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(APPLAUSE)

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Well, it's great to be here at Marine Corps University. And thank you also to the Program on Middle East Studies here. And to my good friend Amin, thank you for the invitation. It's truly an honor. When I heard "Attention on Deck," I felt 20 years younger. It's great to be here.

(LAUGHTER)

Also, Colonel Gentry -- Keil, I wanted to thank you for that wonderful -- those wonderful words of introduction.

You -- when you look at your CV and you see that you have been engaged in very important positions of responsibility in the Japanese humanitarian disaster relief operation after the nuclear meltdown, that you've been on NEO and contingency operations in Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa, that you've been in the high end of combat in Iraq, that you've been in the Balkans on peacekeeping operations, you are really emblematic right now of our armed forces, how experienced it is and how absolutely competent it is.

I have to tell you, the farther I get away from having worn the uniform, the more it becomes apparent to me how much when we talk about our national security strategy of deterrence being the lynchpin of it so we don't fight, deter, I can't tell you how much it becomes more evident to me that it's that competence and experience that others see in our armed forces and people like you, Colonel, that adds immensely to the security of our country. So thank you very much.

I'll start with a true story from Afghanistan, stranger than fiction. When I was selected to go to Afghanistan my first tour of duty, 2002-2003, which was being sent in as a major general to help the Afghans to establish and start to train and equip their new army, I knew very little about the country.

And so what did I do when I first arrived? Like all of you would do, you'd start to meet with people there and try to learn about the country, and learn about the culture, the history, the society, the customs. So in my first week of meetings, I had met with the Brigadier General Asifi, who at that time was the commander of the Afghan Border Police.

So we're at the Kabul Restaurant (ph) in Kabul and having a wonderful dinner. I had my interpreter, Dr. Najeeb (ph). Dr. Najeeb (ph), a young interpreter who for accuracy was at about 95 percent. But in terms of being able to capture emotion and intent of the person that was

communicating to you, he was at 101 percent. But as he would get more excited, the accuracy score would get lower and lower.

(LAUGHTER)

So I was with General Asifi (ph) and my interpreter's getting more and more excited, reflecting General Asifi's (ph) getting more and more excited. He loves talking -- General Asifi (ph) loves talking about Afghan traditions and culture. And so General Asifi (ph) gets to what I know is the culminating point in his presentation to me. And he said, so -- now listen carefully, this is what Dr. Najeeb (ph) translates. Says, "So General, we Afghans, we have a long and proud history of inviting foreigners to our country and then hospitalizing them."

(LAUGHTER)

Now, I'm pretty certain what my interpreter Dr. Najeeb (ph) meant to say is showing them great hospitality. But the fact that I'm standing in front of you in this year of 2015, I'm still not certain that that says that I don't necessarily have infinite knowledge of Afghanistan. But I've got a lot of time on the ground. So I'll try to draw upon that.

Let me ask a question to start off. Raise your hand if you have served after 9/11 in either Afghanistan or Iraq or both. OK. And would you keep your hand up if you have served in Afghanistan. OK, look around this audience. So good. And I will be taking advantage of that expertise and experience when I'm up here on the stage. And I'm hoping we can be interactive as I keep an eye on the clock, knowing that you have an agenda that goes beyond me here this afternoon.

So what I'd like to talk about then in my time up here with you is democratization in Afghanistan. And what I would -- how I'd like to proceed is first of all I'd like to talk a bit about the progress that we've achieved to date in Afghanistan.

Secondly, I have seven observations that I wanted to make about the challenges of democratization. Thinking that as we talk about these seven observations that of course applicable to Afghanistan, but I think they have wider relevance to any time foreign military forces in foreign countries intervene in civil wars or intervene in situations in which a country is losing control of its sovereignty.

And I am certain in this audience that there are many of you who will be going into places that are fighting civil wars right now, or experiencing state meltdowns, not necessarily places only outside of the Western Hemisphere. But you will indeed be confronted with these missions.

So, even though as we say, Iraq and Afghanistan, at least the industrial strength interventions that we've had may be in the rearview mirror, it's at our own folly that we don't keep on talking about these kinds of lessons learned.

Third, I'd like to talk about the cost and the benefits of the mission, in particular in Afghanistan, more provocative. If we're going to assess our efforts at democratization then we have to talk about costs. We have to talk about benefits. And lastly, I'm hoping there's time for some discussion at the end.

So let's start then with pre-intervention Afghanistan. So after 9/11, immediately after 9/11, I was in the Pentagon at that time. Of course, understandably President Bush's administration, the senior military leadership, as we talked about then, intervention into Afghanistan, the focus was on the military operations. But make no mistake about it, that early on and enduring throughout the mission was the principle of democratization that would go part and parcel with that mission.

It was understood very early on that part of the mission in Afghanistan would be to harden that country, so to speak. How do you harden the country? Harden the country so that with less and less dependence upon external assistance that the country would be able to positively control its own territory and deny space to international terrorists.

There was a decision reached early on by the United States, but be clear is supported by the international community, and be clear certainly supported by the ruling or the most powerful Afghan political leaders in their winning coalition that democracy was the best way forward.

You can have a debate about whether that was inspired by U.S. values or whether that was inspired by instrumentality. That is, that what is the best way to harden the country, no one saw a better alternative than democratization. So that's the -- that's the path that we embarked on and have walked with the Afghans now for some years.

So if we're going to do an assessment of this enterprise of democracy building in Afghanistan, which we will do here shortly, it's important that we establish the baseline, so to speak. What did Afghanistan look like pre 9/11? What does it look like today?

You have a lot of criticisms of the mission in Afghanistan. Raise your hand if you've heard of SIGAR and Mr. Sopko. He does a wonderful job of uncovering all kinds of real problems with the mission. He does a wonderful job of public relations in his position.

But that seems to be the dominate narrative, total failure. I can't contest any one of Mr. Sopko's story. What Mr. Sopko does not do is do what I'm going to show you here in a minute. Here's the baseline of pre- 9/11 Afghanistan.

Before I went to Afghanistan on my second tour of duty, I had a very senior Afghan leader say look, you know, you've been there once, you're going to be there again. Make sure on your second tour of duty, realize things are starting to change.

So we can always have a lot of bad snapshots to show you, but if you're going to look at Afghanistan and make your assessments, watch the movie. So here's part of the movie. And let's see here.

(BEGIN VIDEO PRESENTATION)

(UNKNOWN): Amidst these remote mountains of Afghanistan are the various hiding places of one of the world's most wanted men, Osama bin Laden.

BIN LADEN (THROUGH INTERPRETER): We declared a jihad, a holy war against the United States government because it is unjust, criminal and tyrannical.

(UNKNOWN): The U.S. State Department calls him one of the most significant financial sponsors of Islamic extremism in the world. But in Afghanistan, bin Laden is beyond the reach of U.S. law enforcement.

The country is dominated by the Taliban, a movement of religious students turned warriors who have imposed their harsh interpretation of Islam. The Taliban have recently declared that bin Laden is their guest, providing he doesn't attack other nations. But bin Laden may have other ideas.

What are your future plans?

BIN LADEN (THROUGH INTERPRETER): You'll see them and hear about them in the media, God willing.

(END VIDEO PRESENTATION)

EIKENBERRY: So that's the Afghanistan that the United States and our coalition, the United Nations and the Afghan people themselves are confronting in late 2001-2002.

OK. Let's go 12-and-a-half years forward now. And I have a clip that shows the media's role in last year's stated very flawed Afghan presidential election. And it did have problems, and we'll talk about those in a moment.

But keep that baseline in mind when we look at this next video. So, and remember, compare the first clip of that first video I showed, Mujahedin, commander riding on an armored personnel carrier through a Kabul that was destroyed, not by the Soviets, but by the Afghan civil war.

Remembering that from 1992 to 1995 as Afghan warlords tried to figure out how to transition power and seize power, tens of thousands of Kabulis citizens will be massacred through atrocities. And the population of Kabul in 1992 is 2 million. By 1995, it is 500,000. So when we talk about massive refugee problems in Afghanistan, that's a good point to remember as well.

So with that.

(BEGIN VIDEO PRESENTATION)

(UNKNOWN): Concerns were made about the country's security during the campaigning and polling period. And while Afghanistan is still rated 128th in the world for press freedom, outlets like 1TV have made the country one of the region's leaders, both in terms of press freedom and access to independent reporting. And this will be the first election in Afghanistan where all the key candidates take part in live debates and question-and-answer sessions. The coverage is said to be decisive.

"We have media with free journalists and people can criticize the politicians. We've had the most critical of candidates (ph) news programs in the last three or four years we've been established. And we think that it's, again, very, very key for the future of Afghanistan."

It's behind the glass and lights of the main studio that much of the media interest in the elections is being generated. Some investments in Afghanistan's mobile phone network over the last 13 years has meant that even in rural areas, phone ownership is above 50 percent. And it's this combination of 3G access and social media which online journalists like Mukta Saad (ph) are driving.

"So based on week three I think we have five interviews or something around five interviews and capturing it on social media. So based on that we can judge that it's going to become (inaudible) the TV station would have."

The economy, security and radicalism will continue to dominate the agenda of this election. And the coverage of local media is reflecting this. But when Afghans go to the polls this April one thing will be sure. This is the most modern, media-intensive and informed election that Afghanistan has ever seen.

(END VIDEO PRESENTATION)

AMB. EIKENBERRY: OK. So question: which one is better, the power transition of 1992-1995, or a very flawed, corrupt election of 2014? Hard questions to answer.

With that then, what I'd like to do is turn to seven observations I'd like to talk to you about. Now rolling up our sleeves, having given this rather upbeat, inspirational picture at the outset, but now to come onto seven pretty hard observations that I think that it's important that an audience like this takes on, thinks about. I'm sure you do think about this a lot already. And I'm hoping this can stimulate some conversation, both when I'm at the podium here maybe this afternoon, and hopefully as you go back to your seminar rooms and think hard this year about U.S. strategy and security interests.

So I'd like to start with observation number one. And do we have the hand mics ready? Good.

OK, observation number one, let's talk about theories of political development. Now here is a picture that most in our armed forces today would recognize in the upper left-hand corner, the insurgent. In the lower right-hand corner, the population.

Somebody give me just a real quick summary of what the central problem is from a military perspective -- not from a national perspective, from a military perspective, what's the central problem that we're facing here?

Doctrinally how would you define this problem? What are you going to do about it?

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE)

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Say that louder, please.

QUESTION: Protection of (inaudible).

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Against whom?

QUESTION: Basically the (inaudible).

AMB. EIKENBERRY: OK. And do you have any kind of literature that can help you with this?

QUESTION: Yes, sir. The (inaudible) manual.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: And which manual is that?

QUESTION: 324, sir.

AMB EIKENBERRY: Marine manual?

QUESTION: Joint (inaudible).

AMB. EIKENBERRY: OK. Wow. There it is.

(LAUGHTER)

So everyone here wearing the uniform and indeed most of the civilians who work with the military in places like Iraq and Afghanistan, we recognize that Marine-U.S. Army manual. We have the problem defined well. We have a doctrine for it.

Now let's jump up to the high end of the strategic political-military spectrum. Do we have a doctrine, do we have theories that are going to inform the political economic path that we will start to walk down to take Afghanistan to eventually look like Denmark?

Or more modestly -- and I'm not being -- I'm not being cynical here at all -- or more modestly, in 20 years to perhaps look like Bangladesh? Do we have theories and doctrine that inform that journey? And the fact is there are theories that are out there.

I'm blessed in this sense. I'm blessed for a lot of reasons, but I'm certainly blessed to be at Stanford University in this regard because Stanford University has got one of the top political science departments in the nation. And it also within that political science department has some real giants that talk about political development and political theory and modernization. So you have people like Steve Krasner, Frank Fukuyama, Steve Stedman, really some top-notch people -- Larry Diamond -- that are there. And I've learned a great deal from them.

But there are three -- there's many theories of political modernization or political development. Let's talk about three of them.

The first is what's called modernization theory. And I'm sure all of you have heard that. In the '50s and '60s that was the rage. And the idea was that it's really about economic development. It's about modernization that will lead to democracy and lead to stabilization.

And you know the theory. With economic development you get a growing middle class. They demand more political inclusiveness. They have more demands for property rights, for economic rights, translates to political rights.

There is a second theory, institutional theory. That comes from the time of Sam Huntington in the last 1960s. And that's the rage during the 1970s and the parts of the 1980s.

The institutional theory of Huntington is that if you're going to have political order then you have to have institutions that can harness competition within a society. And through those institutions will channel then political competition in ways that lead eventually to democracy and to stable outcomes.

And as Huntington then looked at those institutions, he said that the institutions would be important in terms of having adaptability, being able to operate in very complex environments, and would be able to change over time.

And against that there's yet a third theory, and the third theory is one that's called rational choice. But I think more productively or more understandably now, because there's a lot of rational choice theories, this is a theory when it comes to political development. You talk about elite bargaining. So this is the idea that political elites, that they exist in a society and they are continually aiming to get some kind of winning coalition with credible commitments from each other that allows them to work together and stabilize. And as the country grows, then those political elites develop ways to share power over time.

If there's one book I would commend to you this year, if you're interested in these topics right now, it's a book by three scholars: Weingast, Weingast at Stanford; Wallis; and North, Douglass North. And this is a book called "Violence and Social Order." It -- about half of it is very dense. You can skip over it when they revert to deep social science and political science. Half of it is written in a way that is very, very understandable.

And it talks about doorstep conditions. How does it come where you get to that third picture, political elites bargaining among themselves? What are the so-called doorstep conditions when you transition from that to an open access system?

And he talks about the need for rule of law to be inclusive. It can't be just for a certain part of the elite. He also talks about the need for organizations, institutions to be long lived. They can't change with families and with power brokers.

And third, very interestingly for this group right here, his third condition is a collective civilian control of the military, that no one elite group can control the military.

So now let's get to Afghanistan. And anybody, what theory was the dominant theory that we applied in Afghanistan? Does any one jump out as the dominant theory? Anybody, please speak. You?

QUESTION: Modernization.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Modernization? I was with the USAID, especially as the ambassador. I would agree. That was a big one. Any others?

QUESTION: (Inaudible) transition (inaudible).

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Institutional elections. We want to build parliaments. We got a Ministry of Women's Affairs. So there's a strong argument that it's the institutional theory.

Anybody want to go with rational choice, power broking?

QUESTION: Bonn. (Inaudible).

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Bonn? The Bonn Agreement? Could you explain that just a bit?

QUESTION: We had a (inaudible) meeting of key power brokers from across Afghanistan that excluded the Taliban in large part. International partners, regional neighbors that got together with power brokers from across Afghanistan to decide on the transition of administration, who would lead it and (inaudible) government going in. Even with countries like Iran commenting for democratic elections.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Great example. And we've had one great example of elite agreements. We've had -- maybe we can say the 2014 election ended with an elite agreement as opposed to who won at the ballot box.

We certainly, with the military and USAID and the international community going gangbusters everywhere on economic development, there is the modernization theory. And everywhere, tirelessly, we working with Afghans, great people like Nader Nadery, are trying to build institutions.

So all of the above, and maybe that's OK, but I don't think so.

And the point being that no real robust discussion within our civilian leadership and in our senior military leadership, in fairness now -- you can't say all of this on the civilian side -- between our senior military leadership and our senior civilian leadership about what is our theory. What is the doctrine we're trying to follow here? What is guiding our actions?

And instead, the military having a clear counterinsurgency doctrine, but then informed with a lot of resources, the military then moves into the lead. Go back and read about the Vietnam War and you'll read a lot of critiques about the Vietnam War, that the military, in one study, is called the tail that wags the dog.

Now let's talk about purpose and roles of elections. And let me talk about the cycle of elections, second observation here. First of all, here's the theory of the election. You have a group of individuals, elites. Maybe they have political parties, maybe they have coalitions.

Afghanistan at this stage does not have robust party, it's more about power broker coalitions. And then they campaign. It leads to an election, one person one vote, which in turn then leads to a winner and the government being sworn in. Which leads then to that government needing to do what? It's got a contract with the people. This is the theory of democracy, the contract with the people.

And what is that contract? That contract is in return, the rents that we the government will collect -- taxes, impositions, obligations. In return for those rents that we collect, we will provide

services. We'll provide security. We will provide justice. We will provide health care. We will provide education.

And then, after all of that, what you have is back to the start of the election cycle. So we have the five-year presidency in Afghanistan, and that's the theory of how it works.

Now, let's look back from 2004 to, say, about 2014, the last election. That was the theory that I gave you. Where is that theory flawed in Afghanistan? Anybody?

Remember what I said the contract was. The contract is that we collect rents, we collect rents, and that we provide services. What's wrong with that in Afghanistan? Please?

QUESTION: The government can't provide the services.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Government can't provide the services. And I heard it over here.

QUESTION: Not taking any money in.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: And they're not taking any money in. So think about that then. So here's the theory of what the democratic election is going to be able to deliver. But you have to get underneath that. What's the logic then of that theory? What drives the theory?

So I'm going to read then a quote to you from another Stanford Professor University -- Standford University professor, John Lewis, who writes not about Afghanistan, but writes in 1967 with Professor Kahin a book called "The U.S. in Vietnam," 1967.

Now think about the democratic contract, what we ended up with in Afghanistan, what we ended up with in Iraq, 1967. There're observations well-before kept in Vietnam. And I'll read this to you.

"U.S. aid thus provided South Vietnamese President Diem with a degree of financial independence that isolated him from basic economic and political realities, and reduced his need to appreciate or respond to his peoples' wants and expectations. Certainly the superiority of their own methods, institutions and values and of South Vietnam's need for help, Americans firmly believe that they knew what was best for their client's state."

Now, having said that, even in Afghanistan 2014, difficult to make a case that we have a strong democratic contract yet in Afghanistan. Maybe it's moving in that direction.

But is there any utility to elections then? We can make a strong case that we have some flawed logic, but is there any utility to these elections at all? Anybody?

QUESTION: Public perception.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Public perception? What do you mean by that?

QUESTION: If the Afghanistan people don't feel like they're being properly heard (OFF-MIKE) representative, then it still looks like the U.S. (OFF-MIKE).

AMB. EIKENBERRY: That's very important from -- certainly from a U.S. or the intervening powers position.

Anybody else? From an Afghan perspective, is there any utility to having these flawed elections?

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE) more coordination among the different groups there. More (OFF-MIKE) success of the election.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: OK, that...

QUESTION: Operational coordination.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: True. Let's say, you know, at the operational level, at the strategic, political, military -- at the strategic level, at the political, military level.

Nader, could I ask you if you had any comments on that. Again -- unless you're going to be talking about it this afternoon. I don't want to detract from what your remarks are going to be.

MR. NADERY: Briefly. Certainly, I (OFF-MIKE).

From an Afghan perspective, election was not only about a contract, but a contract to get transition of power from one person to another person without getting into violence. That was driven more, not only from an idealistic perspective, but the (OFF-MIKE) perspective of a society. People see that you've shown (OFF-MIKE) transition into power through blood, through killing. And this exercise, while broad, while problematic, it is the result of (OFF-MIKE).

AMB. EIKENBERRY: I think that's very well-put.

So, the instrumentality of the election is not necessarily one man, one woman, one vote. You have a process with an agreed set of rules which, at the end of the day, are going to be negotiated out and implemented behind closed doors. But you still have a framework to keep the power elite together and to set the conditions, hopefully, for political transition over time.

What's interesting about this, though, it gets back to -- you talked about credibility, credibility to the international community and sympathy with the international community support. But even in Afghanistan, and I would argue in a lot of these elections in troubled places, it is making an enormous effort to try to do the best you can that then provides a degree of legitimacy to the power broker process that goes on behind closed doors.

If your starting point is that this election is going to be horrible, there's going to be a huge amount of corruption that's involved, so let's just not work at it. And you could make a strong argument about that.

But I believe that if you were not to make the concentrated effort, that you wouldn't achieve the conditions, Nader, that you're talking about. But very frustrating if you're in the -- if you're in FEFA, as an example, watching that process unfold.

Third observation, principal-agent relationships. So let me read this. "Principal-agent relationship, an arrangement in which one legal entity legally appoints another to act on its behalf. In a principal-agent relationship, the agent acts on behalf of the principal and should not have a conflict of interest in carrying out the act.

Now, when we get to massive foreign assistance and massive security assistance, in the case of Afghanistan, who's the principal, and who's the agent? Who's the principal?

QUESTION: United States.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: The United States is. Who's the agent? Afghanistan is the agent.

What are the dilemmas when you have a principal-agent relationship, which clearly does not meet this following condition and should not have a conflict of interest in carrying out the act? What are some of the dilemmas then that you start to face based upon your own experience in Iraq or Afghanistan?

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE).

AMB. EIKENBERRY: I'm sorry?

QUESTION: The principal might want it more than they do.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: The principal might want it more than an agent. Very well-said. What are some other dilemmas?'

QUESTION: Different values.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Different value systems.

QUESTION: Carrying out aid in villages.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Carrying out aid in villages.

How about implementation, that if the agent has a set of different interests, one of the things which will be in the interest of the agent is to continue to get resources. So it's going to be very hard if you're the principal, especially in a remote place, in a culture that is distant from yours, in an environment where you don't speak the languages. It's going to be very, very difficult to see if you're really aligned or not.

Please?

QUESTION: Too much focus on security through the insurgency itself, sir, and not on the underlying cogs that we (OFF-MIKE).

AMB. EIKENBERRY: A little bit more on that.

QUESTION: Well, (inaudible) the kind of guerilla with all the resources, all the doers (inaudible) security as the main problem, with the governments and the people sort of being on the backburner. And we've probably done that for far too long. (inaudible) necessary conditions set up everything else -- security, safety, et cetera -- we tend to be myopically focused.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: I would agree with that.

Now let's take a particular principal-agent example here. We could turn to many. And it's getting along the lines of what you were talking about.

OK. Principal-agent relationship. Here's two commander-in-chiefs, President Obama and President Karzai.

And so they talk, and they frame the problem. President Obama frames the problem based upon best advice from DOD, Department of State, national security advisor, everybody. They frame the problem as, this is one about the Taliban and an insurgency, and this is one about helping the Afghans harden the state, so we need to have a strong Afghan military that's more autonomous.

And President Karzai agrees with that. And President Karzai there with his senior military commanders, as our senior military commanders are looking at the commander-in-chief, saying, "President Karzai, clearly he has got it." And then we get down to grassroots, and shoulder-to-shoulder Afghan army and U.S. Army and Marines are fighting together perfectly aligned.

There's another story here. There's President Karzai, and he does see the problem as the Taliban on his right, and below him, he really does see the need for a strong Afghan army that can increasingly take the lead for security, allowing U.S. Armed Forces to go home.

But then we have in the lower right-hand corner President Karzai. And does he see Taliban as the main enemy, or does he see Pakistan as the main enemy? I'm sympathetic with President Karzai on this view. He saw Pakistan as the enemy. He did not see Taliban as the main enemy.

And above him, anybody know -- say it out loud if you know who that is above him. Anybody?

QUESTION: (OFF-MIKE).

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Nope. Amin?

DR. TARZI: Daoud.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Daoud. Daoud. And Daoud seizes power in the 1970s. And he seizes power via a military coup. He is killed via a military coup backed by the Soviets.

So President Karzai and any Afghan leader, they think deeply about their history. And does President Karzai want a really strong autonomous army that he's not sure he can control, and frankly, he's more concerned that the Americans are controlling. Does he really believe as commander-in-chief in the same view with the Afghan National Army as President Obama, the Department of Defense and the Department of State?

I'm interested in this group. Does anybody have, just briefly, a vignette from serving in a district or a province or anywhere in Afghanistan/Iraq about this kind of principal-agent problem? Please?

QUESTION: If I may, a slightly different perspective, (OFF-MIKE) Afghanistan and Pakistan. In Pakistan, the circumstances of the environment where we're working -- thank you very much -- when the Indus River Valley flooded. And so what was interesting is the relationship we had in Pakistan was complex, as were the circumstances for introducing additional military capability there.

But what was fascinating is in the area where we were located near Quetta, Balochistan, et cetera, the underlying understanding of the benefit of the floods is that it minimized, or to a degree eliminated Pakistani or sources of violence originating from Pakistan and going across the mountains.

And so it was simply interesting as I read your article of their being some consistency, at least with what you were writing about in terms of Karzai's perception of sources of instability originating from across the mountains.

And there would've seemed to have been some consensus there likewise from a currency denomination perspective. In some of the areas in Sangin where we worked, it was interesting finding currency not of the origin of Afghanistan, but rather that of Pakistan.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: You served in Sangin, you said? Yeah, that you could -- maybe you'll talk more. I'd like to talk to you at the break more about that too.

You could stand up here and give a 90-minute lecture on principal-agency problems, I'm sure, from your time at the district level, or the northern Helmand level about the fight in Sangin as well. But thanks. Good comments.

We could talk about many other institution-building efforts, many other efforts in Afghanistan beyond the military effort, which I chose to here. But if we talk about the building of the attorney general's office, if we talk about the building of practically you name it, you have to think in terms of principal-agency.

It's hard for this audience to think in those terms. It's very hard for me to think in those terms. It was very hard.

I can be flattered very easily, and I can believe what people are telling me over time. And you have to be able to step back and identify who your partner is and what are the real interests of that partner.

A fourth observation, U.S. commitment to democracy and inherent trend -- some inherent contradictions that we have. So what we have here is this story of three different missions in Afghanistan. The central mission there, all this going back to President Karzai.

Underneath President Karzai, there's the Department of State, there's the United States Embassy. What do we do? We do economic modernization. We do institution building. We try to negotiate elite bargains.

And make no mistake about it, in 2009, 2010, 2011, weak Afghan political institutions. If you're talking about political development, the United States embassy, for all its flaws, it is the loyal opposition, because there is no coherent loyal opposition in Afghanistan.

So the U.S. ambassador gets the enviable task of going up to President Karzai behind closed doors and saying, "Mr. President, here's what's on the agenda today. Kabul bank scandal, some breaking news about your half brothers, deep into it.

"Got to get the parliament seated, Mr. President. We know after they're seated, they're going to come after you. And also, Mr. President, you really have to get out a little bit more and be more visible supporting the U.S. development mission here."

You know how well that meeting just went.

(LAUGHTER)

So I walk out, and behind me comes the U.S. military commander.

"Mr. President, I don't know what the U.S. embassy just talked to you about, but what I'm here to talk to you about is really important, and that's on the right-hand side. Mr. President, we have to get out there and fight Taliban, and I want to help you succeed as commander-in-chief, and I got a lot of resources to do that."

That meeting went a little bit better.

And then on the far left-hand side is the Central Intelligence Agency. And chief of station walks in and says, "Mr. Karzai, I don't know what the first two talked to you about, but I'll tell you what's really important. It's killing bin Laden, who's probably in Pakistan. We're sympathetic with your view about the trouble in Pakistan. And for all your troubles, Mr. Karzai, here's a bag of money."

And he walks out. That meeting went pretty well.

(LAUGHTER)

Now, the world is complex. Building democracies is hard work with a lot of contradictions.

But this, make no mistake about it, is a big contradiction. Because how can it be that we are handing the president bags of money, unaccountable? We're working with paramilitaries out there in Kandahar and eastern Afghanistan, beyond accountability with their private militias paid for by the CIA?

How is it that we can say then that we are fully committed to democracy in this country? There is a tension that's there.

And frankly, from the American people's viewpoint, what mission was the most important of these three?

QUESTION: Bin Laden.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Bin Laden. The CIA's mission was the most important mission, as the American people saw it.

So this need to try to struggle with this push toward democratization and then the contradictions that go with it, the United States military in Afghanistan, the United States military, was it more interested in democracy now or was it interested in stabilization now? It's interested in stabilization now.

Many conversations, I had them as a military commander with the U.S. ambassador on the other side of the table, saying, "What good does it do to talk about democracy now if we don't get a grip on the security situation? No security, no democracy, end of argument."

So let me ask just now with this audience. Does anybody have a quick vignette about a story, again, from a district or a province where you had those kinds of contradictions yourself?

QUESTION: I was the political officer in Jalalabad. That was the second PRT I opened after Kandahar in 2004. And we had the contradiction of going into meetings with Gul Agha Sherzai, who was a provincial governor in Nangarhar at the time. And the embassy had sent down a message saying, "There is illegal taxation on trucks bringing supplies for our coalition troops through the Torkham Gate."

And so we'd walk in and have a conversation with Governor Sherzai and not so much chastise him, but ask him to, you know, help us stop the taxation of these supply trucks." And then the same thing, you know, we'd walk out, and then the chief of base in Jalalabad would walk in and say, "You know, we have these counterterrorism pursuit teams that are working along the border, and that's really our big issue."

And it's exactly like you laid out that, that and the bag of cash, Governor Sherzai's focus would be shifted immediately away from what the embassy was trying to accomplish, which was supporting, you know, our troops, bringing in the fuel trucks and other things and supplies, to focus on that CT mission.

And in meetings with the chief of station in Kabul, we had discussions, where he said the same thing. You know, he said, "Well, your guidance from Washington is fine, but my interest is on counterterrorism."

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Well-put.

So in Afghanistan, what we had is, the military commander through the Department of Defense to the commander-in-chief, the president, the ambassador through the secretary of state to the president of the United States, CIA through the director to the president of the United States all operating with different authorities.

This isn't to say that this is impossible to figure out. But what I would conclude with on this observation, though, is this is something that Washington, D.C. cannot delegate to the field. They can't say in Washington, D.C., "We're going to pick three people that are paid to get along, and we're going to give them a lot of resources so we can be done with this."

There are such inherent contradictions between these three different missions that resolution in Washington, D.C. is required. And frankly, we just didn't get it.

Observation number 5, and Nader, if you're here, I didn't stay up late last night and add this one.

This is a mention of media and civil society. You saw that I included it in the clip to talk about Afghanistan today in the year of 2015, showed the 2014 elections. What I would tell you is, my experience, especially informed by Afghanistan, is that starting point of 2002, anybody who thinks you'll have political institutions that will evolve quickly and become mature and have a democracy that looks like, say, Western Europe or the United States, you know, that's flawed thinking. And I'll be talking about that in just a moment. So you have to recognize that at the outset.

So what do you do for compensations? What do you do to mitigate? And I would argue that one big mitigating factor and tool can be a robust media.

Afghanistan has done phenomenally well with U.S. and international support, with a lot of Afghan ingenuity and some Afghan now increasingly entrepreneurs that are putting money into the media itself. In fact, it may be oversubscribed. There may be a retreat in the media. I know there's arguments now, too many TV stations, too many radio stations.

But I don't believe without the media as it looked in that clip of 2014 -- I think that the 2014 election would've been much, much more difficult. Then there's the question of civil society as well.

Back to Huntington's argument about institutions, you're going to take decades to get the parliament better and better and finally good enough. It's going to take a long time to get a rule of law system up and working. Civil society in the right sectors can make a huge difference.

So you have two organizations that Nader was a member of, formerly with the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission, did a fantastic job of putting a spotlight on big human-rights problems in Afghanistan that the political institutions would have been incapable of doing and leveraging that with the media.

And then, Nader, I always have trouble with F-I-F-A (sic). It's Forum For...

MR. NADERY: Free and Fair...

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Free and Fair...

MR. NADERY: Free and Fair Election Forum.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: That's right. Free and Fair Election Forum of Afghanistan, another organization that -- Nader, you're still with them. And that's also played a vital role as we talked about these elections of 2004, 2009, 2014. It's the independent NGOs, Afghan NGOs, that have made a tremendous difference here.

One other point I would make, though, about civil society and the media is, as I talked about maybe oversubscribed right now on the media side. A cautionary note as these are being established is the need to think through long-term sustainability and financing. And so my fear is, on the media, there could be a drop off, and my fear is, on NGOs, still dependent on international support.

Number six, complexity, time and expectations of political development. Institutions, political institutions, they take a lot of time to develop. And the timeline in Washington, D.C. and foreign capitals is frequently not the timelines that are realistic, and the patience is not there.

Quick example, let's talk about the rule-of-law system. So, step number one, we need a police force, and the police force of 2002 that exists in Afghanistan was in really desperate shape.

Number two, you need an investigative capability. That's the Major Crimes Task Force, although shown there with a Reserve Army Major General Burt Mizusawa with the Major Crimes Task Force. Our military gave them a lot of help. They're like the FBI. But who really gave them the heavy-duty help over time was our FBI. That's another set of institutions.

Third, you need an up-and-running court system, and that doesn't develop overnight. You need infrastructure. You need training. You need rules. You need doctrine.

And then you need a correctional system. So those that say you don't have enough police and the police are not well-enough trained, guilty as charged. But if you had well-enough trained police and enough of them, they still would not be able to deliver decisive effects unless you had the investigative arm, unless you had the court system, unless you had the correctional institutions.

Let me tell you a quick story from talking about institution building and this effort to just get things done in a hurry. Anybody here, raise your hand if you've heard of the comedian Kathleen Madigan. I referred to her in an essay that I wrote.

Kathleen Madigan is -- I think she's from Kentucky. And she does a great job of affecting an accent from that state, but she really is from. She came on the USO tour with the late Robin Williams to Afghanistan in 2010. She spoke at the United States embassy.

She had been to Helmand Province, went out with the USO members to a forward operating base in Helmand. So she told them in -- with her brilliant sense of humor, she got up on the stage and looked out at the audience and said "You, know I just came back from a FOB. Somebody help me. What's a FOB"? And a Marine on cue in the front row says, "Ma'am, that's a forward operating base." "Thank you, Marine."

"And I was at this base down in Southern Helmand Province, and I asked this darling cute Marine captain, Marine Captain, what are you doing"?

And so then she affects the Marine captain, comes to attention, says "Ma'am, if you look outside the barbed wire there. Look down in that village. You see the dust down there? And what we have done down there, ma'am, is incredible.

"We have just built a elementary school. We're just finishing up a health clinic. We -- see that road construction going on? That's going to link that village to the district so farmers will get their food to market. Ma'am, we have a female engagement team that's down there right now talking to those women in that village about women's rights."

And then Kathleen said, "Marine Captain, stop. I have a question. When are you going to invade Detroit"?

(LAUGHTER)

And like all great humor...

(LAUGHTER)

... it is funny. But the funny part of it, the humor is connected to a reality there.

And so that idea about how fast can we get things done in Afghanistan, in Iraq, how fast can the Afghan people get things done? It's got to inform our judgments about what programs we'll undertake.

And then last, seventh point, and I'll end here, is about leadership and contingency.

So the United States of America was extraordinarily blessed during its Revolutionary War in the first decade of the republic that we had this individual as president and commander-in-chief. The Turks, in even more desperate conditions, they were awfully lucky they had that man, Kemal Ataturk.

And Afghanistan had Hamid Karzai. And I'm not -- again, I'm not being cynical in putting this up here at all.

Hamid Karzai, in my mind, is a very decent individual in certain ways. He certainly isn't a Central Asian despot that wants to grind his people into the ground. He's nationalistic. He was an inclusive politician, but a state builder, he was not. And yet the election process ended up with Hamid Karzai as the president of Afghanistan.

And over time, what you see in situations where these democratic elections take place, over time, the frustration to the intervening power, it becomes the real problem is that person who got democratically elected. That too has to be thought through, that when you go with early elections, then you take the results, and that's what you're going to live with.

Now, I'll finish with cost of war. And cost of war, the reason I'd like to go through this, how do you make this complex evaluation? How do you do this assessment? Does democratization -- in the case of Afghanistan, was it a high-payoff strategy?

In order to answer that question, you do have to look at what the costs are.

Human cost: 9/11, U.S. losses as of this day killed in action, allies killed in action, Afghan National Security Forces, police and army, killed in action and civilian deaths.

Fiscal costs: There's our operating costs today, still going up. Here's assistance to the Afghan Army to date, still going up. Here's our development assistance, still going up.

And here, interestingly, is the cost to the American taxpayer as estimated through the year 2050 from Afghan and Iraq War veteran casualties, the added cost to the American taxpayers. That's not $750 million; it is $750 billion. Because of PTSD, now people are saying that figure is too low.

Against that, here is last year's State of California education budget. Here is last year's U.S. Department of Education budget. Here is last year's U.S. Department of Energy budget. And here is NASA's budget last year.

Final cost, opportunity costs. I was gratified and honored with the amount of video teleconferences I had as the ambassador in Afghanistan during the surge with the president of the United States and our national-security team. But I have to tell you that all the time we were spending on Afghanistan, at some point in time, I started to have concerns about, were we spending as much time on China, Iran and Russia? And I would tell you, for the two years in surge, the answer is no. So there are opportunity costs that come with this.

But when you talk about then this question of democratization, go back to the movie I showed you at the outset. Where are we today? What has been achieved? Against how much does it cost?

You've got to make your own deliberations. There's no A, B or C answer for this.

Let me end there. And I know I'm probably already at about the limit of your time. I can take some questions. But if, Amin, we've got to call a timeout and a transition, ready.

DR. TARZI: Sir, we do need to take a timeout. (OFF-MIKE) don't mind sticking around for the break...

AMB. EIKENBERRY: I'll be here for -- I'll be here until the afternoon, late afternoon.

DR. TARZI: Karl, thank you on behalf of the students and faculty for -- at the beginning, you know, we're our own worst critics. And so by measuring progress based on the baseline, I think, was a good reality check, put everything in context. Your seven observations will certainly be fodder for much discussion throughout the rest of the year.

And finally, thank you once again for serving your nation and preparing the future senior leaders of this nation we were talking today.

As a small token of our appreciation...

EIKENBERRY: Wonderful. Thank you so much.

DR. TARZI: Thank you, sir.

AMB. EIKENBERRY: Thanks.

(APPLAUSE)

AMB. EIKENBERRY: And I will be outside during the break.

END