

NWX-WOODROW WILSON CENTER

**Moderator: Drew Sample
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9:30 am CT**

Coordinator: Excuse me this is the Operator. I want to advise all parties today's conference is being recorded. If anyone has any objections you may disconnect at this time.

Thank you.

Man: All right great thank you. Well with the let's begin.

We have here on the line Michael Kugelman and Ambassador William Milam. The others unfortunately cannot make it to this briefing but Ashish if you want to go ahead and start with your questions we can begin.

Ashish Sen: Thanks so much, excuse me, this is Ashish Sen with Washington Times. I want to ask you what you are predictions for May 11th what outcomes you see.

And also if you do see a (unintelligible) victory as people are anticipating, what implications would that have on the US-Pakistan relationship and especially with the draw down in Afghanistan next year?

((Crosstalk))

William Milam: This is Bill Milam, Ashish. Frankly predicting the outcome of elections is a fairly dangerous in most countries even our own at times.

My guess is that it's about a 50/50 proposition that will end up with a hung parliament and a long period of negotiations as to who runs the government under what coalition.

I would assume that Nawaz Sharif will probably be the leading vote getter but perhaps won't have a majority. But this is all just speculation I wouldn't take it too seriously.

I think that the wildcard is going to be the PTI Imran Khan and we'll see how many votes he can take away from the two major and which major candidate he gets the more votes from and how he does.

And he gets some sympathy votes these days because he fell off a forklift.

Michael Kugelman: Yes this is Michael Kugelman I'll just essentially echo what Bill said. Pakistan is a particularly difficult country to try to predict the list of elections for just because it hasn't had a census in about 15 years.

There's plenty of opinions polling but it's always in contradictory and unreliable. And also particularly significant over the last few years there's been a decentralization trend which has essentially empowered a lot of new local level provincial level political actors and movements which has just brought more actors into the fold and really made the election spectrum just so much more complicated than it's ever been so I would echo Bill.

I imagine that there's going to be a hung parliament I don't see any way any party will get an outright majority. And I imagine that Nawaz Sharif will be the Prime Minister but I would not want to be held to that. Imran Khan is certainly is a wildcard.

The question though is if he can use his personal his personality and charisma and political appeal to help deliver votes I mean Pakistan is a country of patronage and it's not the kind of country where you could win an election just by getting the most votes it doesn't work that way at all it's based on constituencies and patronage.

And so despite all this excitement about him I definitely think he'll be a wildcard but certainly not I don't think he's going to be Prime Minister. But then again it's all speculation.

William Milam: Let me add something to this. This is Bill Milam again.

There is I think one factor that has been a in a part of Pakistani elections for a long time and this is well documented in academic studies. The Pakistanis tend to have a favorite they vote they like and then somebody they vote for who probably isn't their favorite somebody they think can deliver more benefits to them.

The wildcard in this scenario is that there's something like ten million new voters first time voters and not only with the decentralization but with all these new voters very young mostly under 30 I presume all under 30 I presume, and one doesn't know whether they will follow traditional patterns or not so this is really a very interesting and very unpredictable election more so than most (unintelligible).

(Ashish Stan): And what do you see as far as the US-Pakistan relationship is concerned there's some reports that this week that Nawaz Sharif said that he would end Pakistan's role in the US led war on terror, if you may, in Afghanistan.

Do you see a major change in the US-Pakistan relationship they say the change in government in the (unintelligible)?

William Milam: Well this is Bill Milam again, I don't see a major change. I think things have pretty much progressed since the really low point of two years ago to a point where we've got a working transactional relationship and both countries need each other for this. We will need Pakistan's cooperation as we withdraw from Afghanistan the material and the men.

And Pakistan continues to need our help in military assistance as well as economic assistance.

I think there is a general desire on the part of most Pakistani political leaders to distance themselves from the US and but I don't think that this will make the relationship that we have now much more different than it is right now.

Michael Kugelman: This is Michael Kugelman again. I'll just jump in and say that essentially there will be no I don't see any affects on the US-Pakistan relationship regardless of what happens in this election.

Because let's face it when you talk about US-Pakistan relations and Pakistan's relationship with the US, these are issues that ultimately come within the prevue of the military and the military is not going anywhere.

And so certainly I think that a Prime Minister Sharif may push back on Washington a bit more so than the PPP government has on issues like drone strikes and also about issues pertinent to the Afghanistan endgame but ultimately this is the military's house. The military will be making these decisions and that's going to state constant. So I don't that's why I don't see any effect now.

I think an important date to be looking at is actually I don't recall exactly when later this year General Kayani's term will end and I think that will be a very interesting transition that could perhaps have a bit more of a consequence or for the US Pakistan relationship.

William Milam: I agree.

Ashish Sen: Thank you.

((Crosstalk))

William Milam: Is that all?

Michael Kugelman: We're we that good we've already answered all the questions?

Ashish Sen: All right is anyone else on the call?

Michael Kugelman: Doesn't seem I'm not sure.

William Milam: That's a (unintelligible) like it I don't other people could chime in if they want but it's we've had dead silence and...

((Crosstalk))

Michael Kugelman: Right.

William Milam: ...for the last minute or so.

Ashish Sen: So I have you both to myself.

William Milam: I think you...

Michael Kugelman: You do.

William Milam: ...have solitary thing here so make the most of it.

Ashish Sen: So can you talk a little bit about the US role I mean people out there obviously anxious about the watching developments very closely in Pakistan yet at the same time the Administration has made a concerted effort to be seen as not interfering as could be carry avoided Pakistan on a recent trip.

Can you talk a little bit about that the US role them being on the sidelines and watching this and how that's been helpful.

Michael Kugelman: Michael Kugelman, I'll weigh in. I think that the US government has played this just right by really maintaining a very standoff role and there have hardly been any public comments at all.

One of the only official comments that coming out of the State Department over the last few weeks about the election was essentially expressing support for Imran Khan after he fell off that lifter earlier this week.

So I think the US government is doing the right thing. It knows that it is radio active in Pakistan and there's really no reason for it to be, you know, suggesting that it may want certain outcomes or anything like that it's not going to happen it hasn't and John Carey said (unintelligible) he chose not to visit Pakistan a few weeks back because the timing was not going to right.

So I think the US is on the right is doing the right thing in this case.

William Milam: Yes this is Bill. I have nothing to add to that that's exactly the right answer. And don't I think the US is probably going to continue to be not that concerned about the outcome assuming it's not a hung assuming it's not a coalition government that is as paralyzed as the last one was...

Ashish Sen: Are there any...

((Crosstalk))

William Milam: ...hoping for a government that can make some moves towards economic reform and reform of, and, you know, social reform too.

Michael Kugelman: Yes agreed.

Ashish Sen: Has this election been dominated more by domestic issues and domestic concerns rather than foreign policies and conditions like the Afghanistan situation and the war on terror?

Michael Kugelman: Yes I mean, of course, you always have to take campaigning with the grain of salt since in terms of what's mentioned but yes I mean essentially you've been hearing a lot about bread and butter issues. And this is no

different from the 2008 election the last election in Pakistan a lot of talk about the energy crisis, about dealing with poverty, things like that.

There hasn't other than I mean certainly there's been the usual anti-American rhetoric and especially from Imran Khan but there hasn't been much talk about things other than the bread and butter issues.

And I think what's particularly significant and there's really been little talk about how to deal with militancy and I think we all know why so many of these parties are choosing not to go there.

So yes it's ironic in that the issue getting the most attention in the campaign are probably those that is the most little chance of anything being anything coming out of them such as the energy crisis which is a huge thing and can't be solved right away anything like that.

William Milam: And may I add that bread and butter issues are probably what the people are most interested in with the energy crisis, the economic crisis and the, you know, the social crisis in a sense.

Ashish Sen: Well there's a recent (unintelligible) poll which found that a growing number of people a growing number of Pakistan even now concerns that the Taliban has a major threat to Pakistan. In fact, it was they put it up there with India is that not been reflected in the political campaigning in the (unintelligible)?

Michael Kugelman: Well I mean it's unfortunately I mean the thing reflected in the election campaign for sure as you know the Taliban is essentially has launched this extremely violent ongoing relentless campaign against all of the major quote unquote liberal secular parties.

And the fact that it hasn't really come up much to talk about the Taliban doesn't really come up much in the campaign trail is because, you know, the party that has been spared from the Taliban's wrath are essentially benefiting from it and they're scared.

If they were to say well the Taliban needs to stop doing what it's doing that could affect their prospects of the polls conceivably but even more it could affect their lives, their safety.

William Milam: Yes it could be very dangerous for them. So they're going to stay away from that issue.

Michael Kugelman: Right. And, you know, the parties there have been several some of the smaller parties the ANP for example, has been targeted relentlessly by the Taliban but it has launched or it has made a lot of strong statements about people meaning to come vote to defeat militancy, the MQM party based in Karachi has done similar things.

William Milam: Yes it's traditionally a anti-pushed in party...

((Crosstalk))

Michael Kugelman: Right.

William Milam: ...so.

Michael Kugelman: Exactly.

William Milam: There's MQM in the ANP have been the most under fire.

Ashish Sen: And may I ask you just one last question and that is about Afghanistan with the go down and process and if we're looking at 2014, would these elections be a bump in the road or do we anticipate continuity as far as Pakistan's policy towards Afghanistan is concern even that the...

((Crosstalk))

William Milam: What Michael said earlier that this is the military's game so and the military's not running for election but and they have their own national security so that's likely to be more affected if it's affected at all by the change of leadership in the army if there is one.

Michael Kugelman: Yes I have nothing to add I agree with Bill on that one.

Ashish Sen: Thank you so much thanks to both of you then.

((Crosstalk))

William Milam: Thanks for calling.

Michael Kugelman: Thank you.

END