- he made about ten million dollars by selling Jalalabad to the Taliban-- because the Taliban took over Jalalabad by p-- bribing-- b-- by getting-- by paying off-- this guy and two other war lords.

But-- he talks about how he got five million from the CIA. He got-- he got a million dollars from the ta-- from-- Osama bin Laden. And he tried to get \$500,000 from the - (INAUDIBLE) from the ISI, but the ISI said no. I think it's that-- is that the basic outline of the story, Anand?

ANAND GOPAL:

Yeah, that's right, yeah.

(OVERTALK)

DAVID SEDNEY:

W-- why were we doing that? We were doing that, because we didn't have the troops on the ground. Recently I-- there's a-- a book called *102 Days of War*-- I'm promoting too many people's books here. (LAUGHTER) You should buy Anand's book tonight, please!

The *102 Days of War*-- by Yaniv Barzilai, and he discusses-- that in 102 days-- from September 11th-- (COUGHING) through December when we were trying to catch Osama bin Laden of course we failed-- at that time. And he recounts in it for example that-- then-- Jim Mattis, one of our Marine commanders had a plan to bring Marines up f-- out of the Kandahar airfield where they were, up into the Tora Bora area and they would be the ones who would go after-- after Osama bin Laden.

That was turned down in favor of paying money to the-- to the-- to the-- resurgent war lords-- and-- trying to work with small numbers of Special Forces intelligence people. That obviously failed. Would-- the Mattis plan or others of bringing in-- a sufficient force to go after Osama bin Laden then and really changing the course of history, am I confident it would have happened? No. I can't say I'm confident. But I think the chances of a better outcome would have been much higher if we had used significant amounts of American forces rather than trying to do this ad hoc-- effort. So, that's one area.

Secondly, when-- the Taliban fled, because the Taliban weren't really defeated. They fled-- the leadership fled to Pakistan. A lot of the soldiers just tried to go back to

their farms and-- Anand talks about some of these stories. But that left a vacuum.

And-- one thing we know from every conflict area that-- there is no actually such a thing (?) as a vacuum. Security will be provided one way or another-- by-- one kind of-- one-- one group or another. And the people who were-- were best positioned, because they had the ability to mobilize the instruments of violence-- were these-- people-- who were-- m-- who-- who were war lords before-- the-- the Taliban came and who then became war lords after.

Because we didn't have-- the ability to offer any alternative, there was no alternative for security in 90-plus% of Afghanistan. In fact, the United States made it a condition of-- of the first iterations of the international security assistance force that was compliant (?) to Kabul, it couldn't act outside of that.

If you go back and look at the (CLEARING THROAT) discussions with the UN and elsewhere-- the con-- the first commander of the international security assistance was a general named John McCall (PH). And-- our first-- diplomat in charge of-- (UNINTEL PHRASE) I've had the-- great honor to work for-- Ryan Crocker (PH), came up with a plan in the spring of 2002 to have fairly small numbers of forces-- along with civilians-- fanned out through all Afghanistan.

And m-- they have charge of the transition to a government-- that provides security-- in those areas. That plan was-- rejected-- by-- the administra-- the Bush administration-- in Washington. And as a result those war lords that-- Anand describes-- cemented their-- their role. And once you have that kind of (INAUDIBLE) structure in place it's much more difficult to change it.

So-- at the very period of time where we could have made a huge difference, I think, with a larger but still fairly small-- number of forces-- we-- we chose-- to do nothing and that left-- (INAUDIBLE) 90% of Afghanistan on its own. The numbers of forces that we had-- in-- Afghanistan as I said is about 15,000.

Well over 12,000 of those were in Bagram-- in 2002. The actual number of U.S. forces outside-- and another thousand or so were in Kandahar. We just didn't have any presence in most of Afghanistan. And as a result we had to rely on intelligence, carried out the kinds of raids-- that-- Anand described-- which were-- were really horrific in the way they-- damaged-- the people of Afghanistan, damaged our ability to succeed and made the effort of 2009 so much harder. The other thing have I'll stress is Pakistan. And again, if you read both books you'll see that the-- that there's another narrative that-- the resurgence of the-- of-- the Taliban goes back to the head of the ISI's-- meeting with-- Mullah Omar in the fall of 2001, where we (?) told Mullah Omar, "Don't surrender. Don't give up. We will continue to support you. The Americans will leave in six months or so and you'll be back in charge."

With that narrative-- Mullah Omar's departure from Afghanistan to Pakistan is-- not at all a-- flight-- of-- of-- someone who is-- doesn't know what he's doing. It's very much in the context, and Anand has a very good story in-- in his-- in his book of a visit of a Taliban commander to Pakistan where-- the lead in dis-- in making decisions about the strategic-- (UNINTEL) of Taliban forces in-- in Wardak is made

by-- an-- a officer of ISI, the-- the-- the-- the Pakistani intelligence.

So, the-- the role of Pakistan during that period of time-- whether we could have countered that role of Pakistan-- during that time, I don't know. But I-- and I think that's one of the harder questions to as-- to-- ascertain an answer to.

STEVE COLL:

So, one more question from me and then we'll open it up and-- finish up by 7:30 when Anand will be outside at that table you passed by signing-- the books that I know you're all going to want to get as you leave. Anand, about the strength and the-- and the structure of the Taliban insurgency today-- so, you can look at different-- goals declared by military commanders or civilian cabinet members of the Obama administration saying what they intended to do when they-- when they-- increased American combat-- troop deployments to Afghanistan.

But essentially their-- their goal was, as they described it, was to break the Talib-- the momentum of the Taliban insurgency and to-- stabilize-- the situation enough so that the Afghan government-- could prevent-- certainly prevent the Afghan government's overthrow by the Taliban, the loss of any major cities and to stanch, if not roll back, the Taliban insurgency.

So, the-- all these five years later lots of blood and treasure-- and-- you know, at the time of that hard fighting in Kandahar and Helmand, America was in a deep recession and turned inward. And so, the casualties and the suffering that American and international-- as well as Afghan-- combatants went through (INAUDIBLE) was probably a little bit under-- played in comparison to the Iraq war.

But it was a bloody fight. So, what did-- what's the result? It looks like the number of s-- districts controlled by the Taliban overall is more or less the same as it was-- not more, but not less. No major city has fallen. When district centers fall or are influenced they're either left alone in a kind of undeclared acceptance of shared rule or they're taken back. But how stable now is-- are these achievements in your judgment given Pakistani policy, given Taliban resources and given public attitudes?

ANAND GOPAL:

I think they're actually fairly stable. You know, I think, you're right in saying that the-- the surge stopped the Taliban's momentum. It didn't reverse the momentum. So, the Taliban are still entrenched in villages and in the countryside.

The city-- the government is still entrenched in the city. In-- in many respects it looks somewhere similar to 1989 in which the-- the government was controlling the cities and some highways and the-- the re-- Islamic rebels at the time were controlling villages.

The Taliban today is probably not as popular-- or doesn't have as much popular

support as the Mujahideen did in the 1908s. So, that's one difference. But I don't think the Afghan government will be able to march into these villages and kick them out. And they're gonna stay there.

I don't think the Taliban's gonna be able to march into Kabul and overthrow the Afghan government. So, what we're looking at is essentially the status quo in perpetuity. What we're looking at is a war of attrition with two sides entrenched and-- and no end-- and no end in sight.

STEVE COLL:

All right. So, let's take some questions from the audience. And so, we'll start here and come over to you (INAUDIBLE).

CHRIS:

Hi-- Chris (INAUDIBLE PHRASE) legal department at OSI. Two very quick questions. The first one for David. You mentioned (UNINTEL) at the U.S. troops being sent in-- but you didn't mention anything about private military-- troops that may have also (UNINTEL PHRASE) figures on that?

And then similarly-- for Mr. Anand, you mentioned Special Forces and I was also curious as (INAUDIBLE) it's such a hot topic in the U.S.-- anything that you've come across in terms of private military troops that may have committed abuses and were overlooked or (UNINTEL)?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

CHRIS:

Just to clarify-- Afghani private security but-- private military forces from the U.S.

DAVID SEDNEY:

I'll start because the figures I used, 15,000 were the U.S. forces in 2002-- in-- in March of 2002 when I arrived. And basically that was the same-- through-- through almost all of 2002. at that point there were no private security contractors when we went into Afghanistan.

That was before the private security contracting-- phenomenon (?) industry became really big-- our-- our forces carried out their own-- security. By the time-- say, 2003 or 2004-- came in then we had the beginnings of those-- those private security contractors.

But when they really exploded was after 2004-- for two reasons. 1) because there was

a huge demand for them in Iraq and so the companies involved were able to supply a lot of them. And so, there was a big supply. And because in Afghanistan-- we-- didn't have-- anywhere near the number of forces that we needed we tended to use a lot of-- of-- we-- we compensated for lack of-- of military forces in that period of 2004, 2005, 2006-- with private security forces. But in the time that I-- that I was referring to 2002 and 2003-- or 2001, 2002 and 2003, the number of forces we had-- was not augmented by those forces, because that-- that was a phenomenon that came a couple of years later.

ANAND GOPAL:

In-- in-- in terms of-- yeah, in terms of private security contractors or forces, if you're thinking about, like, Blackwater and DynCorp and these-- they're not a major factor. I mean, DynCorp is there. I think Blackwater might be there in some capacity. But they're not a major factor.

The way it works actually is through subcontracting. The biggest contracts over the last few years is something called host nation trucking, which is-- a contract by the de-- defe-- Defense Department to (UNINTEL) seven or eight, I think-- companies to deliver supplies between bases.

And-- and this is in the-- I think close to a billion dollars or something. Those companies, those are-- these are Amer-- mostly American companies, then go and subcontract it out to Afghans. And these are-- w-- when you say Afghans we mean Afghan war lords. Or this is-- really the process of creating Afghan war lords. And-- and so, these are really the private security forces that have been in play over the last ten years.

There's been a push by the Afghan government to try to absorb these private security forces into the government, because it's recognized that their very existence is destabilizing to the country. And there's a pushback against that by embassies and by the military saying that we need short-term security-- and not thinking about the sort of long-term security of the Afghan state.

DAVID SEDNEY:

If I can just add that the-- that particular issue pri-- of foreign private security forces was-- has been a very major political issue in Afghanistan. President Karzai issued a decree several years back-- barring their use except for pre-- prevention of-- or protection of the diplomatic establishments-- by-- and military for a sh-- for a short period of time, created in its place something called the Afghan Public Protection Force-- which-- was going to be a state-run-- organization un-- under the control of the Ministry of Interior.

It took over when the-- the foreign private security forces-- were forced to-- to cease formal operation. But that up-- Afghan Public Protection Force-- had a very mixed

performance. And-- it was-- there was a decree-- by the Ministry of Interior-- by the president-- saying the Ministry of Interior should take over-- the Public Protection Force about two months ago. So, that whole issue right now is very murky about (INAUDIBLE PHRASE).

STEVE COLL:

So, we'll go from-- go to the back. The gentleman in the back with the-- then we'll come across this way and come up.

HARRIS:

Hi there, my name's Harris (?). I actually reside in Canada. I'm just here for the day. I--

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

HARRIS:

--think-- I-- I don't have a question. I just have a point. I happened to be in Afghanistan two months ago-- for a family visit. And-- and-- war lords to be honest with you are-- are the least of our problems right now in the country. I think it's a product of a political-- (UNINTEL) for a past 30, 35 years.

And this is-- a process by which war lords are going to (UNINTEL PHRASE) for the public-- or the (UNINTEL PHRASE) process of (UNINTEL PHRASE) because-- we see the political spectrum right now during the elections. We have so many war lords that have flipped the switch.

These are people who held guns and now they're part of the political process where they were running as vice-presidents or presidents (UNINTEL) election process. I think when we talk about the American legacy in Afghanistan I think even the ordinary Afghan (?) citizen (UNINTEL) had legacy from the (UNINTEL PHRASE)-- from-- from the prism of how the U.S. dealt with Pakistan and not necessarily-- how it worked in Afghanistan.

I-- I belong to a Logar province and-- it's one of the most volatile-- regions in the-- in the country. And it's difficult to talk about the U.S. involved in Afghanistan (?) as a Logar, but when I talk to my cousins there they said that we ordinary Afghans do not expect the Americans to come to establishments here.

I think we can take care of that ourselves. It's going to be a process for everyone (?). Eventually, we will get there. But what frustrates Afghans is how the U.S. willingly or unwillingly has sat-- sat quiet and seen what the Pakistani government (UNINTEL PHRASE) establishment has done in terms of supporting militants in Pakistan not only-- not only attacking American sol-- soldiers in Afghanistan, but-- also take--

shot at (UNINTEL) population. So, when you talk about American legacy in Afghanistan-- the-- the fundamental understanding (UNINTEL) has to be that-- American-- the American foreign policy in Pakistan or towards Pakistan (UNINTEL) lack of engagement in Pakistan-- or its lack of-- transparency and how it's de-- it's dealt with Pakistan.

I mean, it plays a huge role, because at the end of the day, I think, all will be forgotten. As soon as the U.S. (UNINTEL) soldiers (UNINTEL) this issues of human rights violations and all that stuff that'll probably fly out of the window. But how you dealt with Pakistan is what's going-- what's-- what-- is something that people are going to remember for a long time.

STEVE COLL:

Great. So, rather than asking you to respond to that, 'cause that's a welcome and-- and highly credible voice, why don't we just move along, and if you want to respond to him later, this woman in the back and then we'll come up this side.

FEMALE VOICE:

Yeah, my name is-- (UNINTEL PHRASE). My question is for-- Mr.-- Sedney, 'cause I'm not sure-- where you're coming down on this question. And for me when I look at the war in Afghanistan there is sort of three goals that I think it had, which I'd like you-- to comment on.

The first was when the U.S. went in they said, "We're going to defeat the Taliban, that they are terrorists and-- we have to defeat them. They harbored-- bin Laden, et-- et cetera. And we're not going to negotiate with terrorists." But in fact, the U.S. hasn't defeated the Taliban. And there have been negotiations, back channel and-- and other. So, on that score-- the U.S.-- failed.

The second one is the war on drugs. And the report just came out from the-- Special (?) Inspector General that showed that there's been a 36% increase in poppy production and the U.S. has spent 8.4 billion dollars to make Afghanistan poppy-free. So, that's a failure as well.

The third one is liberating women. It really seems like it was a lifetime that Laura Bush went on television and said, "This is a war to liberate the women in Afghanistan from the horrible, brutal Taliban." And feminists jumped on the bandwagon. You mentioned Gloria Steinem and Eleanor Smeal, Hillary Clinton.

And women clearly have not-- the vast majority of women have not been liberated in Afghanistan. So, on those three metrics the war is a failure. And I just want to add when the war came home we're still dealing with that. So, the latest scandal (UNINTEL PHRASE) 40 people have died waiting for treatment and 22 veterans commit suicide every single day. That is a legacy that we should not forget. So, are you saying that the war and occupation was worth it? Are you saying that it was a

success in any way? Would you answer that question?

DAVID SEDNEY:

Sure, I'd be happy to. And I'll-- and I'll-- answer in very strong yes, in the affirmative, that it was worth it. And I'll go through the three points that you made. The first is-- you mentioned-- our goal going into Afghanistan. The goal going into Afghanistan was to def-- wa-- was to-- to defeat-- Al Qaeda-- and stop further attacks on the United States from Al Qaeda. The-- that was goal number one.

Goal number two was to ensure that the-- Al Qaeda could not come back into (SNEEZE) Afghanistan and therefore make sure the Taliban could not regain control of Afghanistan by building Afghan security forces that could prevent that from happening.

And number three-- the-- the goal was to-- it was-- the goal was to help Afghan society progress as much as possible. Those are the-- those were the goals that were-- if you go back and read what the Bush administration said, read what President Obama said, read-- read documents that I helped write-- th-- those were the goals.

So, first on Al Qaeda. In terms of Afghanistan-- Al-- Al Qaeda is not a factor in Afghanistan now. There are a few-- probably in the scores-- Al Qaeda-- foreign-- Al Qaeda who are in north-- northeastern Afghanistan, in the Kunar-Nuristan area very much integrated with the local population-- (COUGHING) very heavily int-- intermarried with them.

And who don't take-- right now don't have any ambition or any capability to act outside of Afghanistan. Al Qaeda leaders as we-- have known for some time-- all went to-- a-- Pakistan, where-- where they are now. I think-- it's fair to say that we have degraded Al Qaeda's ability to attack-- the United States and our allies.

That-- not just the-- killing of Osama bin Laden-- but the-- killing of numbers of others of the-- of the Al Qaeda leadership have made it so Al Qaeda's very much in a defensive position when it comes to the United States. At the same time Al Qaeda has evolved-- from a more centralized organization that did most of its planning and - work-- in Pakistan, now it's a very decentralized organization, with-- affiliates in-- Yemen, in Saudi Arabia, in Iraq in Syria-- Somalia, other places in Africa.

And those affiliates are in some cases autonomous, in some cases, for example in Syria right now, they're having serious internal difficulties between-- the official Al Qaeda (UNINTEL) sanctioned area-- sanctioned group and one that's against it.

So-- (CLEARING THROAT) how have we done relating to Al Qaeda overall as a threat? I think it's a very open question. And-- but-- in terms of Afghanistan-- we-- we were able to do that. In terms of Afghanistan vis-à-vis the Taliban, again, our goal it was-- we-- actually we were very careful about this, to not say our goal was to defeat the Taliban.

Our goal was to degrade the Taliban to where-- the Afghan security forces could

handle the threat. So, the kind of situation that Steve and Anand were described before-- where the-- U.S. and other-- allied troops went into Afghanistan in the surge of 2009 pushed the Al Qae-- pushed-- pushed the Taliban out of a number of areas where they-- where they were in 2009, 2010, 2011-- in the beginning of 2012.

And since that time there's been a status-- it's pretty much stayed the same. All those gains have been maintained-- but no new gains have been made. I mean, obviously-- Anand and I have a disagreement there. I've-- spent a lot of time with the Afghan security forces. I think the odds are very-- very good that they're going to make further progress-- over the next three to five years-- despite-- what I expect to be a very strong push by the Taliban this summer.

In terms of Afghan woman (SIC)-- I agree with you-- that there are huge problems-- and-- throughout Afghanistan with the Afghan woman. But-- to say it's been a failure, I think if you-- I think you have to talk to Afghan woman themselves. I don't know if we have any here who can speak for themselves.

I've found that the best spokesmen for Afghan woman are Afghan woman, not me. I'm neither woman nor Afghan. But I do listen to Afghan woman every time I travel to Afghanistan. I was last there in December. I always make a point to listen to Afghan woman. And I the message I hear repeatedly is they are better off now than they were under the Taliban, better off now than they were-- in-- the years immediately following afterwards.

And one of the reasons-- one of the ways we're better off is they understand how many problems they have to face. And those problems can be crushing. They can be dispiriting. And it's amazing to talk to Afghan woman who are 24 years old and have founded 20 schools-- and under death threats all the time. But (COUGHING) (INAUDIBLE) continue to-- to do things that I can't imagine myself doing-- in-- in a-- in an atmosphere-- of-- of-- of-- of-- of-- of--

(OVERTALK)

DAVID SEDNEY:

--violence.

STEVE COLL:

So, that's a-- a very thorough--

DAVID SEDNEY:

I apologize--

(OVERTALK)

STEVE COLL:

--a very thorough response, but I-- but I think-- listening to her question I was expecting you to concede that the war on drugs failed.

DAVID SEDNEY:

I didn't talk about the war on drugs, because if you look at official U.S. government policy we were there to help the British. The British had to lead on the war-- on the war on drugs in Afghanistan. We-- we tried to help-- and-- we have not succeeded.

And-- if-- if our goal was to make Afghanistan poppy-free we s-- we-- we would have failed. But that was never our goal. Our goal was to try and reduce the role that narcotics played in the Afghan economy. And there we have failed. The-- the role that narcotics plays in the Afghan economy, and particularly the role that increasingly over the last two years that narcotics have played in funding Al Qaeda-- I mean, sorry, funding the Taliban-- I think-- (INAUDIBLE) probably 1/3rd to 1/2 the Taliban fund today-- in 2014 are coming from narcotics trade.

Very different than it was in say, in 2010, 2011, when it was probably 10% or 20%. So, that's a area where you're correct. We have failed. But if you look at-- efforts everywhere else in the world-- to address-- the drug problem-- from Colombia to Turkey to Thailand-- you'll see that carrying out-- this kind of efforts requires a much higher level of committed civilian resources than we've ever put into in Afghanistan.

If you look at the amount of resources for example that are-- that are-- put into play in Colombia in terms of governance, rule of law-- agricultural assistance-- in air-- in areas, you'll see that the spending in-- (NOISE) Colombia-- under play in Colombia is somewhere-- ten-- around at least ten times as much per person on the e-- on the-- on the (UNINTEL) drug efforts in Afghanistan. So, again, I'll go back to the resource issue. We've never put the kind of resources that-- that would be necessary in Afghanistan, and they would be huge, to address the drug problem.

STEVE COLL:

So-- we've reached 7:25. I promised Bill that he could ask his question. And then I-- this gentleman is anxious to ask his question. So, we'll collect those two and then-- David has said that he'd be happy to answer questions from-- are you-- are you an Afghan woman?

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

STEVE COLL:

Okay, well, then-- I was going to make an ex-- an exception, but on the grounds--

that-- that he was inviting your voice. And we'll collect your voices (UNINTEL) and then we'll let them respond and then Anand's gonna sign books. And as you buy a book you also purchase a question. (LAUGHTER) And that David is going to provide his questions-- without compensation. (LAUGHTER) So-- please.

FEMALE VOICE:

I just had a quick follow-up to her question. Could Anand respond to what she said about Afghan women and their (INAUDIBLE) whenever he has a (INAUDIBLE)?

STEVE COLL:

Right. So, you-- we'll-- we'll let them each of the questioners-- speak and then we'll ask you to respond to those questions that you feel prepared to address.

BILL MCGOWAN:

Hi, I'm Bill McGowan, journalist, author and I run a blog called Coloring the News. My question is to all three of you, one of you three. In the spirit of living in the solution (UNINTEL PHRASE) of a problem, (LAUGH) which is also living in the problem too, which part of our government is doing a postmortem in the most meaningful, holistic way of what went wrong across the (INAUDIBLE PHRASE)?

FEMALE VOICE:

We lost you.

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

BILL MCGOWAN:

You know, across the military platforms, nation building platforms, the anthropological platforms, the culture matter's platform? Is anybody actually putting this all together now in real time trying to figure out what went wrong? Because, I mean, it-- to-- to remind ourselves why we got there (UNINTEL PHRASE) it was basically to tru-- trounce Al Qaeda, to deny them a platform.

The nation building came afterward. So, if we have to do it again, in a climate, an economic climate where nation building is-- is perceived as unaffordable, you know-- who is-- who is actually standing up and-- and trying to discern where it went off-track? Is there-- you know, (UNINTEL PHRASE) Navy war college, the Army war college, Leavenworth, all of them?

STEVE COLL:

One last-- from this gentleman who's been (INAUDIBLE).

MIKE DIETRICH:

My name's-- Mike Dietrich (PH). I spent-- most of year-- in Afghanistan in 2012. I came back from Iraq in 2005 rather cynical. Came back from Afghanistan (LAUGH) even more cynical (UNINTEL) our U.S. government. And my-- my question is kind of a basic one, which is, we in the United States learn that our own revolution, things about human nature and basic human values.

So, why don't we apply those things to other countries? The prime example being t-- today Afghanistan. Why don't we when we go and deal with a country like that talk in terms of (UNINTEL) that government you need checks and balances.

Because if you don't have checks and balances within your government power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely. Why don't you respect the idea that people want to be able to petition their government regarding redress to they have justice? In other words, things that our Found Founding Fathers dealt with and that we feel central to our government we seem not to apply in places where I think it would work. I think those concepts would have worked and helped Afghans tra-- Afghanistan tremendously. And in stead it seems that we Americans when we go to foreign places we just forget our basic values.

(OVERTALK)

MIKE DIETRICH:

And that's my-- question.

STEVE COLL:

Great. Anand-- choose some, all.

ANAND GOPAL:

Yeah (INAUDIBLE).

STEVE COLL:

You can't do none. But--

ANAND GOPAL:

I'll choose. I'll choose (INAUDIBLE). This-- the-- three word answer to that, I think is the war on ter-- it's (UNINTEL)-- the war on terror, I think is-- is-- is the reason for that. Because-- I mean, sometimes you hear that Afghanistan's not ready for democracy, that it's not ready for-- sort of western style government. I don't think that's true. I think Afghans are very ready for democracy, but they have to be enabled to-- have a demo-- democratic system.

When we pursue a war on terror, which means not thinking about checks and balances or redress, but-- but actually incentivizing people to kill bad guys, or who we think are bad guys, a whole host of other-- effects-- ensue. And-- and this has been the-- the primary pro-- problem from day one, I think, and-- and that's what the book-- talks about.

There is a question about-- which part of our government is doing a postmortem. The-- I mentioned it before, this Special Investigator General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, SIGAR-- you really should go and-- and read their reports. John Sopko's the head of (UNINTEL). I think he's a brilliant guy.

And he-- he just gave a speech the other day, and it was just published on the web, that-- discusses-- his views and SIGAR's views on these things. They actually do go and-- and-- go through a lot of-- what's-- what's happening now and try to take-- hold (UNINTEL) to account.

And if you read the report, the most recent report (INAUDIBLE) came out in April, you would see that for example things like the Asia Study Foundation, which-- David mentioned-- in his-- in his-- remarks, actually are deeply problematic. You-- you know, they describe how there's all sorts of issues (COUGHING) with the way in which-- polling is done in a place like Afghanistan.

I learned this the hard way when I-- when I-- first landed in Afghanistan in 2008. I went out. There was a-- there was a attack in-- in a village outside of the-- the main city-- outside of Kabul. And I went to the house and I interviewed the guy. I asked him what happened. And he-- he explained everything. And then I-- I started asking questions about do you support the Taliban? Do you support the Americans? He pulled a gun to my head (?). (MURMURS)

This is a war zone. This is where your political affiliations or expressing your political affiliations can be a matter of life or death. This is not a place where you can conduct polls. Particularly in half the country where the war is being fought. And this is why-- studies like the Asia Study-- Poll, which says that 70% of Afghans are optimistic (INAUDIBLE) the future are deeply suspect.

The SIGAR-- report describes not only that general aspect of it, that you don't conduct war-- polls in war zones, but also the specifics. For example, you know, one of the ways in which you poll is the so-called Kish Grid, which is you go into a village and you pick a house.

And then you go-- fo-- you follow an algorithm. You pick the first house and you go

30 steps and you make a left and you pick the next house, go 30 steps and-- and, you know, make another left. And through that you condu-- you-- you develop a random sample of the village.

If you try to do this in a place like Wardak you will probably end up-- in a grainy YouTube video somewhere-- you know, in captivity. You know, this is not something that's done, right? What the SIGAR report describes for the Asia S-- Study Foundation, which by the way was subcontracted to an Afghan company, is that they got people-- they tried to find people in the war torn area (UNINTEL) brought them to the city and asked them, you know, what do you think about the war?

So, deeply problematic methodology. So, I would caution you not to th-- not to listen to these sorts of polling that is absolutely uner-- inaccurate. On the question of Afghan women-- and this goes back to the remarks I had in the beginning, which are there really are two narrative here, or two stories, okay? In Kabul and in Shomali and in these kinds of places it's undeniable that Afghan women's lives have improved because of the last ten or 12 years.

Because under the Taliban we all know what they went through. However, on the flip side of that question is what is happening in Wardak or Paktika or Khost or these areas? And let's look at that. In the 1990s in a place like Paktika if you're a woman you were kept inside your house and you're not allowed to leave.

You were not allowed to have an education. You're not allowed to have-- access to healthcare. Today, in Paktika you're kept inside your house. You're kept away from education. You're not allowed to have access to healthcare. On top of that, you're living in a war zone.

So, you can tell me what-- how the situation is compared to then. And-- and this is the story of-- Heela (PH), who's-- sort of the main person I follow in my book, who grew up in Kabul, had sort of-- the-- she went to Kabul University. She majored in economics.

You know, her husband was a communist. So, he was very forward thinking in terms of women's rights. And-- and she's somebody who's very strong-willed and independent. And she was forced because of the war to move to rural Urozgan province and you see the difference.

And one (INAUDIBLE) s-- most striking things to me when I was interviewing her is I asked her, "Can you-- can you describe how you felt when the Taliban were-- were toppled and the U.S.-- backed regime took over?" And she told me she couldn't even remember the day. And this is because from her point of view in this rural village it didn't make a difference. She was locked in her house, you know. So, if we really-- care about the rights of women in Afghanistan we have to look-- of course, we have to look about education and healthcare. We also have to look about the fact that their sons and their husbands are dying in roadside bombs, and the fact that they're stuck in the house for reasons that are more complicated than just the Taliban. Of course, the Taliban are a maj-- major problem. But there are many reasons for this. And that needs to be addressed.

STEVE COLL:

Great. I think that's-- I think that's-- a very thorough-- and so, David, the last--
(OVERTALK)

DAVID SEDNEY:

Well, first of all, on-- on the issue of polling-- obviously Anand and I w-- are 180° apart on this. The-- I will refer people to the Asia Foundation poll. They're well aware of the critiques of people like the SIGAR and I-- I would urge people to be very cautious when you read the SIGAR-- studies.

I'll be happy to discuss a number of the SIGAR studies that have serious flaws, and-- the one that-- Anand just mentioned. He's correct that doing polling in war zones are difficult-- but the-- the Asia Foundation people who did this-- who did contract the actual carrying out of the polls to different Afghan groups, but-- they are very serious, very professional people.

I've spoken to them. I've relayed those concerns. I've raised those concerns with them, and-- and-- found that they are very serious people who actually know what they're doing. Unfortunately, the SIGAR people didn't talk to the-- those people who they criticize.

It's one of the weaknesses of SIGAR reports is they often criticize things where they don't do enough research on. So, anyway-- obviously we feel-- we think very differently on that. So, I urge all of you to go out and-- and-- those of you who-- are familiar with the Asia Foundation I urge you to talk to the people there if you want to follow this up.

In terms of serious study-- about-- what's-- the-- there is none. And it probably is too soon. There are various fragmented things. The SIGAR's reports tend to be about very often very tiny, specific things. They're sometimes brought together, but-- the-- but they're no-- but they're nowhere near a serious, systematic effort.

And-- one of the things that is-- I would say that-- the-- there is no reason to have a study of the failures, because as I said before, there have been many successes as well. So-- an evaluation and I describe those successes-- in what I said earlier. That's very important-- I think, when you look at, again, going back (COUGHING) to the-- to the elections. The narrative that all of you hear from the U.S. media is so flawed that it's very difficult for you to understand what's going-- really going on in Afghanistan.

The-- the 100-- and 200,000 people in Logar and Wardak-- that Anand is talking about, he's right (UNINTEL) happened to them. But if you're talking about what's happened to millions of Afghan woman, they're the ones-- millions of Afghan woman are much better off-- are the hundreds of thousands of woman in the areas that Anand's talking about-- worse off than they were?

Yes. There are people who are worse off. There are people who are better off. But

you have to look at this thing from a broader, strategic area. It's-- very important to recognize the failures-- but-- if all you do is talk about failure then you can't see the success. And I saw a number of people when I said success in Afghanistan they shook their head. Come up to me afterwards and I can lay out to you what those successes are. But even more importantly, talk to Afghans themselves. And talk to Afghans from everywhere in Afghanistan. Talk to the-- talk to the most (?) from the areas-- but talk to them based upon the number of people that they represent.

Because I would argue that-- I do argue very strongly that many more Afghans are much better off today than they were-- in 2001, 2005 or 2008. Yes, there are some, and it's important-- that our media cover those, but unfortunately, our media focuses on the problems.

They get a lot more mileage. Their editors publish stories about negative stuff. They just don't-- won't tell you the story about what's really happening in Afghanistan. I see the Afghan colleague saying (UNINTEL), "What is the number one problem in Afghanistan according to most Afghans?" and I'm talking about most Afghans throughout the whole country. It's unemployment. That's the number one problem that's identified over and over again by Afghans.

(OVERTALK)

DAVID SEDNEY:

War lords are a problem, but unemployment's worse. And the big issue of Pakistan, that again our Afghan colleague raised, that's one that I don't think any of the three of us here have an answer to.

STEVE COLL:

Great. So-- we've run out of time for this part of the program. As I mentioned before-- Anand and David will be available to speak to you as individuals. Anand's gonna go sign books. I'd like to thank you for the seriousness of your questions, for the (APPLAUSE) patience of your engagement. Please applaud our (INAUDIBLE PHRASE).

(OFF-MIC CONVERSATION)

* * *END OF TRANSCRIPT* * *