



**Beyond the Headlines**  
**February 11, 2013**  
**Washington, DC**

**Fawzia Koofi**  
Member of Parliament, Afghanistan

***Afghanistan After 2014:  
The Impact of Troop Withdrawal on Democracy, Stability & Women's Rights***

**Patricia Ellis:** Good afternoon everyone, and welcome. Thank you all so much for joining us for our Beyond the Headlines event with Fawzia Koofi, a member of the Afghan Parliament and Vice President of the National Assembly and she will speak on a very timely topic, "Afghanistan After 2014: The Impact of Troop Withdrawal on Democracy, Stability & Women's Rights" subjects near and dear to many of our hearts here. So the turnout is a real tribute to our speaker and the interest in this issue, and the impact of what will happen after 2014.

I'm Patricia Ellis, President of the Women's Foreign Policy Group. We promote women's leadership and women's voices on pressing international issues of the day, and on behalf of my board member here with me today, Diana Negroponte, we want to give everyone a really warm welcome, and a special thanks to Fawzia for taking the time to come to Washington to speak to us, especially since she had to come from Boston after the storm and she made it! *[Laughter.]* So, round of applause for that! *[Applause.]*

I also want to thank my dear friend, Ambassador Claudia Fritzsche of Lichtenstein, who is a very good friend of the Women's Foreign Policy Group and also—I'm not sure if he's here yet, but I'm going to thank him—Professor Wolfgang Danspeckgruber, the Founding Director of the Lichtenstein Institute for Self-Determination at Princeton. We want to thank both of them for introducing us to Fawzia and for making this important event possible.

So, today's luncheon is part of our Beyond the Headlines series that covers issues on the top of the news and Afghanistan is always timely, but given the lead-up to the scheduled 2014 withdrawal, the recent meeting of President Karzai and President Obama, and also just today there is a new head of the NATO and US Forces, General Joseph Dunford, who just took over. So, also a warm welcome to our friends and colleagues from the diplomatic community we work very closely with. I just wanted to recognize Deborah Lyons, Deputy Chief of Mission from Canada—a good friend of the organization—and the wife of the Ambassador of Afghanistan, so thank you so much for joining us. And one last thing before I introduce our speaker, I just wanted to mention some of our upcoming events. There's information outside but we have a lot of exciting things coming up. I wanted to mention that on Wednesday night, February 13<sup>th</sup>, we're going to have an event hosted by the Algerian Ambassador. It's going to be very exciting, timely—we hope you can join us. On February 27<sup>th</sup>, we have an Author Series event on Saudi Arabia, and then on March 7<sup>th</sup>, we will be celebrating International Women's Day. We do an annual joint event with the UN Foundation and the UN office here in Washington. So, we hope that all of you will try to join us, for all or any of those events that you could make it to.

It's now my great pleasure to introduce our speaker, Fawzia Koofi. She currently serves as a Member of Parliament, representing Badakhshan Province, and is the Vice President of the National Assembly. She began her political career in 2001 right after the fall of the Taliban, and since then she has been promoting women's rights, the right to education for girls, particularly in her "back to school" campaign. She was the first female second deputy speaker of Parliament in Afghanistan, and when she was

re-elected to parliament in 2010, she announced her intention to run for the presidency of Afghanistan in 2014, which is very, very exciting. So as I mentioned, she is a long term advocate of women's rights and has been defending women's rights, and particularly that has been a main part of her platform in parliament. Some of the initiatives that she has been working on in that context are improvement of women's conditions in Afghan prisons and the establishment of a commission to combat the issue of violence, particularly on sexual violence against children. She advocates for access to good schools and creating opportunities for non-formal education. In 2009, she was selected as a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum. And on top of all that, she is the author of two books, one written in 2011, *Letters to My Daughters*, and the second in 2012, *The Favored Daughter: One Woman's Fight to Lead Afghanistan into the Future*. So we are certainly so lucky to have Fawzia here with us. After she speaks I'll open it up with some questions and then go to the audience and look forward to a really rich discussion on all these issues. So please join me in welcoming Fawzia Koofi. [Applause.]

**Fawzia Koofi:** Thank you very much. That was really a long—and I by no means deserve—that introduction. It's so wonderful to be here in this very prestigious organization, and among many wonderful women and men that I feel it's like a home. I don't have to prepare a speech for such an event because I know we all share the same issues and the same concerns when it comes to women's issues, so it's like feeling home. It's very—you're all very close to my heart because I know in one way or another, you do contribute to improvement of women's lives around the world. And some of you, I know, even have been working in Afghanistan. I was here last time in 2009, but back then when we were speaking about 2014, everybody was all, "2014, we still have a lot of time, we will prepare ourselves." But now that we are in 2013, it's just one year [away]. We have started to stress and worry about it, about many issues, but above all is women—the women of Afghanistan's situation—because we have come a long since 2001 and I can say, as I stated in many places, that it's like a golden opportunity for women of Afghanistan post-Taliban. I know that this history of movement in Afghanistan, women didn't start after Taliban, women had a long history of movement and political struggle, and social struggle. But during Taliban, because of all the operation and the prohibition that women faced, it was a new opportunity after the Taliban faded and the regime collapsed. I have always said that for me, the important thing as a woman was to go to the streets of Kabul and breathe as a human being, without worrying [or being] concerned that someone would come and beat me for not wearing burqa properly or for, you know, a little bit of mistake in my clothes.

So that was how we began and then we came a long way. I mean, right now there are 69 women in the parliament. And it's not easy. There are some provinces where women managed to defeat men and get elected in open competition, although we have reserved seats. There are 25% [female] members of parliament, according to the quota; they are reserved seats. But last—the 2010 parliamentary elections, from some of the conservative communities, women actually managed to defeat men and get elected to the parliament on open competition! And this is just a small example of, you know, how people of Afghanistan, the actual silent majority of Afghan people, are pro-democracy. When I hear talks that, you know, democracy isn't important to Afghanistan and the people of Afghanistan are traditional people, let them deal with traditional life and democracy will not work in Afghanistan and you go in this conservative society, people vote for women! These are all, you know, signs of progress.

For instance, [*Turning to Patricia Ellis.*] as you rightly mentioned, many men in the parliament voted for me to become the deputy speaker of parliament. Or you go in the society, civil society, you see active women who demonstrate in the streets when they see something wrong. And when we were—I have another experience that I will share with you. There was a law which was a very contradictory law and it was the Shi'a Personal Status Law, which was approved by parliament a few years back. And there were some of the articles of this law that were really oppressing women and they were putting more destruction toward women. So we went to the president and to some of those so-called leaders to ask them to amend those articles. First of all, we were told, "Well, you are not Shi'a, so why are you worried? It's for Shi'a women." And secondly, is that, "Well, you're so disconnected from the society—from actual women—the actual women of Afghanistan want this law." And it was a few weeks later—a

few days, actually, later—that the actual women of Afghanistan, those women with burqas from their houses, they actually went to the streets and demonstrated and protested against this law.

So this is like change happening from the society, and I think we hardly talk about those changes that are happening in the society. We talk about buildings being built, so many children going back to school, but we hardly talk about the societal changes that happen in Afghanistan. And the credit for this doesn't go to any leader or any government or any country; it goes to the people of Afghanistan. Right now there are, I think—the Afghanistan society, which is in transformation, it's moving forward. And certainly it's unlike 1996 or 1992 when, you know, people welcomed Taliban, because they didn't know what was going to happen when the Taliban came to power. I don't think that right now men and women, but basically women and the younger generation of Afghanistan, will actually welcome any government that imposes their way of life on women, on how to choose to wear clothes, how to choose to, you know, either put on nail polish or not put on nail polish—those basic rights to freedom. I don't think the people of Afghanistan today, actually, can go back to this period and I think this is something that we hardly talk about. The fact that we have—I gave the example before—women from very conservative provinces that represent their provinces defeating men in the parliament, all in the communities where, you know, girls' education or opening a school meant actually leaving Islam, many years back. When you opened a school, it meant you were not Muslim anymore. But right now they come to me asking [for a] girls school for their girls. And I tell them, "Why do you ask for a school?" And they say, "Well, as long as my daughter becomes like you, it's not a problem." I think that is the societal change we hardly talk about.

Now with all of those changes, all have been in the middle of lots of uncertainty and lack of clarity about the future, which is 2014. I know that the issue of 2014 is not a favorite subject in your country because you want your troops to come back home, and you have your own financial problems, lots of politics, etc., but coming from a country where I have to actually represent the voice of my people. There have been mistakes repeated by your troops and by our troops as well, and during the wars, those mistakes happen. But I think 2014 is too early, and is not realistic for a withdrawal because it is a very important year politically for Afghanistan. We will have elections in 2014, and these elections are very, very important for Afghanistan so we need to have political transition before we have military transition, and that political transition is having elections and we have to start paving the way for those elections now. We have to make sure that there are enough electronic forms that are brought to the laws of Afghanistan to ensure a credible election. We have to make sure that there is enough civic education, especially addressing women in their houses to give them this confidence that they should get out of their houses and vote and to give them the confidence that their vote makes a difference so the men shouldn't vote on their behalf. We have to make sure that there is a political alternative for, you know, for a change in Afghanistan. That political alternative needs to consider women, not as just victims but as equal rights holders, because it's true that women of Afghanistan have not been involved in war and destruction. It's true that women have not been involved in killing the people of their country as agents of change, and therefore, they're not taken seriously. Because those parts of society will be taken seriously. They create a problem and they ask for their rights to violent means—in this case, Taliban, for instance.

I know that, along with transition, there is this issue of talks for the so-called process, which, for me, is basically a project, of talks with Taliban and bringing them to the political atmosphere and making them change into a political party, basically. Well, we—I mean, as living in [the] 21<sup>st</sup> century, I don't think, actually we oppose peace. At present, nobody in the world could oppose peace. It's something we believe in dialogue and discussion. But in the meantime, it's also important that we ensure a few things. First of all, as I said before, women have come a long way. We don't have to go back now, after 11 years, and discuss political participation of women, because my understanding is that those issues are taken for granted. We don't have to discuss them again after 11 years, or we don't have to go and talk with Taliban about whether they should allow me and my daughters to go to school. So these are like—or the Afghan Constitution, which is one of the most democratic constitutions in South Asia. We don't have to go and bargain about those issues now, after 11 years. Our understanding was that these are

established issues. We have to ask for more. But unfortunately, there are some points that we are worried about losing all of these.

So I think when in talks and negotiations, first of all, it's important that women have basic rights, to go to school, to politically participate, you know, to be active in the society. Access to basic rights as a human being should be ensured and that will not happen if we don't have the solidarity and support of forces around the world. Sometimes when I talk to some politicians they tell me, "Well, you know, women of Afghanistan have always been like that, there are problems," etc. and "let them live like that." You cannot have double standards. You cannot say that women in the United States or Europe have all the rights to go to school but women in Afghanistan, this is part of their culture. Those women now also want to—even in the rural villages of Afghanistan the mothers want to send their girls to school because they know what it means to be an educated woman. So we need to have the solidarity and support of women leaders around the world. I know that Secretary Clinton was very supportive of this, and I know that President Obama and many leaders in your government and so many others, you know, leaders [whose] voices don't come to me here, but we know they have solidarity and support with us. But that support should come to practice [and it] means that entering negotiations, these are red lines, we cannot cross them. We cannot go and say, "Okay, [what] percentage of women can now go to politics?" These are issues we have agreed on already, and we cannot cross them. Yeah, peace is important, but justice is also important.

Security is important. One of the mistakes we made, and our international friends made in 2001 when they first came, was [giving] a priority to peace and security—ignoring justice. After 11 years, you see we have a problem with both. We don't have actual security, and we don't have actual justice [either]. So, these two processes should be parallel: peace and security, and [at the same time], justice. Pursuing the peace process, Afghanistan has established the Peace Council. There are 70 members, I guess, and there are 9-10 members who are women. We work with them but, you know, like many places in the world, the government wants to have people who just say yes to them, not people who have a different voice. So, we really need to act according to the Security Council Resolution 1325, the Afghanistan government has signed it. We need to make sure that women are there in the negotiation table, not just as listeners, but as somebody who could meaningfully participate in the discussions, if it be [the] Qatar office or if it be any other process, women should get involved because it will be women who will be the main victims.

If, you know, the worst case scenario happens, then we need to make sure that within our programs and policies, when you talk of women's rights and women's issues, many people will think, "Ok, women means, you know, giving a Ministry of Women's Affairs to a woman and that's it." It's more than that—it's women's security, it's national security. I'm not sure how many Security Councils around the world have women. In Afghanistan we have none. I'm not sure how many women in the United States actually are a part of the Security Councils of other countries. So when we talk of women's security, we will have to ensure that, at the National Security level, women are involved because the matter of security for women is for her family and her children.

Within our forces also, I mean, when we talk of security, we have been pursuing the involvement of women in police, which is good. We have some heroine women who got killed in Kandahar but with all of that, women still want to get involved within our forces. Within our army, we have some pilot women, women who are pilots, we have women who are involved at different levels of security, so we are pursuing that to make sure that there are more, but they don't have protection within their jobs, protection from sexual exploitation, protection to be respected. I think many places in the world have that problem.

On the other hand, we have the elections. So, it's a topic that in Afghanistan right now, as we need food or water three times or four times a day, people talk about elections like that, three or four times [a day] at least in each family, because that's the key, important issue for Afghanistan. I know that, for [the] United States, also it's important to make sure that democracy survives. You didn't go to Afghanistan

basically to protect democracy—it was your own national interests because, I mean, your own national security because the 11<sup>th</sup> of September attack happened. And you went to Afghanistan to, you know, do something about international terrorism, which was a risk for you, and for us. So there was a common interest. And now, the threat might not be at the level that it was initially, but I'm not sure if really we're at the position that there is no threat anymore from international terrorism from those regions of the world, to Afghanistan in particular. So, for security and democracy, for Afghanistan especially, elections are important and in the Presidential elections, you know, we need to make sure women are voters but that women are candidates as well. Because if it happens in our neighboring countries, why not in Afghanistan? And I hope one day that Afghanistan will be [a] country where we witness a woman president before [the] United States. [*Laughter.*] Thank you [*Applause.*]

**Ellis:** Thank you. I'm going to open it up with a few questions that touch on issues that you raised. First of all, let's start with the US and Afghanistan. President Karzai was here recently and you expressed some concern that certain issues were not discussed, particularly in assurances from the United States. What role would the United States play? I'm just wondering if you can talk a little bit about that.

**Koofi:** Okay, I was actually following the press conference by both presidents and I was happy to hear President Obama say, you know, women's rights and the Afghan constitution will be safeguarded, that's clear. But that has to come to action, to practice. Like right now they're opening, I think, they're in the process of opening an office in Qatar for Taliban. We need to know: who are they talking to from the government of Afghanistan, who is responsible, how many women will be part of this, what are the issues of women that will be included in the talks. Those issues of basics. We need to, you know, make sure that these are actually part of that, because my understanding with the Qatar office is an office that will liaise, basically. It's not for Taliban. It's not to reorganize Taliban as a political party yet because they need to announce that they are accepting [the] Afghan Constitution, that they have no links with al-Qaeda anymore, that they are happy to be part of peace and reintegration, and then offices could be given to them. But at this stage I think we need to—you know, the United States, because they are right now kind of one of the leading nations. Although there is lack of coordination; President Karzai was in London and there is a trilateral kind of peace between Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the UK. There is a plan for six months; it's confusing us so much, but I hope United States, as a leading nation on peace, will actually keep in mind the gains of what we have had in the past 11 years, and above all, women who are in office.

**Ellis:** Once there is the withdrawal, your neighbors are going to be playing an important role, and I'm just wondering if you could talk a little bit about the neighborhood and what your concerns are in terms of Pakistan, India. Who are they key players, who should be involved and how?

**Koofi:** I think the neighboring countries of Afghanistan have already started reshaping their policies towards Afghanistan. Because they know, that post-2014, they have all the freedom to influence the politics of Afghanistan. And we know that Afghanistan had been a battlefield between all these neighboring, regional power players: India, Pakistan, Iran, The United States, and China, nowadays. We only wish that they will have a constructive room because history tells us that neighboring countries of Afghanistan have, to a great extent, been part of what's happened in Afghanistan, part of the distractions, unfortunately. I'd really want to see some more clear positions from the United States, again, on its foreign policy towards Pakistan. Our President, and all of us, have been saying that Afghanistan—the villages of Afghanistan—is not where the source of terrorism comes from. So we need to go to where it comes from. I'm not saying that you get involved in another war, but there are other ways of pressurizing those countries that they support. I mean, how much more evidence do you want? Where was Osama bin Laden killed?

**Ellis:** So, what are you doing internally to protect the gains that women have made? I mean, everyone is really concerned about what might happen afterwards, and you talked about how important this is. So, what kinds of steps are being taken?

**Koofi:** In Afghanistan what we do is we unite civil society and women groups to pressurize the government. We also have linkages and meetings and coordination with the women who are in the Peace Council. We try to also meet with world politicians. They all gave us an assurance that women's issues would not be a matter of compromise. But if you look at the very, very recent history of Afghanistan, in '89 when the Russians left Afghanistan and the civil war began, population and civilians in Afghanistan were the main victims, but women above all because, as a result of that, Taliban came and stopped education for girls. So, therefore, I think, we have meetings and solidarity, but because we don't have weapons to fight and create problems, we are hardly being taken seriously.

In the parliament, we do raise every day our voices. Every day we talk about this. Please give us assurance, please do this, please make sure that there are women in security, please make sure that there is a budget—enough money—allocated for women. Economic power, because if a woman is supporter her family, certainly, you cannot put her down. We asked in the Tokyo Conference, which was held to for Afghanistan to attract donor attention in June 2012, we presented a paper and asked them to allocate 30% of all the budget to women: economic empowerment. And then we demonstrated that we are ready to supervise this budget being efficiently and effectively spent. And we asked them to give five ministries to the women, and right now we ask them to give one woman the Supreme Council. This is something we don't have and as a result, there is a lack of women's access to justice. The President promised, we met [with] him I think two months ago, and he said, "Yes, please give me a list of people that I should include: one woman." We sent him the list and, apparently, I heard when I was here that a man is coming to be a member of the Supreme Court, and no woman. So these are like entry points. One woman may not make a difference, but it's just an entry point. Then maybe in the second term we ask for two. So these are like basic, basic things we are asking for.

A deputy at the attorney general office, because the attorney general's office has three deputies, which are all men, and he—[the attorney general]—is also a man. So we asked the deputy of attorney general's office for a woman, and he said, "Okay, this I will do quickly. Because there is no problem." And like two months we haven't—there is a lack of political commitment, so to say. Now the international community—now they want to leave and the government of Afghanistan has other priorities. So, therefore, I think that people like yourselves, I mean, who are involved in policy, they could raise the voices and could mix solidarity with Afghan women on those issues, otherwise people will not listen.

**Ellis:** So lastly, and then we'll open it up. I'm just wondering about your running for the Presidency and what would your priorities be? How would you distinguish yourself from other candidates? And how would you encourage other women to get involved in leadership positions?

**Koofi:** Oh, that's a very difficult question because it's like a campaign strategy. [*Laughter.*]

**Ellis:** Well, whatever you want to say. [*Laughter.*]

**Koofi:** Okay, very quickly, very quickly. Well first of all, I think Afghanistan's image to the world so far has been a country where there's, you know, terrorism, Taliban and war. There is another face to Afghanistan, which is a country of culture and relationships. It is a country of values. It's a country which is located at the very, very important location that connects Central Asia to South Asia. It's also a country which has billions of dollars underground of natural resources. It's an untouched country, basically, and if we really touch it properly, it could be changed to another Switzerland in South Asia. I would like to demonstrate *that* face of Afghanistan that could be a reliable partner to the world, not a country that you only give money—donations—but you invest [in as a] reliable partner to you, and also a reliable country for its citizens.

**Ellis:** Excellent. Okay, so we will open it up and I'm going to take a few questions at once.

**Question:** My name is Susan Rappaport, formerly on the Board of this organization, which is doing so fantastically. I have two questions. One is: what do you think of Abdullah Abdullah, the opposition man to Karzai? And how many women are in the Royal Jirga?

**Question:** I'm Nancy Glaser with USAID, actually working in Afghanistan but I'm on Medivac. So I'm lucky to be here! My question is: with 2014 coming up, we hear a lot about the brain drain, people—Afghans, the best and brightest of Afghans—leaving. How true is that, in your mind, and how many of those would be women? And if a lot of the people leave, especially male, does that open opportunities for women in your country to step up?

**Question:** Marie Kux, from the Nooristan Foundation. What do you think about the peace process regarding women's rights? And I want to thank you. You have given the best lecture about Afghanistan. Thank you.

**Koofi:** Okay. On Dr. Abdullah: he was one of the candidates to run against Karzai and he got a lot of votes. Right now he established a coalition.

You mean Loya Jirga or Wolesi Jirga? [*Inaudible.*] On the number of women in the Parliament. Yeah, that's Wolesi Jirga. Okay, we have 69. We have a quota of 25% but right now we have 69. So the quota—according to the quota we have a right to 68, minimum. But there is no quota for maximum. And therefore, we have 69. And I explained before that there is one province that managed to defeat a man. So, therefore, we have one more woman, which is good. And altogether, I think it's 80-something in both houses, lower house and upper house.

On the brain drain: I think it's a matter of concern, because it's valid for both men and women, especially because the younger, educated generation had so many opportunities to explore the world, they managed to create connections, and now they're using those connections to run away from the situation. It's a matter of concern, but in the meantime—I mean, the good thing right now is this change is not from the government to the community level, but it's all over. So, we have some people who leave, but in the meantime the new generation will come. You have seen them in media, in the universities. Recently we approved a law in the Parliament—I mean our Committee—to have a 30% women quota in higher education. So we are asking for a quota at higher education.

**Ellis:** There was a question about the peace process.

**Koofi:** I think that we discussed the peace process, but meanwhile I just want to repeat that, you know, the gains of 11 years should be our priority to keep them.

**Question:** Because Pakistan is a very difficult player, so you must be quite worried.

**Koofi:** Yeah, I am surprised to see that there is a change in Pakistan policy towards peace and they try to become one of the main players. I hope that's honest. I mean, they do make a difference if they really get honestly involved. But I think it should be [the] government of Afghanistan lead[ing]. And when I say government of Afghanistan, it should be all institutions of government. So not one individual but all institutions of Afghanistan getting involved in this process.

**Question:** Hi, I'm Rosa Djalal, wife of the Indonesian Ambassador and also President of Muslim Womessn Association here. And I'm very interested in what you're saying about you wanting Afghanistan not to be a country to receive donations only but you want to, you know, engage with other countries and investors to invest in your country. And my question is: how would you describe Afghanistan? How can you convince investors to invest in Afghanistan if the perception of the world about your country is an instable country?

**Question:** My name is Jeta Menkulasi. I work for the International Monetary Fund. I work as an economist on Afghanistan so I have a particular interest on it. You did mention that the troop withdrawal

of 2014 is very premature, in your opinion. To my knowledge, you have a total security force of 352,000, including army and police. And it is my understanding that the recent talks about troop withdrawal, what will remain after 2014, might actually be even less than it was previously envisioned of the foreign troops, which means that the 352,000 security forces will be there for quite some time. Which means that—I don't know how much of the percentage of the total employment that is, but it's quite a large number—it's a very militarized society. So I was wondering, in your opinion, how would that affect the political transition and the social transition, if you have such a huge security and armed forces? And also you mentioned that the withdrawal is premature. Do you imply that the Afghan army and police are not well prepared, especially in the provinces?

**Question:** Hi, I'm Sona Gandhi, I work for FINCA International. We're a microfinance institution and we have been proud to work in Afghanistan, and particularly in your own province, since 2003. And my question relates to the role of financial access and economic independence for women. What role do you think that can play in securing women's rights beyond 2014? And how can we ensure that, regardless of who is in power in 2014, that we can work with you so that we can continue to serve the women of Afghanistan?

**Koofi:** Okay. On the investment: I think there are many ways of investment in Afghanistan. The one obvious one is the natural resources, the mines of Afghanistan. I'm not very impressed the way the western companies and factories from the US or Europe are approaching this because they are not interested in investing in mines in Afghanistan, while the Chinese are coming forward. I think, when you look at the image, I think security and development are the two interlinked issues. It's like they feed each other. If we invest more in development and economic growth, we could not get rid of Taliban, but we could marginalize them because many people are not necessarily tailored by Taliban ideology, but they are with Taliban because of the economic problems, or because of lack of employment and jobs. So if we take investment and job creation for people, and then use local resources—I mean, local manpower—as well, we can do our homework to a great extent, in terms of creating jobs in the community with the support of companies. So right now, it's not very attractive for Europe or America. The companies are not interested. We have some Indians, but [it's] basically Chinese who are coming forward. Which is good, I mean, they are playing their role in terms of investing, but I think it has to be—for image purposes, there have to be other actors who should get involved.

On the military: that's true. It's a very militarized society. Before coming here I was at USAID and we talked about it. 60% of our budget right now goes to security. It doesn't help security because you cannot bring security by having more check posts and having more individuals with arms, but you have to look at other elements of security, which are job creation, social services, etc., especially job creation for the families, like wives of those people who fight. So, I think 2014 doesn't have meaning. For me, 2014 is not only just military presence but the commitment the international community has. So if there is less military presence, there will be less appetite for financial and political engagement in Afghanistan. So we look at it from that perspective, basically. So if the troops leave, I'm sure our troops will have that motivation and the morale to fight. And we have seen examples of that. We have seen many examples of our troops fighting even suicide bombers.

Last year in September, there was a suicide bomber who came attacking NATO and [the] US Embassy. I think you remember that. And he wanted to go in the middle of a group of civilians to kill them. So this police officer, who was the father of four children, and his wife is a teacher—he held the suicide bomber and threw him out of the main road, which could have resulted in a lot of civilian casualties, into a small pond. And then he exploded himself, I mean he killed both of them, and then we went to see the family. But he avoided a lot of civilian casualties, so that is the morale and motivation of our forces. It's true that they don't have the required equipment because it's only [been since] 2009 [that] the international community started providing all the necessary support of our armed forces, when the withdrawal started. Before that, there was less support provided. But 2014 is beyond just military presence for me. It's like your commitment, your funds, your political engagement, it's about that. Because troops could



be there or not; it makes a difference morally, but actually it's our forces that should be responsible, eventually.

Financial support for women, I think it's key. We have been talking about it. It's really important. And after millions of dollars spent in Afghanistan, you wouldn't believe that I have to go to PayPal. It's a website, I guess, that collects donations, and raise \$1 to build a school for girls or to do some humanitarian job creation projects for women. Can you believe it? Therefore, we ask 30% of funds to be allocated for women's economic empowerment because during the war, many women lost their husbands, or brothers, or main member of the family. FINCA has been involved in other provinces, but mine, as well, I know. They lost their husbands and brothers, so they need to have jobs to send their children to school because if they have an uneducated boy, that uneducated boy can become a threat for the society, eventually. Or an uneducated girl. Therefore, we need to change those if they have a source of income and therefore, I think small intervention projects—not like big, like we cannot have billions [in] investments in a factory—but we could have small, small businesses. Agriculture is very important, small businesses, handicrafts—and when I talk of handicrafts I don't only mean tailoring and embroidering, it's more than that—that are important for women. But also, you know, their empowerment: we're giving them access to dollars. You know, that's important.

**Question:** Yes, Joanne Young. I wondered if you could comment on if all women in Afghanistan you feel are supportive of what you've been talking about, or are there some that are very traditionalist and are a problem, in terms of progress. And also I was wondering if you could comment on how the population perceives the Chinese and Iranian influence of the country.

**Koofi:** I will start with the last question. We don't have a problem with [the] Iranian nation. We have so many things in common in terms of language, religion, etc. But certainly when [the] Iranian government stops our tankers of fuel in winter, when people are in deep need of fuel, people will get angry. And therefore, people demonstrated in front of the Iranian Embassy with bicycles. If you don't allow the fuel to come and make our cars functional, then we will use the bicycles. That's fine. So I think, you know, they have influence in the parliament, they have influence in the government. Perhaps you heard that they have been giving money to our chief of staff of the president, I mean, to the palace. But I think, you know, in choosing between some of this, I think people have chosen—you know when we signed the strategic partnership with the United States, when the parliament approved it (this was last summer), there was a lot of influence by neighboring countries not to approve it. But people chose to approve it, so I think that's an answer.

**Question:** My name is Genie Nguyen from Voice of Vietnamese Americans. Thank you for your presentation. So you have a very broad view of Afghanistan. But the two main concerns for me as a foreign investor are the corruption and the infrastructure in the government system. And secondly, with the coming elections in 2014, how do you assess the current civic engagement of the people in Afghanistan? Are you able to have confidence in true elections that the voice of the people will be respected?

**Koofi:** On the elections, as I said before, it's everyday talk in every family. We have to make sure that we really have elections because right now, that's the only alternative. We cannot pay for it, I mean, we have to go for it—there is no alternative. But, of course, people are—they have lost confidence to a great extent, because of the fraud and irregularities happen and because, above all, elections might not mean change for people. There might be some individuals will who influence and use all the resources of government, etc. And people on that way blame President Karzai that might he have a candidate and supported and he has all the structure in his hands and might he use it for his candidate. What is important for us is to have an independent election commission. An independent election complaint commission. To make sure that there are actually the voices and there are ways paved for different voices, including the political opposition to come forward and to have a coalition, a trustable coalition. And that's the key. If we promote a coalition that people think could lead Afghanistan, I'm sure people

would go for it. But if we don't, and then it just switches from one brother to [another], it doesn't make a big difference, basically.

On the corruption, I think it's a key question. I mean, it's a matter of concern for all. It's not financial corruption only. We're talking about lack of rule of law in this corruption process; we're talking about wrong appointments. And I think, when it comes to financial corruption, it's not the government of Afghanistan. The international community also needs to be blamed for that. We only spend 20% of the budget through the government of Afghanistan. 80% goes through their own channel.

**Question:** Deborah Lyons, Deputy Head of Mission at the Canadian Embassy. Thank you very much. It was wonderful to hear from you. I mean, obviously all of the people in this room are very committed to what's happening in your country but you make it so much more real by your discussion and your description today. My question is, perhaps, a bit of a hypothetical question, in a sense, but I know we're all wondering about it. Let's assume the election in the spring of 2014 goes well and, as you know, a number of the coalition partners are coming out in 2014. Our country is bringing out the training mission that we have there. We will be continuing, of course, with our diplomatic mission, and with our development, much along what Nancy was referring to. And let's assume that the US *does* follow through on what they're suggesting now will be an accelerated draw down. What do you, as someone who's obviously completely involved in the politics of what's happening in your country and the changes that are taking place, how do you think the post-2014, with the US remaining with a very small troop contingent, what do you see for the future?

**Koofi:** Well it's a very fundamental question. I mean, the thing is, there are two scenarios one could look at. There is this best-case scenario, which the 2014 elections result in a strong, committed government and that government keeps its responsibilities in terms of poverty, education, rule of law, delivering social services—things that belong to a government. We don't need to blame our neighbors or the international community for that. But that is our homework we should do. And there is somehow, kind of, political stability. And when you withdrawal your troops, we hope that things will not go to the extent, to the extreme that women have to stay home again. This is the best case scenario. We are all hoping, and I'm pretty much confident in the level of engagement from the public in the process, and with the level of enthusiasm not to let the situation down—from the people—this is likely to happen.

In the worst-case scenario, Taliban might come back to power. There is a lot of sympathy for them within the Palace and out of [the] Palace, and there is a share of power un-democratically with them. Like, "Ok, you come take this and I take this and we're settled and that's fine." And then, through that, there might be some elements that we'll start fighting militarily again against Taliban. So, war again. But that is the worst-case, and I hope we don't go to that level. That's why we're asking for engagement in Afghanistan. Because if once again we go to that war, then automatically we prepare the ground for another extremism and radicalism and then, eventually, to another al-Qaeda or terrorism in Afghanistan that could be a threat to all of us, to the world.

**Question:** Diana Negroponte with the Brookings Institution, and a member of the Board of this very distinguished, wonderful organization. Thanks, Pat. Madame Speaker, what is the influence of India, within the state structures and then informally, through the villages?

**Koofi:** Well, India has been a reluctantly constructive partner in all of this. They pretty much are involved in education and humanitarian development. And the nation of Afghanistan seems to be so close with the Indian nation. In any Afghan family, you see somebody who speaks Hindi because there are a lot of movies in Hindi and they watch them. [*Laughter.*] But India needs to get involved more in construction, I mean in rebuilding Afghanistan. There is more of an expectation because it's one of the emerging economical powers in the region, and we are paying the price for the battle between different powers in Afghanistan in the region in South Asia. So they need to get involved.

I think right now, the perspective of the Afghan people is quite positive towards India. Yeah, we know that Pakistanis have been very sensitive; you can even count the number of Indian consulates in Afghanistan. They say, "You have a consulate in Jalalabad, Helmand, and I don't know where." Which I think, in many cases, it becomes a matter of internal issue of a country. But people of Afghanistan seem to be—there are five flights a day to Delhi, and I think all of those flights are full. [Laughter.] Many people go for treatment or small businesses to India. So they regrettably have—I mean, I'm speaking on behalf of people.

And to your question, "How many women in Afghanistan will agree?" Well, no leader can have the support of all its citizens, and I don't think I could represent all women of Afghanistan in that sense. And nobody could represent, in your country also, which is the mother of democracy. You have different views and that is nice to have different views. But, I think on core issues, you know, we cannot go back to 1996. I think any woman in Afghanistan, any mother—as a mother I can say any mother would like to see her girls go to school. Perhaps I say it differently, they will say it in a different language, but I mean even in Kandahar, you go and a woman will have a mobile phone. They will want their girls to go to school. But, of course, women have problems. I cannot represent a woman who is every day a victim of any kind of violence and, you know, she is being executed in front of 200-300 people in public, and her last moment in this world was so awful that she even didn't look back to see who was shooting her. I don't, perhaps, represent her. I mean, when I see her and her life, it's like, "Am I breathing in the same world and the same province that she is also breathing? I mean, am I drinking the same water?" And she has her last minute in this world, [and it] was bad. But perhaps my last minute in this world will not be like hers.

It's all over the world. I mean, there is violence, there are women who are victims of violence, there are women who are victims of different women's rights violations but I think there are some who raise their voices. Not everybody can raise their voice.

**Question:** [Inaudible.] I'm wondering what you think will happen with the opium trade after 2014.

**Koofi:** Well, actually one of the challenges of Afghanistan with corruption and security is the opium. You know that Afghanistan is not a demand country for opium, we are a supply. Unfortunately right now there are more addicted people, but we are a supply; opium is being traded to other countries. So we need regional cooperation for that. We need to have strengthened border control for it. And there are other talks also. Some people talk about making it legal for the purpose of drug use, or others. But I think in a country where there's a lot grown, if you make it legal, it becomes a real problem, and there will be more addicted people. Unfortunately, like four or five years back, there were more addicted people than right now, especially women. In the area where I'm from, and Suzy is here [*Motioning towards one of the attendees*], I mean she was in my province. Yeah, she was working on that program. People use it for treatment purposes as well. People use it just to forget pain for a few—I mean, people use opium, or poppy, whatever, they use it just to forget the pain for a few minutes.

**Question:** Hi there I'm Theresa Casale from CHF International and we worked in Afghanistan empowering women economically until just a very short time ago. From the NGO perspective, we have a lot of grassroots capabilities and are working to raise the issues publicly, raise awareness of women's issues in Afghanistan. From your perspective—we have our own ideas about from when we get questions from our grassroots networks, about how the average American woman can help with this problem—from your perspective, though, what can we relay as the message as how the average American woman who wants to get involved with this issue, what can she do?

**Question:** I'm Catie Dahlin. I'm with Management Systems International. I really admire what you've accomplished with leadership in Afghanistan. I probably speak on behalf of a lot of us when I say that. I really admire what you've done. I specialize in civil society support and, as we look ahead to the future and empowering Afghan organizations that are working with women, are there certain organizations that really stand out to you that have a lot of potential if they were to achieve scale with international

support, that seem well-positioned with strong leadership in terms of supporting women's issues in Afghanistan long-term?

**Question:** I'm Lindsey Holaday with the Nooristan Foundation and my question is very similar to the others. We're an NGO; there are thousands of international NGOs in Afghanistan. And I guess the question is: how are they going to be viewed after 2014, generally speaking? Are there going to be certain antagonisms of having Westerners continue to be there? I know there have been security issues surrounding certain aid workers, up 'til now. I wonder if you expect that to continue or what the role of NGOs will be in 2014.

**Koofi:** I think what American women could contribute is, you know, their own personal contribution to empowering women, but also those who have access to power to ensure that there are programs and projects for women. Right now there is a program that is called Women in Transition for Afghanistan. I hope that we will be able to pursue these funds that come to Afghanistan because they were supposed to start it in, I guess, spring, but now I'm being told that is maybe a delay. I'm hoping that with the change of people, like, for instance, policies don't change, policies remain and that is the responsibility of all of us, and particularly, you who have access, I mean, you women who have access to power and to the decision-makers here to make sure that there is money actually being allocated. But also personal contribution, I mean, can you imagine if 200,000 American women donated one dollar? You could build a girls school, easily. But one dollar from one American woman is nothing.

On the empowerment of civil society, I'm creating this atmosphere so that so many civil societies could work, so there is no one kind of leadership because we need to have competitive process so there are many organizations who come forward. Because if you have one, with that one corruption might happen, like they might stick to certain messages and not include other messages and other people around the country. So I think, therefore, we promote so many organizations that are working for women. The civil society organization, they are now security research organizations for women which I am happy—it wasn't before. There are organizations that are working on [Security Council resolution] 1325 for women, you know, so there are organizations that are working for elections, civic education. So I think we need to create a more competitive atmosphere among civil society so that it doesn't become like one identity for Afghan women, you know. One [organization] cannot be [the] identity of Afghan women nowhere in the world. So, it has to be different, competition.

I think NGOs are well-respected in Afghanistan. I mean, yeah, there are corruptions, but no organization is exceptional of corruption. [That is the] general perspective. When you talk of corruption, it's not like, "Okay, NGOs are exceptional and the government is to be blamed or NGOs are to be blamed and the government is exceptional." People's view is like, you know, there might be some wrongdoings anywhere but there is respect for NGOs. You go to the very remote areas and see that the NGOs are working in places that the government doesn't come, but the NGOs have access. Through the National Solidarity Programme, through other programs, you know, small-scale programs, you go to the provinces and I'm sometimes really impressed! Because I go to some very remote areas and I see that there is a locally funded NGO with a water pump, for instance. It's good. And I think when the government doesn't reach everywhere—all of our country—it's the NGOs that could reach. But, of course, they need to be monitored, etc.

On the security, yeah, it's a common issue. You never know where you are a target. We don't know if we are a target in our bedrooms or outside the bedrooms. So, it's like a common problem. But it's like, our politicians were actually targeted in their bedrooms. Our president's brother was targeted at his home, our former president was targeted at his home. Even our chief of spy intelligence was targeted in his dining room. You know, you never know whether you're safe in the field or safe at home. Because it's a terrorist act. We haven't had, really, major incidents of NGO staff being attacked or targeted. In fact, you go to the villages and you feel safer. I sometimes take all my friends, international friends, journalists, or NGO workers to the villages, and we don't need a security bodyguard. We just walk nicely; we cannot walk [like that] in Kabul.

**Ellis:** Okay, we have time for a few more questions so I'm going to go to Claudia and this woman here.

**Question:** Claudia Fritsche, Ambassador of Lichtenstein. I have two questions relating: one, to security. How big or small is the female component in your security forces? Security is such an important issue in your country, and if parts of it have female face, I think that could have a good effect. And secondly, with regard to elections—forgive me, I'm not familiar with the infrastructure—but are we running the risk that in some remote areas not everybody may have access? That's the question I'm asking.

**Question:** Anika Ayrapetyants, Counterpart International. We work with women in Azerbaijan, in Bangladesh, in Tajikistan, places that are close to you geographically, trying to help them to become leaders. We work with young women and older women. And you are such an inspirational leader and an inspirational speaker. You inspired me, and I'm from Uzbekistan. You have to have to juggle your responsibilities as a model for women in your country, as a politician, as a mother, as a wife. So my question to you is: what do you think are the obstacles, internal and external, within the family, within society, for women to become leaders? I know education is important but not every educated woman becomes a leader. So, what are the obstacles for Afghan women, more and more women, to becoming leaders?

**Koofi:** Thank you, Ambassador. You've always been a great supporter of us and the Afghan women. I thank you for that. Yes, security is one of the concerns during elections that might, as a result of insecurity, some people will not be able to vote. Therefore, we are working—the parliament is pursuing our National Security Forces and [the] international community to develop a plan, a comprehensive security plan, so that no community is deprived of their voting rights. But if sometimes you see the consequences of, like, you pay a high price and the incentive is maybe your fingers are being cut or your nose is being cut for voting and then the consequence is like you get fraudulent elections, so people will get disappointed. We are working with our security to have a plan. And then the other plan we have is the electoral law is to create more polling stations so we don't have to walk two-three hours because transportation is difficult. People don't have to walk, especially women, don't have to walk two-three hours but get out of their—like, for instance, like where they live, villages, and then vote in the public places. So, in the new law we're trying to increase the number of polling stations so that more people could access polling stations because I know, in the last elections, there were a lot of fake votes being used on behalf of women. So we're trying to avoid that as well. Women should vote as a woman, as a human being. Their rights shouldn't be ignored.

On the obstacle, you know, it's not easy. You have to take hundreds of steps forward, maybe two hundred back, as a woman. And sometimes it's like you put your forehead against a cemented wall when you work. Honestly, it's that difficult when you are working in the social life as a woman in those countries. Sometimes it becomes too much pressure on me, on other women. I'm just telling my own story but there are other women like me in the parliament, outside the parliament, that we think, "Okay, this should be our last day of politics. Why should I have that much pressure?" Everyday pressure. It's not that you do too much work; it's the pressure of security, like people will target you, it's the pressure of opponents that will get you down to the level [and ask], "Why her scarf is this color and not the other color? Why her clothes? And why does she have more makeup or less...?" All of those, you know, as a woman we are vulnerable. So it's not easy. But, with all of that, there is more interest. You know, on my Facebook page, I have personal messages and sometimes I go and I receive—out of 200 messages, I get—I get maybe 10-15 are from young girls who say, "Well we want to really continue your path." So there is more interest and that is good.

And it's like in Afghanistan, it's unlike Tajikistan, maybe, for instance, in that people are more engaged politically, including women. I go to the villages and people like illiterate woman who are in traditional clothes, they come and they talk about Hillary Clinton, for instance [*Murmurs of surprise.*] And I'm like, "Okay, how do you know her?" [*Laughter.*] They talk about all politics. They listen to the radio or they're

more engaged and that's nice! It's a lively society and it's a very hopeful society. I mean I remember during Taliban when I was looking at the streets of my village (or where I was living) and each five minutes, there was a car going because life was not there, basically. But with that, people were hopeful. Now, the traffic in Kabul is awful. You need two hours to get to one meeting, the other day when I was there (when some of you were there). It's so awful. Can you imagine how much [more] lively people are? I mean, I'm hopeful for the women. The challenges are there in the parliament, a law in itself. It was not easy.

When we first came, and I ran as the vice president and deputy speaker of parliament, I was like, "I ran as a woman vice president, I will never get elected." But I was. But the challenge was: how should I get other women to speak in the parliament because their microphones will get cut when they speak? Because it was not a valid discussion, your point is not logic, the other man's point is very much logic. So we had to—I mean Dr. Diana [Bowen] was working in the parliament, she was with some companies—I think we have some other women here as well—she knows our story. It was so difficult for us to get women to speak! Now I don't think we have to go back to those problems, because we paved the way.

But there are other challenges, like we only have one chairperson of the commission in the parliament committees who is a woman, and that's me. No other woman managed to get [elected as] a committee chairperson because they have to face so much male dominance, so much male dominance. And when they want to put you down it's not like how powerful you are or how much support that you have. I got 20,000 votes and I managed to defeat many men, I mean, many men. I was number ten in the list. So sometimes when they give less importance to me, I tell them, "Excuse me, I have more voters than you have. You cannot put me down." [Laughter.] Because I came all the way here and I come from political background, my family is in politics, I mean, I have a strong—but for women who just come, it is not easy. They have to be careful of their scarf or of their makeup or their dress—everything. Everything. Even for a woman who works in civil services. We had 22% in 2007; it's now reduced to 18%. When you talk to the Civil Reform Commission, who is one of the corrupt ones (and I say this in the parliament publicly and in the media), they say, "Well, there are fewer women coming." But sometimes when posts are announced, women call me and they say, "Ms. Koofi, we would like to run for this post. Can you help us?" And I keep calling different people but they don't get the post because they either have to bribe or find other ways of getting to the post. So it is like, you have to really force. You have to really find your way. It's not that you wait for a miracle to come. You have to really find your way. But it's not easy, I'm telling you. Sometimes when I come here I'm like in a different world. Is this real life or no? [Laughter.]

**Ellis:** Well, we've come to the end of an absolutely wonderful time. And we just want to thank you so much for taking your time, making it here, sharing your insights and letting us really understand what's going on inside Afghanistan. You are a true inspiration and role model and we wish you all the very best and hope to keep in touch. And please let us all know how we can be of assistance, so, all the best.