

ANNOUNCER: Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome MIT President Dr. Susan Hockfield.

[APPLAUSE]

HOCKFIELD: Good afternoon, everyone, and welcome to today's lecture in the august series of MIT's Compton Lectures. I'm particularly honored to welcome several guests this afternoon-- Sir Nigel Sheinwald, British Ambassador to the United States, Dr. Phil Budden, Consul General with the British Consulate General here in Boston.

Now, I'm delighted to have all of you join us today. And as our custom, I'm going to look forward to a lively question and answer session with the speaker following his lecture.

Let me begin by providing a little bit of context for the Compton Lectures. They were established more than 50 years ago, in 1957, to honor MIT's President Karl Taylor Compton who had died three years before. Karl Taylor Compton guided MIT for almost a quarter of a century, from 1930 until his death in 1954, first as president of the Institute and then as chairman of the MIT Corporation, MIT's Board of Trustees.

Compton was truly a transformative figure in MIT's history. He led the Institute through the difficult years of the global Depression and a world war. He guided MIT's transformation into a world leader in both engineering and science and, in innumerable ways, truly set the stage for the research, education, and innovation breakthroughs that poured out of MIT from World War II until today.

The Compton Lectures honor his wide-ranging and deep intelligence and curiosity. Their aim, as originally set out, is to bring to MIT some of the great minds on the world scene. And they surely have-- from the legendary physicist Niels Bohr, who gave the inaugural Compton Lecture, to Linus Pauling, two-time winner of the Nobel Prize. President Compton himself was noted for his high intelligence, his depth of knowledge, his integrity, and his commitment to public service.

So it's extremely fitting that we should honor his legacy with a speaker who embodies these same exceptional qualities, the Right Honorable David Miliband MP, Secretary of State For Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs of the United Kingdom. That he is the youngest person ever to deliver a Compton Lecture testifies to his remarkable accomplishments and leadership.

That he is also an MIT alumnus, having earned a Master's degree in political science in 1990, testifies to a particular strength of character appreciated no more than in this lecture hall. And that he's the first foreign secretary to have his own blog suggests that this is not your grandparent's United Kingdom anymore.

After completing his undergraduate studies at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, David Miliband came to MIT as a Kennedy Scholar, an elite British scholarship established in 1966 in memory of President John F. Kennedy. Since its founding, the Kennedy Scholars Program has sent 455 exceptional British graduate students to MIT or to Harvard with a goal of strengthening ties between the UK and the United States.

It would have been particularly gratifying to one of our previous Compton Lecturers, the late Senator Edward M. Kennedy, who spoke in the series in 2007, to see how hard this Kennedy Scholar is working to cement those ties between the UK and the US.

Widely considered a contender for leadership of Britain's Labour Party, David Miliband first rose to prominence as chief policy advisor to Tony Blair in his historic bid to introduce a new Labor platform and win the post of Prime Minister. Following that victory, from 1997 to 2001, David Miliband served as head of the Prime Minister's Policy Unit.

He has subsequently held a wide range of leadership positions, including Minister for School Standards, Minister of Communities and Local Government, and Secretary of State for Environment, Food, and Rural Affairs. In this last post, he brought climate change to the center of public attention in the United Kingdom.

Beyond his direct government service, he helped found the Center for European Reform and has written widely, including two books, *Reinventing the Left* and *Paying for Inequality*. Finally, for those who understand what this means, I understand that he roots for Arsenal.

[LAUGHTER]

This afternoon, the Foreign Secretary will explore what might be done to end the war in Afghanistan for good, a subject that concerns us all. Certainly this is not the first time that the United States and Britain have united in fighting and in seeking to end a difficult war. In fact, as President of MIT, Karl Taylor Compton himself was deeply engaged with the work of MIT's is Rad Lab, the specialized brain trust that, in concert with brilliant colleagues from Great Britain, developed the radar systems so pivotal to winning World War II.

I believe that President Compton would have been moved by the continued partnership between the United States and Great Britain and would have found our subject today particularly compelling. So with shared respect for our past and shared concern for future, I invite you to please join me in a warm welcome to the Right Honorable David Miliband.

[APPLAUSE]

MILIBAND:

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you very much. Well, President Hockfield, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for that very kind introduction. I am delighted to be back at MIT. You have welcomed me today here with warmth and with scholarship, with generosity and with intellect. And I am extremely pleased and honored to be able to deliver the Compton Lecture today.

As a student here in the late 1980s, I learnt much about political science, my chosen subject, but also about the history of this great Institution, a beacon both of academic excellence and of the enlightened values of progress, discovery, and a belief in human worth, values which we cherish dearly on both sides of the Atlantic.

I remember the twelve months I spent here extremely fondly, probably more fondly than my professors who had to labor through the essays that I wrote. I was surprised to find or be told that the last British cabinet minister to speak at MIT was Winston Churchill.

[LAUGHTER]

Surprised because I would have thought that after a Churchill speech, you would want many more from British cabinet ministers. The theme of his speech in 1949 was science in the service of society. He called on scholars and students at MIT to rebuild or help rebuild a world shattered by war.

I can honestly say that it is tremendous to be able to look back and hear about the enormous achievements of this Institution. But it fills me with even greater pride that this is an Institution thinking globally about the big challenges of the future. Science in the service of society can be a cliché.

But what I have learnt today from the professors and from the students I've met, not least through the Energy Initiative that I've recently been briefed on over the last hour, is that the spirit of public service, as well as the spirit of scholarly inquiry, is driving this Institution forward in a way that is beneficial not just for the people lucky enough to come and study here or teach here, but actually more widely.

I have to say that in 1988, I would never have believed that I would be British Foreign Secretary in a Labor government coming here to explain a war in Afghanistan. But I've chosen this as the topic for my lecture today for three simple, but important reasons.

First, foreign policy needs to be about national security. Terrorism is the number-one national security threat to the UK. And the border areas of Pakistan and Afghanistan are our greatest concern not because their governments chose this, but because the security deficit there allows terrorist groups of international potency to prosper.

Second, the Transatlantic Alliance. President Hockfield mentioned the fact that I came here on a Kennedy Scholarship, a transformative year in not just my education, but I think in my view of the world. That program is dedicated to the memory of your fallen president, and the scholarship program is designed strengthen cooperation between the US and the UK. The rationale behind the launch of the program was that the Transatlantic Alliance matters. And nowhere is the Transatlantic Alliance being tested more than in Afghanistan at the moment.

The third reason I've chosen to talk about the war in Afghanistan is that it is central to the future of Western power. We are moving into what many people call a multipolar age, where the spread of economic power from West to East will demand a change in the international balance of political power. The fate of Afghanistan will have vital implications for the coalitions we need to build with Muslim-majority countries far beyond South Asia and crucial to the new balance of power in the world.

But there is also another reason for devoting this speech to Afghanistan. Neither your country nor mine started the war in Afghanistan. In the 1990s, that country's Taliban government provided cover and support for al-Qaeda's senior leadership. It was a symbiotic relationship. In return, Osama bin Laden supported the Taliban with money and with fighters.

After Afghanistan was used as the launching pad for the terrible events of 9/11, the United Nations' mission and then the NATO mission enjoyed widespread international support. But we never meant our military to be there forever. Eight years in, with al-Qaeda having been pushed into Pakistan, it is not enough to explain why the war started. We need to set out how it will be ended, preserving what has been achieved and protecting South Asia from a contagion that would affect us all.

The military surge now on the way is vital to success in Afghanistan. Civilian and economic investment is a necessity in a country that comes second to bottom in the UN's Human Development Report. These are the preconditions for progress.

But my argument today is that now is the time for Afghans to pursue a political settlement with as much vigor and energy as we are pursuing the military and civilian effort. The political settlement needs to be external as well as internal, involving all of Afghanistan's neighbors, as well as those parts of the insurgency willing permanently to sever ties with al-Qaeda, to give up the armed struggle, and live within the Afghan constitutional framework. And it is to that internal settlement and external settlement that I'll be devoting my lecture today.

To be clear, there are no superlatives to do justice to the bravery of the American, British, and other soldiers, sailors, and Marines fighting in Afghanistan-- their professionalism in the face of adversity, the enthusiasm with which they talk of a better future for a land thousands of miles from their own.

But in my experience, these young men and women are the first to acknowledge that however hard they try, their work alone will not be enough to secure Afghanistan. President Obama has put it this way. "We are not going to succeed simply by piling on more and more troops." British Prime Minister Gordon Brown has said, "We need not just a military push, but a political push." And General McChrystal has himself acknowledged that, quote, "A political solution to all conflicts is the inevitable outcome."

So while the violence of the most murderous, indiscriminate, and terrible kind started this Afghan War, politics will bring it to an end on the back of concerted military and civilian effort. Now I'm going to explore that politics in the lecture, but you can never talk about politics unless you understand history. So I want to start with a bit of history.

For millennia, Afghanistan's history has been in large part its geography at the crossroads of southwest Asia astride the mountain ranges and deserts that separate the subcontinent from Central Asia. From Alexander the Great to Genghis Khan, from General Roberts, who marched 10,000 British and Indian troops from Kabul to relieve Kandahar during the Second Anglo-Afghan War, to General Gromov, the last Soviet soldier to withdraw across the Oxus River in the dying days of the Soviet Union, commanders and their armies have crossed and recrossed the high passes and wide rivers that bind this ancient land.

Britain fought three wars in Afghanistan between 1840 and 1920. Each time it was defending its power base and its equities in British India. Each time it suffered military reverses as it sought to establish order. Yet on every occasion, once that lesson had been learnt, the imperial strategists sought and secured a saner and more sustainable objective, a self-governing, self-policing, but heavily-subsidized Afghanistan, where the tribes balanced each other and the Afghan State posed no threat to the safety of British India.

It's striking that many years later, Soviet strategists reached strikingly similar conclusions. When, in 1989, the Soviet forces in Afghanistan withdrew back across the Oxus, they left behind a government which survived for three years. It did so by, in the words of advice that came direct from the Kremlin, quote, "Forgetting communism, abandoning socialism, embracing Islam, and working with the tribes." Unquote.

As with every other regime in modern Afghan history, the Najibullah government could not have existed without external subsidy. And so it fell when Yeltsin's newly-independent Russia cut all aid to Kabul. Britain's experience in the 19th century and the Soviet Union's in the 20th showed that the best way, probably the only way, to stabilize Afghanistan is to empower the Afghans themselves to secure their own villages and valleys and to govern them.

To realize this, the Afghans need full political and military support and generous subsidy. But the Afghan people neither need nor welcome our combat troops on their soil any longer than is necessary to guarantee security and set them on a course to regulating their own affairs.

A recent study of Britain's bloody withdrawal from Kabul in 1842 concluded that the first cause of the disaster had been the reluctance of junior officers to tell their superiors the truth about the dire situation British forces found themselves in. I know from my own discussions with diplomats and commanders in the field that such happy talk is not the order of the day now. Getting Afghanistan right means getting right down to the ground truth.

So let me set out the basic facts of the situation as I see them. The Afghan people are tired of 30 years of civil war. They've been traumatized by the fighting and the denial of basic rights and opportunities. The majority of them hate, for good reason, the brutality of the Taliban.

Meanwhile, the Afghan government faces competing demands from its own people and from the international community. But it lacks the capacity and sometimes the will to address them directly. The concerns run deeper than elections marred by corruption. They also relate to the very structure of the political system.

The insurgency which challenges that government is a broad but shallow coalition with shifting relationships, geographical bases, and tactics. The Taliban are led by members of the former Talib regime under Mullah Omar, who's now based in Pakistan's border areas. But a variety of other factions are also operating, including the Haqqani network, Hizb-i-Islami, and a range of smaller groups. They all trade on the uncertainties of the people and the weaknesses of the state.

The Taliban are despised. Recent polling suggests that only 6% of them want them back in power. But they do have organized cadres and enjoy some support in the southeast and the north and are able to mount operations in Kabul and elsewhere. The al-Qaeda leadership is now in hiding in Pakistan's tribal areas. Its leaders have, in significant number, been killed or arrested.

Despite the historical ties between al-Qaeda and the Afghan Taliban, their relationship is predominantly tactical and local. Yet al-Qaeda retains the global capacity, including through its affiliates such as that in Yemen, to plan and carry out deadly attacks.

Finally, there has been significant change in Pakistan in the last 18 months under President Zardari's civilian government. The reality and threat of domestic terrorism has brought new purpose to civilian and military leadership, a new consensus between leaders and led. It is now realistic to talk of complementary pressure on both sides of the border.

If these are the facts of the situation, the basic facts, how to explain them? The strategy of the Afghan government and of the international coalition for eight years has been focused on building up key pillars of the state and delivering better lives. And there is a real record of achievement here. 5 million refugees back home, perhaps the greatest sign of growing confidence in safety and security.

Yet the polling indicates what anyone who visits Afghanistan knows, that insecurity is still the biggest problem. And last year, more Afghan civilians were killed by the Taliban in insurgent attacks than ever before. They are defended by an Afghan National Army, which, in 2003, numbered fewer than 2,000. Today it is over 100,000 strong, though with a weak ethnic balance. It will grow by a third by the end of December and further in the years to come.

The Afghan soldiers are gaining front-line combat experience, including in the Moshtarak operation in Helmand Province. Plans are being developed for the transfer of lead security responsibility to the Afghans district by district and province by province as the key conditions are met. And as the Afghan forces get stronger, international forces will be able to withdraw from their combat role, although their support and training and mentoring will need to continue for a number of years.

In education and health, the figures speak for themselves. In 2001, only 1 million Afghan children attended school, all of them boys. This year, we expect to see some 7 million Afghan children in school, a third of them girls. 8 out of 10 Afghans have access to health care. This year, 40,000 more Afghan children will see their fifth birthdays than would have been the case in 2002. This is what we mean by building up the key pillars of the state.

Meanwhile, at local level, the National Solidarity Program would be a remarkable story in any country. Almost 30,000 village councils have been elected by their peers. There have not just been designed, but implemented 40,000 development projects and are now forming, from the bottom up, district councils across Afghanistan.

There also other areas where progress has been much slower where we're rightly stepping up efforts. Let me pick out three. Justice and law and order are a critical background and battleground. The Afghan National Police now number almost 100,000, but quantity is not the problem. Quality is. Problems of drugs, illiteracy, patronage, and corruption are real and rife.

The Afghan government has rightly launched a robust and far-reaching program of reform. But they also need, with our help, to build up the informal judicial structures for criminal and civil dispute resolution. That is, after all, what Afghans, many of them, mean by the rule of law.

Further, despite the success of the National Solidarity Program, civil administration is a massively uphill struggle. In large parts of the country, district governance is almost nonexistent. Half the governors-- there are 364 districts in Afghanistan-- half the governors do not have an office, fewer than a quarter have electricity, and some receive only \$6 a month in expenses. Over the next two years, the international community has promised to help train 12,000 subnational civil servants.

And last but not least, corruption. 95% of Afghans see corruption as a problem in their local area. And in some regions, the average Afghan is paying \$100 in bribes every year. Such widespread abuse has deep roots. President Karzai has promised to take steps to end the culture of impunity, including by strengthening the High Office of Oversight to investigate and sanction corrupt officials. The international community and his own people will judge him by his actions, not his words. Donors are trying to incentivize action here by promising to channel more aid through the government as certain tests on his delivery are met.

Now, I go through this list for a particular reason. The achievements are real. None of them would have been possible without the tireless efforts and unstinting bravery of the military. Without them, the insurgency would have overwhelmed the Afghan government and probably overrun Kabul. Our development work would have ground to a halt, and al-Qaeda would have seized more space to plan their terrorist atrocities.

But it is not enough to stop the story there. The work ahead on each of these fronts is clear and pressing. The additional troops that your country and mine are deploying are vital if progress is to be made. Britain's commitment and determination will endure until we have achieved our shared goal-- an Afghanistan that will not again be used as a base for international terrorism.

However, even on the most optimistic reading of present plans, only if the scale of the insurgency itself is reduced will the Afghan authorities be able to govern their land in sustainable or acceptable ways. And only then will we be able to withdraw our forces, confident that they will not have to return.

The efforts of our military are an important part of this. As General McChrystal said recently, "The role of the military is to try to shape conditions which will allow people to come to a truly equitable solution to how the Afghan people are governed." And this raises the core political challenge for Afghanistan, one which has been neglected for far too long.

The Bonn Agreement of 2001 and the processes which followed it fell short of a sustainable political agreement. The Northern Alliance came to Bonn as the new masters of Afghanistan, but they were not representative of the broader Afghan population. It was right that the Taliban leaders were excluded from Bonn, but other more significant and legitimate groups were significantly underrepresented, most notably the various Pashtun confederations from which the Taliban draws its strength.

The two [INAUDIBLE] which followed Bonn lead to a top-down, highly-centralized political structure in a country where people have always had a strong predilection for managing their own affairs at local level. Furthermore, the balance of formal and informal democratic institutions did not mesh with tribal and other informal traditional and community-based structures.

Corruption has exacerbated these problems. Resentment towards corrupt officials has corroded confidence in the very notion of public service and public office. And finally, from Iran in the west, to Pakistan in the east, the Central Asian republics in the north, and the regional powers of India, China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, and Turkey, the Bonn Agreement failed to bind the neighbors into a long-term project of building a new, more peaceful Afghanistan.

The lesson that I draw from history and from the present is that Afghanistan will never achieve a sustainable peace unless many more Afghans are inside the political system and the neighbors are on side with the political settlement. And the rest of this lecture is designed to explain what that internal settlement and external settlement might be.

Let me start with the situation within Afghanistan and with respect to the insurgency. There is now an international consensus behind a program of so-called reintegration, which the United Nations defined as, quote, "The process by which ex-combatants acquire civilian status and gain sustainable employment and income."

The logic is very, very simple indeed. As military pressure on the insurgency increases, as the dangers of continuing to fight grow and the prospects of success look more remote, those on the periphery of the insurgency will start to review their allegiances.

We've already seen this in the south of the country in recent months. Already in Marjah, the site of General McChrystal's first big push to establish order, some fighters have agreed to lay down their weapons and accept the writ of the provincial government.

For such realignments to be sustained there needs to be a serious alternative future for the insurgents, not just employment, but protection from retaliation by former allies. That is the significance of President Karzai's proposed National Council for Peace, Reconciliation, and Reintegration and of the \$150 million the international community has already pledged to fund it.

But my case today is that a reintegration program will have major impact only if it is coupled with a serious effort to address the grievances of those whom President Karzai describes as his, "disaffected compatriots." Without a genuine effort to understand and ultimately address the wider concerns that fuel the insurgency, it will be hard to convince significant numbers of combatants that their interests will be better served by working with the government than by fighting against it.

Some insurgents are committed to al-Qaeda's violent, extremist agenda. There will never be reconciliation with them. They need to be beaten back. But the majority are not. They share deeply conservative Islamic beliefs and, linked to that, strong views about what is a just social order. Their rallying cry is the expulsion of international forces. But they are also motivated by intense dissatisfaction with the Afghan government and Afghan politics, which they see as corrupt and incompetent.

The idea of political engagement with those who would directly or indirectly attack our troops is very difficult indeed. And we have no more right to betray our own values than those of the Afghan people, who pray that the Taliban will never come back. But dialogue is not appeasement, and political space is not the same as veto power or dominations.

The Afghans themselves must own, lead, and drive such political engagement. It will be a slow, gradual process. There is no quick fix. But the insurgents will want to see international support for the process of reconciliation. International engagement, for example, under the auspices of the UN may ultimately be required.

So there needs to be clarity about the preconditions for any agreement. For me, they are as follows. That those who want a political say in their country's future must permanently sever ties with al-Qaeda, give up the armed struggle, and accept the constitutional framework. In doing so, their interests would be recognized and given a political voice, but constrained by the views of others and by the laws of the land.

In his repeated offers to talk direct to insurgents, President Karzai has made clear that while the preconditions should set the terms of any final agreement, they should not prevent dialogue from developing. The military buildup of international and Afghan capacity concentrates the mind. Dialogue provides an alternative to fight or flight for the insurgency.

What could this political settlement look like? An outsider needs a degree of humility but can offer suggestions. I would offer four. First, arrangements, formal or informal, to ensure that the legitimate tribal, ethnic, and other groups that feel excluded from the post-Bonn political settlement are given a real stake in the political process and the ability to compete for political representation. A peace settlement must include the vanquished as well as the victors.

New arrangements for political organization should give voice to the different blocks of opinion and influence. And efforts should be made to broaden the ethnic base of the Afghan National Army and other key institutions. All of this would encourage individuals to address their grievances and those of their broader community from within the political system rather than outside.

The threat to the insurgency is of growing military pressure from increasingly numerous and capable Afghan and international forces. The offer is a political voice commensurate with support in the population and consistent with the Afghan constitution.

The second element is the empowerment of provincial and district governors and their associated assemblies of elders so that the provisional governors and the district governors have the confidence, competence, and capacity who wish to govern in the best interests of those they represent.

Recruiting the right people into these jobs is essential. And given the challenges of upholding justice and the rule of law, the police chief and the local magistrates are equally, if not more, important. Local governors and local assemblies also need to be given more operational responsibility for development, dispute resolution, local security, and local reintegration.

Third, a new dispensation, not necessarily involving constitutional change, between president and parliament in which the legislature, which, after all, already includes two former Taliban, has a real stake in the success of the enterprise, a stake that would encourage parliamentarians to construct as well as criticize, and which would ultimately lead to the development of something completely alien in Afghanistan today but critical to democracy, a constructive or loyal opposition.

And fourth, underpinning all this must be a more concentrated and concerted effort to tackle corruption. President Karzai has promised to tackle the culture of impunity, and the establishment of the new anti-corruption unit are important. But the new political settlement needs to include many more checks and balances, a much greater emphasis on transparency and accountability, to ensure that the government, at all levels and in all guises, is the servant and not the master of the Afghan people.

When should this drive begin? Well, the great consultation proposed by President Karzai, the grand Peace Jirga on the 29th of April, should, in my view, be the start of a process of building a new national political framework. The president has now spoken several times about his hopes for this gathering, which needs to be well prepared and bring together diverse representatives from across Afghanistan.

It cannot solve every problem. It can set out the principles on which they will be addressed. We should support careful preparation, wide engagement, and systematic follow-up.

In any country, an internal political consensus goes a long way towards securing stability. But no country's politics can exist in a vacuum, least of all Afghanistan's, because for too long it has been the victim of external meddling and interference. In 1898, Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India, called Afghanistan, quote, "A piece on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for domination of the world."

The great game and the Cold War are, of course, history. But even today, Afghanistan is a theater in which competing regional interests are being pursued. And its tribal and ethnic groups in the south, the east, and the north still roam freely across its borders.

Those who oppose the government still draw on external funding, support, and shelter. So if Afghanistan is to have a more peaceful and prosperous future, it needs not just a new internal political settlement, but also an external one. There needs to be much greater effort to reach out not just to disaffected Afghans, but to the country's neighbors and near neighbors.

Given the scale of the geopolitical challenges in the region, including the long-running tensions between India and Pakistan and the position of Iran, it can seem that Afghanistan is fated to remain the victim of a zero sum scramble for power amongst hostile neighbors. The logic of this position is that Afghanistan will never achieve peace until the region's most intractable problems are resolved.

But there is an alternative story, which I believe, in which Afghanistan is so dangerous for the region that it becomes the place where more cooperative regional relations are forged. The first step is a recognition by all Afghanistan's neighbors and the key regional powers of two simple facts.

Fact one is that no country in the region, let alone the international community, will again allow Afghanistan to be dominated or used as a strategic asset by a neighboring state. Fact two, that the status quo in Afghanistan is damaging to all. Crime, drugs, terrorism, refugees spill across its borders, when Afghanistan's great mineral wealth and agricultural potential should be feeding the region. These two facts can and must provide the basis of shared interest around which the countries of the region can coalesce.

Second, and this is a more complex and difficult point, there needs to be a more honest acknowledgement of the different interests and concerns of the neighbors so that efforts can be made to provide reassurances. Pakistan is absolutely essential here. It has a 1,600-mile border with Afghanistan. It holds many of the keys to security and dialogue. It clearly has to be a partner in finding solutions in Afghanistan.

Of course, Pakistan will only act according to its own sense of its national interest. That is natural and, I suppose, not unusual. Pakistan's relationship with Afghanistan is close to the core of its national security interests. It fears the build-up of a non-Pashtun Afghan National Army on its doorstep. It is perpetually worried about India's relationship with Afghanistan.

It is a country of 170 million people, growing fast, which for half of its history has been dominated by military rule, not democratic government. Its own security and economy has been directly damaged by decades of insecurity and conflict in Afghanistan. And crucially, it has had a very difficult relationship with the United States for a generation.

That is the significance of the current administration's determination, and of Congress, to pursue a new security, economic, and political relationship with Pakistan. This is a vital opportunity to address Pakistan's concerns and ours. And the Kerry-Lugar Act is a vital down payment in this regard.

But progress for Pakistan cannot be achieved simply by a more serious, more equal US-Pakistan strategic security understanding, crucial though that is. If we want to create the remarkable post-9/11 regional consensus that did exist, there must be enough transparency to build confidence that every country's legitimate interests will be respected, but that none will be privileged.

That means that alongside Pakistan's own fears about its Western border, fears about Pakistan's role in Afghanistan need to be addressed. Every country needs to accept that just as there will be no settlement in Afghanistan without Pakistan's involvement, so there will be no settlement unless India, Russia, Turkey, and China are also involved in the search for solutions. China is Afghanistan's largest foreign investor, and I will discuss the regional approach in Beijing next week.

India has already pledged \$1.2 billion for reconstruction in Afghanistan. It has a big role to play in stabilization in Afghanistan. It also means that the Iranian regime, which is flouting the UN on the nuclear file and has a track record in attempting to destabilize its neighbors, must acknowledge that the best way to protect its investments or promote the interests of Afghans that share its Shia faith is to work to promote peace, not undermine it.

Spurning the invitation to the London conference, which Iran did, was completely shortsighted. The posturing and bombast of President Ahmadinejad in Kabul yesterday does not change Iran's need for stability in Afghanistan, nor the fact that many Iranians recognize it.

The third part of a regional settlement concerns economics. I warmly welcome the focus of Ambassador Holbrooke on agriculture and the success of wheat seed distribution programs in turning farmers from poppy to licit production.

But economics should also be the great lubricant for better regional relations. Afghanistan can benefit all of its neighbors if it becomes the land bridge of Central Asia, South Asia, and the Gulf. After all, many years ago the Silk Road was the passage for trade for many centuries. There are common interests not just in trade and transport, but in managing and sharing water and electricity and harnessing economic growth for the benefit of the region.

Fourth is the question of the forum in which this work for regional engagement should be taken forward. The process does need to be regionally owned. The Turkish government's meeting in Istanbul in January launched a new drive. The London conference, also in January, gave wider international approval.

The Afghan government now needs to take the lead on regional engagement in partnership with the UN. Only the region can decide whether the multitude of existing bodies can provide the basis for a serious and a sustained engagement that is now needed. If not, then a new standing conference on stability, security, and cooperation in South Asia may be the answer.

Finally, and this is where the external settlement links most clearly to the internal political settlement, there needs to be greater transparency with respect to the future direction of Afghan foreign policy. It is for the Afghans to decide how to do this. But they, too, have a critical role to play in building confidence and reducing miscalculation. Linked to this, there will need to be consistency and clarity about the presence, activities, and future plans of the international forces in Afghanistan.

President Hockfield, ladies and gentlemen, I have been to Afghanistan six times as British Foreign Secretary. On my first visit in July 2007, I attended the funeral of the last king, Mohammed Zahir Shah. The grief I witnessed was palpable and deep, but so, too, was an extraordinary sense of national unity amidst all the tribes who gathered in Kabul.

The unity is not expressed today through allegiance to a monarch. Instead, it is founded on a deep desire of the people to live life as they see fit. In that, they are their own country's greatest resource and ours.

The end state that we are striving for and they are praying for in Afghanistan is far from Utopian. But within two to five years, it is realistic to aspire to see a country on an upward trajectory, still poor, but with a just peace, with democratic and inclusive politics bedding down at all levels, and with incomes growing.

The urban population should have access to electricity 24/7. More shops will be open in the local bazaars, and more children, in particular girls, will be going to school. Most grassroots insurgents, the so-called \$10-a-day Taliban, should be resettled in their villages, with at least some of the insurgent leaders reconciling into legitimate political process.

Communities will be increasingly able to rely on the Afghan National Security Forces, rather than ours, for protection. International troops will have stepped back from the front line to focus on the still dangerous work of training and mentoring. The neighbors will be working together, preventing trouble, not fueling it. Above all, al-Qaeda will be kept out.

That vision depends on sacrifice and on money. But it is only feasible if politics comes to the fore. That is how the war in Afghanistan will be brought to an end. Thank you very much indeed.

[APPLAUSE]

Thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE]

HOCKFIELD: Thank you. An extraordinary vision for a multilateral peace and prosperity. And I'm actually looking-- are there people at the mics? There are people moving to the mics. But I want to thank you for that really remarkable view of what is possible in a part of the world that often seems impossible. So we have questions from the mic. I think we'll start over here on the left. It's hard for us to see you, but please.

AUDIENCE: Thank you, Foreign Minister, for your kind remarks. My name is [INAUDIBLE]. I'm a technology policy grad student at MIT, and I was previously an Air Force officer of the Pakistan Air Force. And the fears you talked about being expressed in terms of the strategic in parts of [INAUDIBLE] are something we have lived when I was being [INAUDIBLE].

So my question is like two parts. The first one is that since the issue of Kashmir is pivotal in having India and Pakistan to reach kind of like a sustainable relationship. So I want you to put your foreign minister hat off and kind of like lay down the framework which, in your opinion, is sustainable for both the countries when it comes to Kashmir.

And second part is to deal with the issue of narcotics, because that is something which primarily is of great significance to the northwest frontier province and to Afghanistan itself. So do you see any replacement to that trade which can enable the Afghan society in the longer run, economically speaking? Thanks so much.

MILIBAND: Good. Should we take three or four, and then I'll be able to get through more of them.

HOCKFIELD: Oh, terrific. That's a great idea. One from the right-hand side over here, please. And please, I ask you to ask a single question. And if would, a question, please, rather than a statement of your own.

AUDIENCE: My question is, how can engineers help who are doing start-ups and interested in sustainable development?

HOCKFIELD: Another one over here, please.

AUDIENCE: Okay. Given your suggestion of a political settlement with the Taliban, what steps would be taken in such a settlement to ensure that there wouldn't be basically a provision of legitimacy to apathy on the part of, say, elements in the Pakistani government to not dealing with Islamic militancy by al-Qaeda, the Taliban, Lashkar-e-Taiba within their borders?

MILIBAND: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. So these are good questions. Let me try and answer them. I wish I could take off my foreign minister's hat. I know this is a very private meeting, and no one will ever say--

[LAUGHTER]

--anything about what I say here, but sometimes the walls have ears. And so I think that in my speech I said that historically there's been a temptation to think that unless the big regional questions are resolved, then Afghanistan will always be a victim of them. And what I tried to suggest is that actually Afghanistan needs to be the place, because it's so dangerous for the whole of the region that it actually becomes a starting point for promoting regional stability rather the end point.

Second thing, in respect of Kashmir, as you will know better than most, as the whole audience probably knows, Britain has a history when it comes to South Asia.

[LAUGHTER]

We've got a history of brilliant diplomacy that solves all the--

[LAUGHTER]

--all the problems. So a degree of humility is important in all international affairs, but probably especially in this one. And what we say time and again is that it's in everybody's interests for Pakistan and India to begin to cooperate and develop their cooperation. It's very important that we say that it's got to be their decisions and their negotiations that bring progress.

I think that the immediate responsibility is actually in Pakistan, where the prosecution of the Mumbai-- those associated with the Mumbai attacks, which killed almost 200 people, is absolutely a first step in building the sort of confidence that's going to be necessary.

But we are, without inserting ourselves into the process, we are strong supporters of any steps towards greater India and Pakistan dialogue, and the recent meeting of the lead foreign office officials from both countries is at least one step. But I think it will take the successful prosecution of those associated with the Mumbai bombings to really give it a push.

I mean, the alternative to drugs is agriculture. And a successful agricultural sector depends, first of all, on prices, on wheat prices mainly, but also on security. And the reason that you've now got 20 poppy-free provinces in Afghanistan and why the UN reports falls of 30% and 20% in Afghan drug production is because security has gone up and prices have gone up. And the wheat seed distribution programs that I referred to are about not the free distribution of wheat seed, but of the subsidized distribution, and that's driven the process.

How can engineers help, I mean, is important and an interesting question because the economics matter and the economics depends on serious agricultural engagement. And actually, the fact that the US Secretary of Agriculture visited Afghanistan a few months ago is, I think, a significant development. It may seem unusual for a Secretary of Agriculture to be part of the solution, but he or she-- he is.

Now, the other thing to say is that although Afghanistan is now the second poorest country in the world, according to the World Development Report, in the 1960s and '70s it was the heart of a trail that took many Westerners to South Asia. And it's a country which had its agriculture developed on American lines.

And it needs the skills and the ideas not just of Afghans, but of outsiders as well. And so one of the things that Ambassador Holbrooke is putting together is a range of ways of engaging US citizens with engineering and other experience in support. Remind me what the third question was? Yeah, remind me what--

AUDIENCE: So the general idea being that--

MILIBAND: Oh, about reconciliation. Yeah, I remember, yeah, yeah. Look, I think there's been a big change. Are you from Pakistan, by any chance?

AUDIENCE: No.

MILIBAND: No. There's been a big change. Maybe the first questioner who was formerly in the Pakistan Air Force may have a view on it. But even in the time that I've been going to Pakistan-- I've had six visits to Pakistan as well in the last three years-- there's been a fundamental change in the appreciation on the part of the public about where their problem lies and about the intense danger of domestic terrorism to the strength of the state.

And that is forcing a reappraisal because no one is going to have a client state in Afghanistan. I mean, everyone's going to have to understand that. But legitimate interests should be respected. And that is a message that is going loud and clear to the Pakistani leadership as well.

And it needs to flow through, right through the organization, through the institutions of the state. But I think there is a chance, if the security relationship with America is developed, that it could do that. And that's the importance of the strategic security understanding with the US.

HOCKFIELD: Should we get a few more?

MILIBAND: Yeah, yeah.

HOCKFIELD: Over here, please.

AUDIENCE: Okay. Britain has a history in the Middle East, too. Can your principal of greater dialogue be applied to the moribund Middle East peace process to include the democratically-elected government of Hamas in the negotiations and to immediately end the suffocating blockade on Gaza that's killing people right now even as we speak?

[APPLAUSE]

HOCKFIELD: Another, please.

AUDIENCE: So you talked about the need for sustained financial support. In your opinion, how should the financial burden be distributed between different countries?

MILIBAND: Mm-hmm.

HOCKFIELD: Take another one?

MILIBAND: Mm-hmm.

HOCKFIELD: One more, please, over here.

AUDIENCE: Okay, women's rights. With all due respect, as compelling as your talk was, I felt that women's rights was really absent from it. And the status of women in Afghanistan is appalling. And I think that a lot of us expect the US and the UK to be at the forefront of countries challenging Karzai's government on this issue.

And the small wins we've seen seem uncoordinated and unstrategic. And particularly now that we're at the 10th anniversary of 1325, which the UK was one of the first states to put together a national action plan for, what is being done to convince the government that women need to be part of the rebuilding of Afghanistan.

MILIBAND: Really good questions. On the first question-- it was actually two questions. The suffocating stranglehold on Gaza, you're absolutely right. If you're interested in the Middle East, you can't leave Gaza out of the equation. A central part of Resolution 1860, which was a UK-sponsored resolution to bring an end to the Gaza War, involved opening of the borders into Gaza and not just aid but reconstruction.

And that is only partially being met, to put it generously, both on the Israeli side, but also on the Egyptian side. And so I'm happy to say or to agree with you that that is an important priority that we take up and others take up in all their engagements, both with the Israelis and with the Gazans.

Look, the Hamas issue is a slightly different one for the following reasons. There are plenty of people talking to Hamas. Egypt has been nominated by the Arab League to engage with Hamas to try to promote the reconciliation between Hamas and Fatah.

So in respect of engagement with Hamas, there is engagement. Should Britain try and insert itself into that discussion? No, it shouldn't, because there is a country Egypt nominated by the international community effectively to conduct that discussion.

Should Hamas be brought into the discussion about a two-state solution? Look, the nominated and elected representative of the Palestinian people is President Abbas. He was elected as the president of what should be that country and of the people of Palestine. And he is the chairman of the Palestine National Council, and it's he who needs to negotiate. And you can only negotiate if you're willing to support a two-state solution, if you're willing to recognize the presence of the other state.

What's significant about the last eight years is the whole of the Arab world, not including Hamas but the rest of the Arab world, all 22 countries of the Arab League, have supported something called the Arab Peace Initiative, which says not just that it will recognize Israel, but normalize relations with Israel in the event of the creation of a Palestinian state. And it seems to me that the challenge for Hamas is are they willing to commit to that Arab Peace Initiative as well.

So it's a complicated answer, but I don't think-- it's got some differences from the Afghan situation. In terms of the financial burden, I think it should be shared according to a very simple principle, which is those who have the most are going to have to give the most. And that's the basis on which UN funding is organized and provided, and that's the basis on which the UK contribution to the UN and other development funding.

The issue that was raised about women's rights is a difficult and important one. Afghanistan is a society very different from our own. But it's a society which should value what I would call universal rights, and women's rights are an important part of that.

Now, the fact that girls are going to school is obviously a big step forward, a significant step forward. And the fact that the Afghan constitution actually talks about the equal rights of men and women is a step forward. But words on paper or words given in speeches have to be turned into reality, and that is a long, long hard struggle.

The reason I put emphasis in the discussion, or the description I gave of a political settlement and the emphasis I put on respect for the Afghan constitution, was to flag that the issue of women's rights are going to have to be an important part of that.

But it's not for us or anyone else to betray those rights in the course of a peace negotiation. They're not up for grabs. But equally, your right to say that simply insisting that people sign or say that they support the Afghan constitution is not, on its own, enough.

One of the most telling parts of the London conference on Afghanistan was the presentation by civil society representatives. Because in addition to the 74 ministers who came for an intergovernmental conference, two days before there was a civil society conference.

And it can be trite to say that women have a big role to play in the development of that country's future or in development in any country. But no one could listen to the presentation of the representative of Afghanistan's women's organizations without recognizing that it's not just trite, it's actually true. And so in the way in which we support and sponsor development, we've got to recognize that.

But I don't want to pretend to you it's an easy or straightforward process because the values and traditions and history of that country speak to unequal relations, not to equal relations between men and women. And it's going to be a long road before the Afghan girls who are at school now get the sort of rights or lives that you might expect or people in this hall might expect.

HOCKFIELD: Another couple, please. Where are we? Over here, please.

AUDIENCE: Good afternoon. Thank you for coming to MIT. In your talk, you mentioned that dialogue is not appeasement, and you laid out four preconditions that would need to be fulfilled in order to get people to the table. If that were to happen, in your opinion, what would a design look like for a dialogue process? What would the structure be, and is anybody thinking about that?

MILIBAND: Mm-hmm.

HOCKFIELD: Over here, please.

AUDIENCE: My uncle was deputy chief of mission in the US embassy in Afghanistan for a time, but I claim no special knowledge of Afghanistan. I'm tempted to ask you what the distinguished British socialist Ralph Miliband would have thought of what you've been saying here today. But I'm going to focus my question on something else, which is you laid out some conditions for bringing people into a government, and you talked about laying down their arms.

And I thought of an interesting analogue, which is the situation in Northern Ireland, where the whole decommissioning of the weapons by the IRA was crucial in that extended negotiations. And is there not a pretty strong case to be made for, as the negotiations are going forward, that's when people begin to feel more confident that they can begin to set aside their weapons? Not set aside your weapons first and come into a government that you have many reservations about.

HOCKFIELD: Over here, please.

AUDIENCE: Yes. Do you have any idea when the war in Afghanistan will be ended, will be over, when all the troops will get out?

MILIBAND: Mm-hmm. Good. I mean, the first question was-- first of all, there are a lot of people thinking about the design of the dialogue. Where's the lady who asked the-- she's--

AUDIENCE: Here I am.

MILIBAND: Oh, hi. There's a lot of people thinking about it. There isn't yet an agreed design. The April 29 jirga is the start. I mean, there is an Afghan tradition of bringing the tribes together. 300 or 400 representatives come. They're not elected through democratic ballot. It's a tribal society, after all, despite the ravages of civil war.

And I think it's going to have to respect that informal mechanism of Afghan participation and engagement, and it's not going to be a one-off. It's not going to be a one-off. And it can't be rushed, either. It's not going to be done within the space of six weeks.

The second question. Whenever I give lectures, I remember that books are remembered for far longer than lectures. And whenever people ask about my dad and what he would think now, I always treasure the idea that his books live on and that the ideas that he stood for can be examined and debated.

What I know is that he certainly wouldn't agree with everything I said, but that is part of the spirit of democratic inquiry. I think he would think that the notion-- the examination of the idea of how you substitute military engagement for political engagement, is at the heart of democratic politics, and certainly something that he believed in very strongly.

Just on what you said, there are a couple of aspects of what I tried to say. First of all, we've got to be realistic. In a society like Afghanistan, the renunciation of the armed struggle is not the same as giving up all your weapons.

And I deliberately said that the precondition for entering for any agreement is going to be the renunciation of the armed struggle, because Afghanistan is not going to be a country where suddenly, in the space of a couple of years, all the weapons that flow in and out of that country are going to disappear.

But you're also right to say that dialogue opens up possibilities that don't exist before the dialogue starts. And that's why I specifically talked about the preconditions for a final agreement. And I think that that is-- I think that's important. And today, we are meeting a day after a remarkable event in Northern Ireland yesterday. I mean, it's just worth pausing, given the history of this-- or at least Boston's relationship with Northern Ireland.

But what happened yesterday was the final capstone on the Good Friday Agreement of 1998. So it's taken 12 years, even since 1998, for the devolution of policing responsibilities is the last part of the-- sorry to mix my metaphors-- the last part of the jigsaw.

And it was historic when George Mitchell brokered the 1998 Good Friday Agreement. But the history books will record that it was March the 9, 2010 when the words on paper were finally turned into reality on the ground. And that is-- it's a very, very striking example.

When will our troops come home? I can't give you-- it would be glib to name a date. What I can tell you is that the commitment of President Karzai and the international community is for the whole of Afghanistan to be under Afghan security leadership within five years.

Afghan security leadership doesn't mean the end of military engagement, but it does mean a complete change from the combat role that's undertaken at the moment. And after eight years of war, people are impatient for change, and that's an understandable way.

HOCKFIELD: Another round?

MILIBAND: I think the last round.

HOCKFIELD: One more round.

MILIBAND: We don't to keep the governor-- I'm seeing the governor, and I don't to--

AUDIENCE: I want to ask about the effort to establish a credible and non-corrupt Afghan regime. And it seems like this is necessary to the future of the British and American efforts there.

And I guess my question is, given that we've had trouble doing it over the last eight years, and that we need to do it even faster now and that it doesn't seem like the strategy has changed, it's just we're putting more resources into it. Why should we believe that this effort to make the Afghan National Police and the rest of the regime credible is going to work over the next few years?

HOCKFIELD: Over here, please.

AUDIENCE: It seems like the Bonn Agreement was a long time ago, and accommodation or incorporation is more difficult now, especially since the Taliban rhetoric has become [INAUDIBLE] themes and has become closer to al-Qaeda, and [INAUDIBLE] has a reputation of being pretty irreconcilable, what do you suggest can be done to help bring in these groups?

HOCKFIELD: Over here.

AUDIENCE: So you have briefly mentioned Iran. So my question is, how much influence does Iran have in Afghanistan? And how big of a factor is the stability in Afghanistan in the question of dealing with Iran's nuclear weapon?

MILIBAND: Mm-hmm. With Iran's--

AUDIENCE: With Iran's development of nuclear weapon, yeah.

MILIBAND: Well, let me do the last question first. I don't think that the Afghan issue is really related to the nuclear file. The biggest problem for Iran is that Afghanistan is a massive source of drugs for Iran, and Iran has a very serious drugs problem. And I've sat with the Iranian foreign minister. We have diplomatic relations with Iran, sometimes pretty testy relations, but we have relations.

I meet the Iranian foreign minister. I mean, I've sat across the table with him, and he's talked about the damage that instability in Iran is doing to his own country through the drugs trade. And that is the stupidity of not attending the London conference, what I described as the bombast of President Ahmadinejad in Kabul yesterday. Because they've got a real problem with the instability that exists, and it's a dream to think it's been created by the international presence there.

So they also have significant investments in the west of the country in Herat and around there. And so I think that they also-- Secretary Gates said in Kabul yesterday they back both sides or all sides in Afghanistan. But I think it's right to say that they will, if the rest of the regional neighbors get their act together, then Iran will want to be part of it, not separate from it. And I don't think we should preclude them from being part of it.

The first question is a very, very difficult one. The corruption in Afghanistan is deeply rooted, and it reflects a whole range of facts, not the least the fact that pay levels for police and others are very, very low indeed. But it also reflects weakness of security and the fact that you can, in the road between Lashkar Gah and Helmand Province and Kandahar, the fact that you can be stopped 20 times and fleeced 20 times, shows you the link between security and corruption.

And I think that, although insecurity creates the conditions for corruption, I think it's very important to say that the fight against corruption is not a sort of a Western luxury. Because the people of Afghanistan are actually sick to death of the corruption that they see locally. And that is going to be the greatest pressure for change actually, from the bottom up.

Finally, on the Bonn Agreement, I mean, there are a shifting set of allegiances. I call them tactical. al-Qaeda has been significantly weakened since the Bonn Agreement, it's important to remember. I mean, it's holed up in the western part of Afghanistan. It's under severe pressure.

And it's going through the minds of many of the insurgent's leaders whether or not, actually, their alliance with al-Qaeda is more trouble than it's worth. And it is that question that is going to be very important in establishing some kind of stability, both in the west of Pakistan and in the east of Afghanistan, south and east of Afghanistan.

HOCKFIELD: We have one final semi-official act in honor of you as an alumnus returning to MIT with a small present.

MILIBAND: Oh.

HOCKFIELD: This is Alex Chan, the president of the Graduate Student Council at MIT. I'm going to hand over the mic.

ALEX CHAN: Okay.

MILIBAND: Alex, nice to meet you.

ALEX CHAN: Hi. On behalf of the student body, welcome back. Today we would like to honor you with a very special thing, the MIT ring, also famously known as the Rat. This ring symbolizes MIT's creativity, our intelligence, and our proud traditions, and of course, our nerdiness.

[LAUGHTER]

So we hope that this ring would accompany you as you applied your mind and hand in the future to deal with the biggest issues in the world.

MILIBAND: Thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE]

HOCKFIELD: Let me ask you, please, to join me in thanking the Foreign Secretary for an incredibly daunting dual challenge that he's presented, frankly, to all of us for internal peace and stability, external alliance among the neighbors of Afghanistan, in an area of the world that is incredibly important to all of us.

And I can tell all of you that my confidence in being able to achieve these extraordinary goals that he set out is raised by his own intelligence, his own understanding of the issues, and frankly, the fact he has a MIT degree.

[LAUGHTER.]

Help me thank him.

[APPLAUSE]

MILIBAND: Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]