The Afghan Challenge

William J. Fallon , Rory Stewart , Joanne J. Myers

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Introduction

JOANNE MYERS: Good afternoon. I'm Joanne Myers, Director of Public Affairs Programs, and on behalf of the Carnegie Council I'd like to welcome our members and guests and thank you for joining us.

Today our conversation will be focusing on one of the most troubled spots in the world, Afghanistan. Discussing this issue will be two very distinguished individuals, Admiral William Fallon and Rory Stewart. It's an honor to have you both here with us today.

Before we begin, I would just like to take a moment to thank John Tirman, who suggested we host this event and for making the necessary arrangements. John is the Executive Director and a principal research scientist at MIT's Center for International Studies. This year Admiral Fallon was a Robert E. Wilhelm Fellow there.

All one has to do is read the headlines to realize that the war in Afghanistan is not going well. Just last week, Defense Secretary Robert Gates announced that he had requested the resignation of the top American general there.

Although we once talked about "winning" this war, the language has changed to that of "succeeding." But what does success mean? How will the mission be defined?

What are the strategic goals? Will the addition of 21,000 more troops to the current U.S. force of 41,000 make a difference? And, in the end, just what is needed to ensure a politically stable, economically viable Afghanistan? To address these issues, I would like to turn the floor over to our distinguished speakers.

Admiral Fallon is one of America's most distinguished military officers and diplomats. His last assignment was commander of U.S. Central Command, which means that he was responsible for operations in both Afghanistan and Iraq, among others. His wealth of experience gathered from his involvement in many of the world's most demanding assignments will most assuredly enrich our conversation.

Rory Stewart is a respected scholar, prized author, and activist. He is the Director of the Carr Center for Human Rights at Harvard. Before arriving at Harvard, Mr. Stewart was based in Kabul, where he was Chief Executive of the Turquoise Mountain Foundation. His time spent on the ground in Afghanistan will expand our understanding and add a personal dimension to the conflict there.

More information about these two accomplished individuals can be found by reading their bios, which have been handed out earlier to you when you checked in this afternoon.

We have a lot to discuss, so at this time I ask that you please join me in giving a very warm welcome to our speakers, Admiral Fallon and Rory Stewart. Thank you for coming.

Remarks

WILLIAM FALLON: Thanks for the kind introduction. It's a pleasure to be here with you, and, Rory, an honor to be sharing a dais again with you.

I have to tell you back a couple of years ago, when I found out that I was headed for Central Command, I received a gift from one of my daughters a couple days later.

It was a book [*The Prince of the Marshes*] that Rory had written about his experiences down in Maysan Province in the south of Iraq, which I found fascinating. My only regret, after reading that and having spent a year over there, is that I never got to meet the Prince of the Marshes. That's still on my list of things to do, so I'll always have something out there to reach for.

But I think tonight you want to talk about Afghanistan, so I'll be happy to lead off and to give you a couple of impressions.

I think that the byline on the advertisement, at least on the Web, was "Afghanistan: What's needed for a stable, economically prosperous, and viable Afghanistan?" I'll give you a first cut at it from my perspective.

First of all, I would say that when speaking of Afghanistan I would caution that it's impossible to just look at the country of Afghanistan as its current boundaries exist. I've always looked at the region in which countries happen to lie. It is particularly important here, because Pakistan and the people there play a huge role in what goes on in Afghanistan.

The principal issue to understand is that the Pashtun people, who are the majority in Afghanistan, are a significant minority within Pakistan. Their traditional areas overlie a big part of the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.

The Pashtuns aren't really keen on that border. Truth be known, at least in my perception, they'd prefer there wasn't a border, because they kind of like the whole of Pashtunland. But of course, that's not the view of the Pakistani government; they are keen on having a very firm border there. That, I believe, has been one of the friction points between the two.

There is a line that the Brits established—Rory can probably give us some of that history—some years ago to define the two countries. But again, that's not viewed with much glee and happiness from the Pashtun, mostly Afghan, side.

There is also the issue of Central Asia, of which Afghanistan is certainly a part. The short history here is that all of these countries north of Afghanistan used to be part of the Soviet Union. A lot of the folks who inhabit that place right now of a certain age who served in the military spent some time in Afghanistan back in the 1980s, and their view of the country is decidedly negative, based on my extensive engagement with folks in Central Asia. So there is pretty much of a "let's hold them off and keep them at bay" view from the north looking down to Afghanistan.

The last country I'd like to touch on is Iran, which shares Afghanistan's western border. Iran in its engagement with Afghanistan is really a mixed bag. I'll tell you that, from my personal engagement with President Karzai while I was out in the region, I found that he personally would vacillate between really having his jaw jacked pretty tightly down and at other times recognizing that in fact Iran has played a dual role here.

On the positive side, they have injected a significant amount of economic blood into western Afghanistan, particularly around Herat. It's pretty noticeable. When you travel around the country, that's one of the areas that I believe stands out as, at least on the surface, the one with a little bit better infrastructure than the rest of the place.

However, now, this all comes at a price, and the price is intense meddling in the country. As far as I was concerned, we had a real problem back about a year and a half ago, because the Iranians were not only meddling in the country but they were coming after the United States and the coalition, particularly the United States.

They formed an unusual alliance with the Taliban. Ideologically, these folks are pretty far apart. Those that are familiar with the area would know this. But nonetheless, they collaborated to some extent to try to get to us. It wasn't extensive. I couldn't tell you whether it's still going on. I noticed that it was kind of at a fairly low level, but it exists.

The other thing is that President Karzai certainly recognized that the Iranians were meddling with some of his opponents to set themselves up politically so they'd have influence no matter who thinks they're running the country in the near future.

The next issue I'd like to talk about is stability, which is absolutely required in this country. You have to have security, in my experience, if you're going to have any kind of economic and personal development. There's no better measure of that, I think, than watching where the money goes or doesn't go. You're not going to find much investment in places that are unstable. So that's a real problem, in Afghanistan in particular.

We have a lot of help that's in the country right now in the way of coalition military and security forces. I think for the near term they're pretty essential to try to get some measure of stability in the country that could be possibly

enhanced. But I think in the long term the answer is going to have to be with the Afghans themselves, and so with the Afghan security forces, particularly the army, which is reasonably credible, I believe well run, although it's very small.

I am fond of these folks, first of all, because they are professional and they're tough and they don't shy away from difficult tasks, as others in the region tend to do. They're very experienced, because the leaders have all had some time in the anti-Soviet days in the 1980s, almost without exception.

The other thing that I really appreciate is that by my observation they get along with one another to the extent that professionals should. Although they come from different backgrounds, there's a pretty good mix of the ethnic divisions within Afghanistan to be found in the Afghan army. The fact that they generally work together and plan together is a good thing and helpful for the future.

The other thing, the bottom line to all of this, though, is none of these forces are going to be successful, and certainly there's no way that the military alone is going to provide the essential security here. The population has to be convinced that whoever is providing the security is someone they can trust. So much better, I think, for the Afghans to be doing this than us or any of our partners over there.

But there's a long way to go, certainly with the police. The Afghan army is held in pretty high regard by the people, the police not so at all. They are two vastly different elements. We can get into that maybe in the Q&A if you're interested.

Economics in Afghanistan: What this place lacks, in my opinion, first and foremost, is a viable, long-term economic plan. It's a welfare state, and it has been for a long time. In the near term, there's really no alternative in my view. Rory has spent a fair amount of time over there on the ground in places I haven't been, so he can probably elaborate on this or have an opinion. But it has been my experience that this place really doesn't have one.

Now, those that came to help several years ago got together and came up with a plan. There is a blueprint. There is something on paper. In my opinion, it's pretty shaky and not really viable. And so the place needs development. The only folks that I see really making an effort in that line that's sustainable right now happen to be China, and of course they're interested in taking care of themselves and they're interested in the minerals that are potentially in some significant supply. That's what they're engaged in right now. But, at least, they are there working that piece of the problem.

I guess the other thing I would share with you is in my view there are four things that are needed in this country, and these are really the priority things:

- They need roads. There is actually a fair amount of progress that has been made in the last several years. There were no roads before. There were tracks and trails, there were dirt roads and gravel roads. There's now almost completed a ring road that runs around the central mountainous region that ties the country together. But there is a long way to go.
- They need electricity. There basically is none. There's some around Kabul, there's some in Herat, a few other places, but there is no national grid, there is no national source. There's one big dam on the Helmand River, Kajaki, that provides the bulk of the power down there, but it's a fraction of what you'd see in any developed country. They've got a long way to go.
- The other thing they need is water management. There's a tremendous amount of water that runs through the country. It comes from the snow melt in the high mountains both there and up in Central Asia. Most of it runs right on through. It's not particularly well used. There was a system of relatively local irrigation that was reasonably effective, I thought. The Russians worked hard at blowing it all up when they were there in the 1980s. A lot of it has still not been redone.
- The last thing goes hand-in-glove with the water, and that's agricultural development. The place is, I believe, able to feed itself.

There are 30 million people there. That's a significant number. You wouldn't think so when you look at the place at first, it seems barren and vast and just not many folks; but if you look carefully at the valleys where the water follows, there are a lot of people. The land is reasonably fertile in these areas. So they can feed themselves. There is a potential, I think, for some of this to be exported, because there are some pretty hungry mouths down the road here in India and in Pakistan and other places.

So there is potential, but without those four things I think the economics of the place are not particularly wonderful.

And again, tied in with the first comment I made, it needs to be weaned off its welfare state status. That is going to take pretty significant cooperation by those who are there to help from outside and a government that is viable.

That gets to the final point: How is this place going to really stand on its own in the future? It's going to stand if and when the majority of the people have enduring confidence in a government that can represent them and take care of their basic needs. This is a grand experiment, because this place does not have a tremendous history of good central government. It's mostly local, it's tribal. It has really been devolved down to people very close to their homes. So it's a pretty interesting experiment underway.

I think I'll end it there, enough from me, and turn it over to Rory for his observations and comments.

Thank you.

RORY STEWART: Thank you all very much for coming.

Just before I came onstage, I was talking to a friend here and I was talking about the consensus that seems to have built up around Afghan policy. She came from Britain. She assumed the consensus was that it was a disaster. Therefore, when I was talking to her she was saying, "How does one get over the positive story?"

In fact, of course, at the moment both in Afghanistan and in Washington the consensus is in favor of President Obama's policy in Afghanistan. I'm sure you're all much too grand to read *Newsweek*, but were you to read *Newsweek* you would discover this week the President being celebrated for his "coldly rational approach" to the problem in Afghanistan.

The question, I suppose, on my mind is: What would it take to shake this consensus? What could one possibly do to convince Ambassador Holbrooke or General Petraeus, or indeed the President himself, that they were wrong, because it's an immensely attractive policy I believe?

Firstly, it seems to be a just war. It's in response to 9/11, backed by a broad coalition, endorsed by the United Nations. We seem to be facing a terrifying threat—a threat of global jihad, regional instability, terrorism unleashed against American cities. Our objectives, in the light of all of this, seem quite reasonable, certainly admirable: we want to stop al Qaeda, we want to stop the Taliban, stabilize Pakistan, bring development, build a legitimate, effective state.

Our methods and approaches seem quite reasonable. If you hear the President speak, he talks a great deal about good governance, economic development, civil society, capacity building. We celebrate our successes in health and education, immunization. We may concede that the policing isn't going as well as we'd hoped, but, broadly speaking, things seem pretty good.

And then, after all, there is the immense charisma of General Petraeus, of Ambassador Holbrooke, of our new President. Little wonder, therefore, that there is such a consensus, that NATO generals, Afghan media moguls, NGO workers, all concur in the idea that more troops need to be sent to Afghanistan.

The problem, I think, though, is that, although it wouldn't be right to say that our policy was a lie, I think it's a myth. And although we might not be able to say that our policy is a crime—that, in other words, we can't, as one might have liked to in Iraq, point to corruption in contracting, torture in bases—although that too exists in Afghanistan, that isn't our dominant narrative, or lies and false justifications. In other words, it's not the kind of thing that Burke could stand up in the Houses of Parliament and attack in the same way as he attacked British colonization in India.

It's not a crime, it's a mistake—a mistake so extravagant and costly that it approaches being a crime, but a mistake nonetheless, and probably quite a well-intentioned mistake. It is, in effect, as though—and this is what, I suppose, one is struggling to get across—as though somebody was saying, "I've got $100,000 and I want to have an eight-bedroom house with a swimming pool and a tennis court in central Manhattan." Now, there's nothing wrong with any of those objectives. The problem, of course, is that they are not achievable.

And how does one then address this issue, particularly given that the house in question is not actually a house they are going to be living in, not a house in their own country, and not a house that they are ultimately really accountable for?

So you could look at the logic of the argument and you could point out how very strange the President's argument is. I mean, broadly speaking, his argument as laid out in his speech on the basis of the white paper is as follows. All these things are logically connected in a necessary and sufficient chain. These things are presented as analytic truths, as self-evident:

- That our objective is to stop terrorism, to stop al Qaeda from regrouping;

- That the way to do that is to defeat the Taliban, because, so long as there are Taliban, al Qaeda can regroup;
- That in order to defeat the Taliban, we must create a legitimate, effective state in Afghanistan;
- That this will deliver humanitarian benefits to the Afghan people, particularly if combined with a counter-narcotics policy.

All of this, in turn, depends on the stability of Pakistan. Or to put it in the one-sentence statement made by our President: "In order to catch Osama bin Laden we must win in Afghanistan and stabilize Pakistan."

Now, it's not necessary to be an advanced analytical philosopher to point out that none of these things follow from each other. One could, for example, imagine having a counter-terrorism strategy which did not have a legitimate, effective state. One could imagine humanitarian projects which in turn did not contribute to counter-terrorism. One might even be able to imagine doing things in Afghanistan which didn't depend on doing things in Pakistan.

These are empirical claims; they're not logical claims. That's not to say they're false—all these connections may be true—but they need to be substantiated, they need to be proved. This is when we get into problems, because proving things in Afghanistan is very tough.

All of us who present ourselves as Afghan experts have in fact, as you could imagine, a tissue of some personal experience in travel, a little bit of reading, a little bit of knowledge, some comments picked up in restaurants and at other conferences.

But if you were to really ask us "Does eradication work in Afghanistan?", we would be hard pushed, most of us who are not agricultural specialists, to explain why the eradication of poppy works in Nangarhar in eastern Afghanistan but not in Helmand in the south. If you were to say, "How about subsidizing wheat?", we would have difficulty understanding why perhaps subsidies for fertilizers (i.e., inputs) is better than wheat subsidies.

Or to take a final example, if you were to say, "What alternative crops should we plant?", we might not realize that in Ghowr in central Afghanistan, where the poppy is short-stemmed, it would be better to have some potatoes, some onions, some apricots, some wheat, because you have a longer growing season, it's less labor intensive (two people from your family can go into the city to get a job and your overall household income is greater).

Now, I am taking this tiny, tiny example of counter-narcotics as an example of what would be, in effect, 52 different policy issues of this sort involved in those of us in this room trying to get involved in the question of how to create an effective, legitimate Afghan state. I mean some of us might know about agriculture, but we're not going to know about why the counterinsurgency tactics are not working in the Kunar Valley or are working in some parts of Kunar but not in Karingal. Others of us are not going to understand the details of the electoral system and what effect that has on party politics in Afghanistan.

But beyond all of this it would be difficult to imagine a single fact which you could use to convince the policymaker, to convince President Obama, to convince Ambassador Holbrooke, that they are trying to buy an eight-bedroom house with a swimming pool and a tennis court for $100,000.

This is the fundamental question: How do you explain that the creation of an effective, legitimate state in Afghanistan is a task of almost unimaginable proportions, that you could invest in Afghanistan for 20 or 30 years before you could bring the Afghan police, army, or civil service to the level of their counterparts in Pakistan, and yet Pakistan itself is still not stable?

What facts would you have to adduce to convince people of that? Would it be to say 75 or 80 percent of people in Afghanistan are illiterate? Would it be to point out that there is no basic infrastructure or legitimate economy? Would it be to point out that the majority of the civil servants don't have a high school education, or that 50 percent of teachers are only educated one grade above their students, so if they're teaching third grade they have a fourth-grade education? Are these facts that might make them sit up and say, "Can we create this effective, legitimate state in five years' time?"

What kind of historical analogies would you have to be involved in to convince General Petraeus that, although he is aware of some of the micro differences between Iraq and Afghanistan, he, broadly speaking, still assumes incorrectly that a surge from Iraq is going to work in Afghanistan?

In order to prove that, you would need, first of all, to work out how the surge operated in Iraq, which is a very controversial subject.

General Petraeus clearly believes that the surge operated in Iraq because of troop increases, population security,

a counterinsurgency strategy.

What if the surge operated in Iraq because of better intelligence and Special Forces operations against terrorists?

What if the surge actually worked in Iraq because of the political dynamics between Shia and Sunni?

What if the existence of a Baghdad government with a major mass political base, giving 85 to 90 percent of the support in southern Iraq, driving the Sunni out of neighborhood after neighborhood in Baghdad, and Sunni tribal sheikhs who had a traditional relationship to the Baghdad government were the two decisive ingredients in stabilizing the country?

Those two ingredients simply do not exist in Afghanistan, where the government lacks that mass political base, where the tribal structures in southern Afghanistan are so eroded by the Taliban, by 30 years of war, and in any case never existed in that kind of muscular relationship to the central state which attained under the Ba'aths.

Already I've said something astonishingly complex, which presumably academics could publish 3,000 articles on, and one still hasn't got to the stage of really convincing General Petraeus that the surge that he believes worked for a certain reason in Iraq won't work in Afghanistan.

Ultimately, therefore, I suppose we come down to telling stories. Those in favor tell themselves stories perhaps about the Marshall Plan or they tell themselves stories about success in the Balkans. Or they feel a general sense of the moral rectitude of their task, that they are fundamentally well-intentioned, hard-working, diligent people.

Or perhaps the story is even more complicated, a story that reflects our contemporary culture, a story of why—and I just want to perhaps conclude on this—we were able to talk about politics in the 1860s in terms of foreign affairs and find it very difficult today. The answer is partly here in this magazine, but it is much more present in what passes for strategy.

In 1867, two British men sat down in the Council of India to talk about Afghan Policy. Henry Rawlinson and John Lawrence were both men who had spent 30 or 40 years operating in India, Rawlinson a great deal of time when he wasn't in Baghdad on the North-West Frontier. Both knew the country well. Rawlinson, broadly speaking, was frightened that the Russians were going to take Afghanistan. The conversation went as follows.

Rawlinson says, "The benefits that would accrue to the British Empire, the people of Afghanistan, would make the costs involved in taking Kabul seem an economy."

John Lawrence says, "You're wrong. The Afghans don't like foreigners. They're not going to like us. And as for the statement that the Russians are going to invade, the Russians are welcome to it. They're not going to like the Russians either."

Somehow, that is not the nature of our policy debate today. Nobody is saying, "What is the cost/benefit analysis? What actually is politics and nationalism and religion in Afghanistan?"

Instead, generically, we say, "We are committed to local solutions to local problems. We understand the importance of capacity building and governance; transparent, predictable, and accountable financial processes; combined with an investment in small- and medium-sized enterprises; certain kinds of infrastructure projects; free, fair, credible elections based around the notion of a vigorous civil society"—in other words, the kind of things we would say about a World Bank project in Botswana as somehow overset on an operation in Afghanistan which currently is on line, I reckon, next year to costing probably $85 billion and will involve 90,000 international troops.

So the question then, to conclude, is: How does one posit—and this is what I think Admiral Fallon was working at—something that's realistic? How does one avoid simply being accused of being a nay-sayer? Because the answer, of course, is that one ought to be able to say, "Well, for $100,000 I can't get you a swimming pool, a tennis court, and an eight-bedroom house. I can, however, get you rather a nice apartment in the suburbs of Boston with a nice view."

The problem for the policymaker is: How on earth are they going to sell that? It doesn't sound great.

The answer, of course, in Afghanistan is that you can, over 20 or 30 years, work to make the country more prosperous, more humane, more stable than it is today. You can take certain kinds of actions with Special Forces and intelligence operations to try to make the United States slightly safer against the threat from international terror. You can help to contribute to the long history of Afghanistan to the benefit of its people.

The question is: When are we going to be allowed to look at what we can do? Because I believe our attempt to do what we cannot, our obsession with pursuing what we feel we ought to do rather than what we can, is deeply damaging, counterproductive, and probably makes us less likely to achieve our objectives.

Thank you all very much indeed.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: My question to Admiral Fallon is: Can you tell us a little bit more about what is the goal of Chinese development policy vis-à-vis minerals, because there's not much coverage of that in terms of the media? And it will be interesting, because we follow what they are doing in Africa quite a bit and its relation to human rights and democracy, but I haven't heard much about their goals in Afghanistan.

To Mr. Stewart, this is somewhat controversial, and maybe a non-starter as most people tell me. But I have been told at various conferences that one of the issues that is occasionally being floated, including by an MP from the U.K., Tobias Ellwood, is that possibly some portion of the illegal trade in narcotics could possibly be brought into the legal trade of pharmaceuticals for morphine, where there are some shortages in the world. Would that help both economically as well as perhaps decriminalizing some elements?

WILLIAM FALLON: As to the first of your questions, it's not a big deal, nothing unusual here. The Chinese economy requires enormous amounts of raw materials. They are scouring the world to try to find them. There is some evidence that there is significant mineral wealth in Afghanistan.

One thing that has been discovered is copper. There's an old mine that they're expanding and upgrading to try to satisfy some of their needs. They are doing it very intensively with their people.

That's about all I think is worth mentioning right now. Nothing unusual, I think, nothing other than their behavior in other places.

RORY STEWART: The issue of counter-narcotics is a complex one. Clearly the aim in counter-narcotics in Afghanistan is to try to find a carrot and a stick to convince farmers not to grow poppy. This is a very, very difficult thing to do. There's not much of a stick, because we're very worried that eliminating the poppy crop would bankrupt farmers and drive them into the arms of the insurgency.

So in fact, not to pick on the President's speech, but when he says that narcotics, to quote, "undercut the economy, encourage criminality, and fund the insurgency," there's something a little bit misleading about this. I mean, in essence, narcotics in Afghanistan at the moment really is the economy. In what sense it undercuts the economy I'm not at all sure. There would need to be some sort of footnote. Essentially, the entire non-aid-related economy in Afghanistan at the moment is connected to the production of 93 percent of the world's heroin.

It certainly encourages criminality insofar as this is definitionally illegal.

In terms of funding the insurgency, not clear. I mean certainly it is one source, but it's also an enormous source of revenue for people very close to the Afghan government. A great deal of the money goes to people who are police chiefs, officials, or even more senior people in the Afghan government.

In terms of legal morphine, legal morphine is less on the stick side and more on the carrot side. The question of alternative livelihoods is: What else could you plant which could generate the kinds of both prices and extraneous benefits? When I say "prices and extraneous benefits," the farmer doesn't only grow poppy because you get $135 a kilo at the farm gate. You grow poppy also because the transport arrangements are guaranteed for you, the security for your crop is better, and you get certain kinds of credit arrangements.

It's better than growing apricots, because the roads are so bad the apricots bruise in the trucks and they rot because there's no way of preserving them. You can keep poppy for two or three years before you have to send it out. So all of that makes poppy an attractive crop.

But the problem with legal morphine is that the price for legal morphine is lower than the price for illegal poppy. And even in countries like Australia and Tasmania, which grow legal poppy for morphine, quite a large proportion —people argue about the percentage of this, but maybe 20 percent—of the crop goes illegal. In Afghanistan, one presumes the answer would be that they would have no more incentive to grow legal poppy than they would have to grow apricots. Well, maybe more than apricots, but no more incentive than they would have to grow mint, saffron, or any of the other high-value crops which people have suggested.

WILLIAM FALLON: If I could put a p.s. on that, I received several proposals by well-meaning people around the world to do just this thing, and I found them to be not viable. The amount of need for this particular product is small, and it wouldn't even begin to put a dent in getting rid of the illegal side of it.

QUESTION: Admiral Fallon, there are people who argue that we were doing pretty well in Afghanistan until the Iraq war started, and that as a result of the Iraq war we diverted our attention from Afghanistan, we deprived Afghanistan of the necessary resources, and that we're now paying the price for that. What is your view about that decision?

WILLIAM FALLON: That's a pretty simplistic view, and it's highly tinged with politics, which in my opinion is one of the major factors driving a lot of the discussion about Afghanistan, and it tends to distort the picture significantly.

U.S. domestic politics is a major player here. In the most simplistic terms, we have this "bad" war in Iraq, is the view of the Democratic Party generally, and we have this "good" war in Afghanistan. I don't buy either one of those views.

The reality in my eyes is that the al Qaeda worldwide network chose to operate from the Afghan mountains, primarily along the Pakistan border, because it was ungoverned territory, inaccessible to most folks, and above and beyond the rule of law in any way, shape, or form. So it was a wonderful place to go hang out because nobody was going to bother you.

So in 2001, in response to the attacks here on 9/11, the United States decided to go try to get rid of these guys and their Taliban supporters who had taken over the government of Afghanistan. And so over a several-month period those characters were pretty much pushed out of the country of Afghanistan and the Taliban's grip on power was broken, and people were generally pretty happy with that. So things got cleaned up.

The United States, along with most other folks that had a hand in that, took a bow—"Thank you very much, pretty good work"—and let things go on. And there were a lot of things going on, people working around the world to try to help get a responsible Afghan government up in the absence of the Taliban and get it moving. So a lot of things going on.

But it didn't require a lot of troops, frankly, because there wasn't much to do in terms of an external threat, al Qaeda being in my view an external threat, and the Taliban pretty much high-tailed it out of town. So things went kind of low key.

Then, next year there was this business in Iraq that began and became the focal point of attention, certainly for the United States.

Meanwhile, back in Afghanistan things proceeded in their own bumpy way. I agree with Rory that this is not a couple of years' project, this is a lifetime of activity to bring this place anywhere near the expectations of a lot of folks. Noble work, but it's going to take a long time.

So meanwhile, attention got focused on Iraq. The situation over the years changed in Afghanistan. I think, for one, the Taliban looked around and said, "The heat's off us. Maybe we can try this again." So al Qaeda went over to Pakistan, found that to be not unlike what they had enjoyed there—"and, by the way, we can probably go back and start playing again." So the security thing began to slowly deteriorate as people were, I think, probing.

Frankly, we were just beginning the work of trying to help the Afghani government. So we started to help set up a new security force. Again, this isn't something you snap your fingers.

We took a different approach in Iraq, and we got what we paid for, in terms of it not being particularly viable. We had a lot of trouble with them. We got big numbers, so what could they do? So we're trying to do it smarter.

We had allies that stood up and said, "We're going to take care of other problems. We're going to take care of the drug problem." Not so fast.

Another ally said, "We're going to take care of the police, fix this all up." Didn't work out.

And so you had these "talk is cheap," failed attempt kind of things in many respects. So I think that's really what went on.

I can tell you that when I arrived in early 2007, what I found is we didn't have enough troops to do, first of all, and still the number one thing, and that is to train the Afghan security forces. This is something that requires high skill levels, experience, and credibility. We just didn't have the troops. We asked for them, but they were just not available because now we had a major fight. We were reaching a culminating point in Iraq in 2007.

The requests for additional forces were still outstanding when I left, and in my view the primary purpose of those is really to, again, put the bulk of them into training.

Meanwhile the security situation has deteriorated. Meanwhile we have a lot of people with a lot of boots on the ground. Effective contribution? That's pretty suspect in my mind. So now we're going to have to figure out what to do.

I would probably take a little different view than Rory, in that I'm not sure that the policy has really been well defined. The talk in the media is pretty much as Rory describes it: we're going to have a surge. I'm not so sure

about that. Certainly, my opinion is you better be real careful with a surge of troops because, for the reasons already cited, this place doesn't take very kindly to lots of outside forces. If we could get the kind of results we'd like to get from those who are already there, we probably wouldn't have as much need for more.

But I think what's going on now is a little bit of a "let's see what needs to be done" approach. First and foremost, there is still a desire to get rid of al Qaeda. The fact that this border is pretty nebulous presents a real issue, and how do you get at them?

So we can feel free, because we've been invited by the Afghan government—we've done it anyway—to operate wherever we care to in Afghanistan. That's not the case in Pakistan. We're not just going to walk across the border, despite some claims otherwise, and start doing things over there.

So my sense is they're still trying to sort out what the real policies are going to be. I think there may be room for considering some of these ideas that Rory has put into the discussion.

QUESTION: A question for Rory Stewart, multiple. What would your policy be now in Afghanistan? Do you think there's a real danger of the Taliban taking over the country? If we have a better relationship with Iran, do you think Iran has the capacity to participate in a more positive way that could be effective?

RORY STEWART: Broadly speaking, the policy towards Afghanistan that I would favor would not be very different to the kind of policy that we have to other similar poor developing countries, which is to say that you might continue to have a substantial troop presence, perhaps for training purposes or for counter-terrorism operations, and you might have a generous development aid budget in order to pursue the kind of policies that you might be pursuing in the pool, the kind of things you might be doing in Botswana.

But these two things together would not add up to a project of state formation. We wouldn't be claiming to be creating a legitimate, effective state in the country, nor would we be imagining that we somehow had the possibility in a short timeframe of five or ten years of creating a situation which we wouldn't have to worry about anymore, that Afghanistan would somehow be turned around and we could then all pack up and go home.

It is a very long process, and because it's a very long process necessarily our presence there needs to be much lighter than it is. It is inconceivable that we could sustain over 30 or 40 years investments of $85 billion and upwards annually or 90,000 troops.

We really need to understand that Afghanistan is not the sum of all our fears, that it is in fact one of 20 or 30 troublesome countries in the world, that we should be husbanding our resources to deal with other crises as they emerge, and that a lighter footprint will probably be a more sustainable footprint, and a sustainable relationship is what Afghanistan needs.

In terms of whether the Taliban would win, I would have thought that was unlikely. But it is extremely difficult to tell, obviously. The so-called Afghan experts are wrong again and again. If you had suggested in 1988 that the government of Najib would manage to survive two and a half years after the Soviet Union withdrew its troops, nobody would have believed you.

Nobody in January 1994 was able to predict that the great famous jihadi commanders, the warlords who were fighting it out in central Kabul, these men with these great names—Massoud, Hekmatyar, Dostum—would almost overnight vanish and be replaced by a totally unknown group of young students called the Taliban, who would then sweep 90 percent of the country, end the civil war, reestablish road security at a time when people would have thought that was almost unimaginable. So that question is a very important question, but it's not one that any of us could presume to answer.

The assumption of the policy is the worst-case scenario. The policy assumes that, were we to withdraw troops, the Taliban would somehow immediately retake the whole country again and re-invite al Qaeda, and al Qaeda would again be using Afghanistan as an extremely useful part of their armory against the United States.

My guess is that the Taliban is much weaker than it was in 1994, that a lot of their legitimacy was eroded by their very poor performance in government after 2001, that the opposition to them would be much more sustained, that it would be very difficult for them to pose a conventional threat of any sort—they couldn't roll artillery or tanks up the main streets to Kabul so long as there were even a few airplanes around to deal with—and that, therefore, the likelihood in fact of a draw-down of troops would be a strengthening of the Taliban position in rural areas of the south and east, but nothing resembling a takeover of the country.

As to whether Iran could play a useful role, certainly. I mean in western Afghanistan it has a very strong influence, and a lot of the infrastructure development around Herat is driven by Iran. The problem, of course, is the will. The Iranian government is not very interested in being helpful at the moment. Whether that will turn around remains to be seen.

QUESTION: Rory, could you say a little bit, and Admiral Fallon as well, about the significance of the change in our

commanders? It has been portrayed as a strategic shift in counterinsurgency doctrine or something. What is the actual nature of that shift and what are the prospects of the shift being any more successful?

RORY STEWART: This is really a question for Admiral Fallon, so I'm deferring to him on this.

WILLIAM FALLON: To answer you honestly, General McKiernan never worked for me—he came in just after I left—so I haven't had the opportunity to watch him, only to see from a distance. Clearly, there is some unhappiness with his bosses over what has gone on. I'll just leave it at that. And by the way, the press is speculating again, extrapolating into Korean policy that doesn't exist in my opinion.

I'll talk to you about General McChrystal. Very savvy, very knowledgeable. He knows this territory cold. He knows the Taliban. He spent an incredible amount of time in operational responsibility chasing al Qaeda around the world. He physically spent about half of his time in Afghanistan during the year that I was out there actually present in the country. So he knows it very well. He knows all the bad actors and the good ones too.

He is a Special Forces person, he's used to thinking in terms of speed, agility, and small-unit tactics and aggressiveness. So I think the policy business is still a little unsettled here as they sort out what they really want to do. But I would expect he would be more of the small, speed-and-agility type, and that would be very appealing to Secretary Gates and others. So we'll see. But he is certainly very, very familiar with this.

QUESTION: Let me just follow up. With the Special Forces background and the agility, is it just a matter, as has been portrayed in the press, of catching a few al Qaeda leaders and killing them; or what Rory was discussing, the infrastructure and the complexity? How does changing the military commander relate to the strategic question that Rory was discussing about Afghanistan in the future?

WILLIAM FALLON: Well, the latter remains to be seen, because that's an extrapolation of what he finds and what he does.

But the Special Forces folks are not just about tracking down al Qaeda and killing them. I found Special Forces people to be the most useful tool in my kitbag out in the Pacific, for example, because they are highly trained, and they know how to not only chase down bad guys and get rid of them, but they are very effective in relationships with host-nation security forces and in projecting a very positive image with local citizens, because they are quite versatile, many of them speak native languages, they are well trained in other general assistance forms, and you can leverage these folks to a great extent.

So I found a couple of hundred mostly Special Forces people in the southern Philippines basically did an incredibly large, significant, positive job in projecting stability and encouraging local security forces. So I think that's a big advantage. There just aren't enough of them to do all those things that we'd like to have done.

QUESTION: Very quickly, I was surprised that none of you talked about the role of the Saudis, because you talked about the Taliban and you were talking about Iran, Central Asia, Pakistan. But the Saudis obviously have been very influential on the Taliban and on the crisis in Afghanistan for many, many years. I would like to know if you could comment.

A question for Rory. You made a remark about the NGO workers who want more troops in Afghanistan. Well, I know some NGOs who would rather not see any troops in Afghanistan. They were able to work better before, actually. And also, there is no rule of law right now and very much corruption with the Karzai government. That is a problem too.

WILLIAM FALLON: On the Saudis, I think it remains to be seen. There's probably Saudi money, no doubt, going into different places. In my estimate, of all the things that are impacting the situation in Afghanistan that is not a major issue.

RORY STEWART: On the NGOs and troops, it's true that although some individual NGO workers oppose troops, the major NGOs have made no comment about it at all—Oxfam, Save the Children. Médecins Sans Frontières is not in Afghanistan, but even they, broadly speaking, when they make comments at all, they talk about donor coordination, aid effectiveness, et cetera.

The criticisms of troops at the moment are not coming from any of them. The reason for that is that they have been both convinced that development is not possible without security, the kind of rule-of-law arguments that you were making, and also because I think the development and aid agencies have lost the confidence to engage in a dialogue with the military about the proper use of military force. The counterinsurgency doctrine at the moment involves so much reference to economic development, good governance, the rule of law, and all these kinds of things that it's quite difficult for civilians to really work out how to engage with it.

QUESTION: A quick question about priorities. If Pakistan should ever, even as unlikely as it seems with a strong military, become a failed state, should not our policies be directed first toward securing a stable Pakistan and secondarily toward Afghanistan? Also, because of the geography, access to Afghanistan is primarily through

Pakistan.

WILLIAM FALLON: I would say that it's inappropriate to say "We'll do this and not this," or "We'll take care of this problem and then try the other one." You've got to work multiple balls because they're in the air.

I think that the consensus would be that there's a greater awareness of the challenges in Pakistan and the contribution that has to the unsettled conditions in Afghanistan than there happened to be a couple of years ago. So I think there is a significantly enhanced emphasis on Pakistan. I think that's tending in the right direction.

But it isn't one of these "Let's go fix this problem and then this one's going to fall off the tree." It doesn't work that way. We're going to have to work on both sides and figure out how to coordinate it. That is, I think, understood. People know they're going to have to work both sides of that border and the other actors that have a role to play.

RORY STEWART: On this you're right, there is an incongruity. Clearly, Pakistan is 20 times more important than Afghanistan in almost every indicator: Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda are in Pakistan, not Afghanistan; Pakistan has a nuclear bomb; Pakistan has a population seven times that of Afghanistan; Pakistan has the potential to destabilize India. And yet we're putting 20 times more investment into Afghanistan than we are into Pakistan. So there is an issue there.

I sometimes feel it's a bit as though you've gone into a room where you have an angry cat (which is Afghanistan) and a big tiger (which is Pakistan) and you're beating the cat. People say, "Why are you beating the cat?" You say, "It's a cat-tiger strategy." But actually, the reason you're beating the cat is you don't know what to do about the tiger.

The problem with that is that, of course by saying that, you then put yourself into the trap that the President put himself into with Iraq and Afghanistan. You end up saying, "Iraq's the wrong war, Afghanistan is the right war," and one might end up with a situation in which one implies that, because one sees this discrepancy in the treatment of the two countries, therefore one should be launching $20 trillion into Pakistan and trying to save Pakistan.

The answer, unfortunately, with both is that that form of stability is not within our gift. This is not a country which the United States has the lever to control, to predict, to explain in that way. This is largely an issue for Pakistanis. It's largely an issue of political will, not of technical training, not of resources. It is about Pakistanis themselves being convinced that the tribal areas are more of a threat to them than India.

Which brings me back to my beginning statement, which is: How on earth do you convince people who have locked themselves ideologically in a particular place that they're wrong? What would it take to make people see the elephant in the room?

Thank you very much.

WILLIAM FALLON: I couldn't agree more.

Just to add one more comment on that, we've been doing a lot in Afghanistan because Afghanistan is utterly incapable of doing much for itself. So everyone, all 42 (at last count) countries, are here to help.

In Pakistan they have, let's say, a longer tradition of central government. You can throw all kinds of rocks at it, but the fact is that the Pakistanis have had a government. They are very proud of their achievements. There is a very significantly well-educated middle class saying, "And by the way, we'll take care of our own business, thank you very much, so go ahead and stay over there in Afghanistan. And the Indians, by the way, you stay here." So they haven't welcomed people to jump in and start mucking about in town. So it's very different.

That is part of the explanation, I think, of the resources, not that we haven't thrown a lot of money into Pakistan in the last few years.

I don't think you'd find many people, military people or anybody else over there, that believe that a purely military solution, whatever the number is, is likely to solve the problems that exist in Afghanistan. We'll need some combination of capabilities to help move this thing forward.

So it isn't a matter of just throwing more troops at it and that's going to solve the problem. There are dozens of issues within that country that need to be addressed. Some of them can be helped, many of them can be helped, by stability and security.

In fact, one of the reasons there is not much squawking from most of the NGOs is that they don't feel they're very viable without some kind of security, and it can't be provided effectively by the Afghans right now. And so to do any good work at all they need some help.

RORY STEWART: Just a little bit of a gloss on this.

One of the problems with a very heavy international presence is that it's not simply wasteful, it can actually be counterproductive, it can actually do harm, and it can do harm in different ways.

I mean our obsession with Afghanistan, the number of resources we are plowing into Afghanistan, lead to a lot of very irregular and contradictory policies.

Sometimes we support warlords; sometimes we support the central government against warlords. We disarm people, then we rearm the same people. We call them different things—one thing we call DIAG [Disbandment of Illegal Armed Groups], the other thing we call "community defense forces." But essentially we reverse policy. We go from centralization to decentralization.

As we do this, of course, our presence there causes other kinds of problems. It can cause certain kinds of backlashes in southern Afghanistan, where of course we invested heavily in the 1980s in convincing Afghans that it was their religious and national duty to fight against a foreign military occupation, and now providing them with a propaganda target which the Taliban can exploit.

We of course do suffer casualties ourselves, casualties of course on the Afghan side, both of combatants and noncombatants. All of this means that a strong foreign presence of this sort creates mistrust, it creates conspiracy theories, it erodes our credibility.

If we bite off more than we can chew, it's not simply that people begin to question the power of our jaws; it's also that people begin to wonder why we're really there in the first place. You get villagers saying, "Oh, we know you're really supporting the Taliban" or "We know that you've only come here to steal our oil" (despite the fact they don't have any oil), because the whole situation is so bewildering for an Afghan villager, so difficult for them to understand exactly why we're there and what it is we think we're doing.

So one of the reasons I would caution against what I think in Afghanistan is a slightly half-cocked operation, an attempt to do things that we can't do, is that it's not just wasteful, it's actually harmful.

JOANNE MYERS: I want to thank you both very much, Admiral Fallon and Rory, for being with us today. Thank you.