Welcome to the inauguration, no, I'm kidding. This is, as you well know, this is great decisions. It's great to see so many familiar faces back here. This year, as I always say, this is one of my favorite things that the World Affairs Council of Oregon gets to do every year because it is the oldest grassroots global affairs program in the nation. And Oregon was part and parcel of this program and it was started, great decisions started in Portland in 1954, very much in a moment like one we are seeing right now. And it was a way to connect you and I and your neighbors with the issues that are changing who we are and where we're going, and a way to actually accentuate that we are citizens of a world and we cannot shut our doors and windows to that factual reality. Are you hearing me, Washington? Anyway, as some of you probably know, we had to reschedule last week's program because of the unbelievable, devastating snow that we were given. I say that being from the Northeast and the Midwest, so there's a little bit of scoffing involved. We are rescheduling OSU's Amy Billow for March 10th in this room. So we're just tagging it on to the end of the series. Wanted to let you know that we are live streaming the whole series. If you've got one of these and you can't make it here, you can log on to UStream or you can just go to our website at worldoregon.org. And if you go to the Great Decisions page, it's up there running live and you'll probably see me, if you went there right now, standing here talking to you. So it's kind of a, it kind of boggles the mind. And we're doing something new this year, which is we are making this program free for members. If you are not a member, we are charging $5. And that's a way to support things like being able to stream this into high school classrooms and libraries and Bend and things like that all around the state. And make what we do a little bit more Oregonian in terms of our outreach and our deployments. So we've been able to do this for free for years for folks, but there is a new normal out there and I hope you can all join us on that wave. If you need a Great Decisions book, they are $25 for members. They are $30 for the general public. And you can get them over here, you can get them at our office. If for those of you who don't know, we're in the Oregon Historical Society, third floor. We love seeing your smiling faces, so you can always stop there and just get one here in the lab every single week. Other things coming up. Oh, we are doing a wonderful partnership. In addition to. one of the best speakers I've ever heard talk about the EU. He talks about it with the fervor and passion of, like he's talking about his favorite band. He is like, he's a young scholar, he knows what he's doing, and I think he will totally excite you, and he also totally disagrees with the chapter in your Great Decisions book, so it'll be a good way to wrangle with some good critical information. Anyway, that brings me to today's program. We're very, very lucky to have a community partner like Mercy Corps here in our backyard. Meg McMorrin, who's sitting down here, is one of my favorite partners to co-conspire on events and ideas, and anytime we've got a good topic, and I go, hey, is there someone in your office who's working in Kuala Lumpur or Afghanistan, and as it turns out, Najha Haider is our speaker today. Najha has more than 20 years of development experience working in public and nonprofit sectors in Africa and East, South, and Central Asia, the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and the US, including working currently as Mercy Corps' Deputy Regional Director for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Prior to that, she worked in a number of different capacities for Mercy Corps, including Director of Global Field Programming, Director of Leadership Development as a Senior Program Officer, and Acting Country Director for Uzbekistan, and prior to that, she was with UNICEF. She was the National Coordinator for the Ministry of Women's Development, so she's got fantastic on-the-ground experience, and when we talked about, during this, we talked about, do we talk about US policy, do we talk about government relations, and I like to sometimes put a different spin on this and have someone who's got a very, very different perspective on the thematic or the idea that we're talking about in the Great Decisions series, so I think that National Experience is going to give you a very, very different perspective on the various policy and sort of US interests in foreign policy things you'll read in the chapter, so let's give her a big hand. Hi, everyone, it's my pleasure to be here and be part of your Great Decisions series. Thank you for having me on such a memorable day in our history. Seriously, it's my pleasure, I need to stop doing that. I am originally from Pakistan, as some of you pointed out, looking at what I'm wearing, and I first arrived here and got to know the United States of America through Eugene, Oregon, if you wouldn't believe that. That was my landing spot in the USA, and I was joining the University of Oregon, and the year was 1998. It was a wonderful time. At that time, when I used to say to people, I'm from Pakistan, they would look at me blankly. honey, why would you go there right now? And he was trying to convince me to change our plans. I explained, like, no, this is an organization. We're humanitarian. This is the kind of places we go to. So if there's a war, we go and try and help people. They're like, all right, don't worry. We're gonna take care of you. So they said, this person, we're gonna assign him to you. He'll go with you all the way. And just imagine, I mean, usually a sane person

wouldn't ask this question, but it was so crazy. There were talks of U.S. Marshals on flights. You would see fighter jets accompanying planes if they veered off or did something weird. So here I am, a sane person, I swear. Otherwise, Hank, all the way to Pakistan? And then he starts laughing, and I was like, no, all the way to the aircraft. I'm like, all right. So they didn't have any scanners in place. They didn't have their protocols all set up, but they said, okay, just give us everything, like from my passport to my ticket to my hand luggage to my purse. I didn't have anything in my hand. They just did a search, and they were like, all right, give us everything. They hand-searched all of my luggage, my checked-in luggage, my hand luggage, and then this person carried it all the way to the aircraft. I think they were trying to make sure nothing untoward got into my luggage. And I was wondering, who's gonna do this for the rest of the airports that I go through? So I landed in Pakistan as part of that effort, and those were the early days. The bombing had started. This is October 2001. And what was happening to the population inside of Pakistan was that all neighboring countries had sealed their waters, for those of you who might remember that time. And they were displaced from their own communities, but they had nowhere to go. So they were amassed around these border areas, and we were spending inordinate amount of time. We were just sort of brainstorming on how to get food and essential items and water to these people, and all kinds of ideas were being discussed. And I spent a fair bit of time with the Pakistani government trying to just get no-objection certificates and getting trucks of food and water. And a few months in, we had a really good team in place. We were, of course, we already had an operation ongoing, so we were also worried about our teams who were inside of Rana San, trying to maintain some kind of contact with them, figuring out how do we continue with certain things that were non-response. And in our world, response means immediate needs, right? So you're dealing with a catastrophe that people are displaced from their communities, their networks, their markets, all of the systems that help us be leading a normal life. So that's what we were focused on at that time. Once we had a good team in place, I, a couple months later, returned to my job back here in Portland, which was focused, again, on the Balkans, which was the other disaster that everybody was working on at that time. And sometimes, I remember somebody asking me, is that in Texas? And I said, a little further south. So those now look back at them as fond memories of good times. Sadly, Pakistan's been in the news quite a bit and gained recognition, but not for great things recently. Interestingly, that's when I came and then joined Mercy Corps after graduating. And my first experience with Mercy Corps was heading out to Afghanistan for an internship. So I was in the international studies program at the U of O and required to do an internship and, of course, looked at Mercy Corps as an international development organization. And very luckily, landed an internship that was for the programming. At that time, the year was 2000. Mercy Corps was doing in Afghanistan inside, as well as for refugees who were outside in Pakistan. And the operations were being run from the Pakistan base, which is in Quetta, southwest of the country. You'll see it maybe in the map. And this was the time that the Taliban was in power in Afghanistan. So we had access to various locations, especially in Kandahar and Taliban heartland area and Helmand. We continued working there as Mercy Corps throughout those years that the Taliban was there. So that was the first interaction with Mercy Corps. I got to learn about the organization, its amazing culture. It totally hooked me. And also learned about the issues that the refugees were facing in the camps, which were in Balochistan and Pakistan, some of the biggest camps that I've been to anywhere, and also the small farmers inside of Afghanistan, what they were dealing with. This was also the time that the Taliban had put a ban on opium cultivation, if you recall from your article. So things were pretty much in flux in all kinds of different ways. I returned after the spring of 2000, completed my studies, graduated the next year, and luckily landed a job with Mercy Corps. It was focused on the Balkans. So that was my focus. The year was 2001, and September 11 happened. And as the bombing began in Afghanistan right after that, Mercy Corps deployed humanitarian efforts for those populations who were impacted by the war that had just started. And I deployed, once again, to Pakistan, where the operations were based out of to support the humanitarian effort that was underway. And if you recall, this was a crazy time, right? This was when all of the airports were ramping up security in a major, major way. But it was so close to after 9-11 that they didn't have those systems in place. So here I am with my Pakistani passport, arriving at the airport. And the person at the desk looks at me and goes like, hi. honey, why would you go there right now? And he was trying to convince me to change our plans. I explained, like, no, this is an organization. We're humanitarian. This is the kind of places we go to. So if there's a war, we go and try and help people. They're like, all right, don't worry. We're gonna take care of you. 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So even though we were fully covered and I was fully covered and I looked pretty local over there I think people were shocked just because they could sometimes see half my face and I was like, why are? And then I was like, oh, because I'm the only woman in this entire marketplace, so yes, this is still like, because you're like, I'm not, like nothing is showing, but I was like, well, I'm showing as a person underneath all of this, so. But despite all of that, the teachers at the schools, we were gonna be working through schools and principals were just really excited about having extracurricular activities, sports activities, and had a lot going on, interestingly. So they would do a demonstration of whatever was going on in the school at that time, and I remember going to one school and I was trying to find those photographs of girls doing taekwondo, and not something you expect from the north of Afghanistan, which, you know, I mean, and again, different places, different kinds of things, it was just so, it busts those myths that you have about certain places, and you're like, you know, life goes on, it's slightly different, but it's super exciting. And then most recently, in 2014, I was there again, but it was really April of last year, in 2016, that I moved into my current role, which is supporting these two countries as a deputy director for that region. And in the past few months, I've been to Kabul a couple times, and to Kandahar once. And from my vantage point, because I've been kind of going in and coming out at different points almost in history over these last 15, 16 years, it's remarkable how much things start shifting. So in 2004, five, there was, you know, it was right at the beginning of that period of 15 years of war that it has been through. In 2014, it was a whole new hope almost emerging, and there was so much construction going on in Kabul. Like, you couldn't breathe. There was just so much construction going on, and it was something you notice. And most of them around Kabul were huge wedding halls. And it seems to be quite the business to do, to create these huge wedding halls. But when you go to Kandahar, or when I went to Kandahar, that's where you feel where the economy has been hugely impacted by the withdrawal of troops. So that's where you notice massive buildings that. that are vacated and had international forces in there before. Markets that you see, which are ghost markets now and recently had life growing. I think in the photographs, you'll see a photograph that maybe makes no sense. It looks like a Tetris Lego set almost. What that was, was we were traveling outside and it's taken from the back of a moving vehicle, so a little blurry. We were going outside of Kandahar City into the districts to some of our project sites. We were

working with agriculture and farmers over there on crops like saffron and pistachio, and I'll talk about that in a minute. But on the way there, you'll see the terrain. It's just nothing. Like there's nothing. It's arid land, barren land on both sides. Sometimes you pass by like a small building somewhere and you have no idea what that might be. And in the middle of that, there's this thing and you're looking at it and it's like, what is that? And it's containers on containers on containers. And these are containers which, those of you who've traveled internationally or moved from places, we use for moving personal effects, like moving your entire household, or equipment or merchandise, or maybe military equipment, who knows. But there is this, almost what feels like a neighborhood worth of containers just sitting there. And then you start noticing around you in the markets, especially out in the districts, the smaller markets, that what looked like, is it corrugated metal that's used for just that kind of thing? But no, it's not that. It's really sort of containers that they're sitting in as shops. And some very creative ways of using containers. The whole place is inundated with containers, which I think, I mean, you can draw your own conclusions, but I was asking my team, I was like, what is this about? And they're like, oh, who cares? And I was like, this is one of those things where so many foreigners came in for whatever reason. Yeah, that's it. I was trying to take a photograph from the other end to see how far it goes. Like, it just goes. And some of the remnants left behind. I don't know if anyone is, and other places, these get sold off as scrap metal or would be reused, but I think they have been saturated. Like, they've been used for every purpose you could think of, and then these are lying here. Maybe there's a reason I just didn't look into it too much. So those were some of the visits. Before I go into our programming, let me give you a brief overview of Mercy Corps. I assume many of you know what Mercy Corps does really, really well, but for those of you who may not have heard of it, Mercy Corps is an international humanitarian organization. We are non-governmental. We work under international humanitarian principles of humanity, impartiality, independence. We work about, in 40 plus countries around the world. and a team of about 5,000 that is mostly nationals of the countries where we are working. So about 90% of that is from the places that we are operating in. So for instance in Afghanistan we have a team about 200 plus and only six of them are not from Afghanistan. And those of the teams which we call expatriates, not from the country where they're working, mostly come from within the region or from the broader world. We really believe that a better world is possible. We are community-driven, we are market-based, we try and work really really closely with the communities in both identifying the issues that they're facing and identifying the solutions that are needed. We believe that we don't have to try again and again the same thing. So innovation comes from there right and that's at the core of our DNA I want to say. Find new ways of solutions, find new solutions, find new ways of attacking issues, improve little by little working with those who are most relevant to it. We also don't, we strongly believe in this, we don't create a situation where when we leave everything that we've created falls apart. So we connect people, we facilitate linkages with markets, with anything that should be working in that space, whether it's public service that's missing, so whatever the gaps are we try and bridge that by bringing those people together rather than inserting ourselves into that gap. And that's the idea of when we leave things continue to work. In Afghanistan and Pakistan we have been working since 1986 and our work there in 1986 was working with displaced populations inside the country and with refugees in Iran, in Pakistan. We were working quite a bit with smallholder farmers and continue to do that to this day. That is the mainstay of the economy especially in the rural parts of the country and we have stayed quite engaged with that. For those of you who are familiar with Mercy Corps' work would know that when we're working in a place like Afghanistan which is now almost 40 years of cycles of war and insecurity, we often are really engaged in what we call, what I was calling humanitarian response activities, so looking at immediate needs etc. But as we do that in all of those places like Syria right now or neighboring places where Syrian refugees are, we try and build in elements of recovery for the community really quickly. So for them to be able to regroup, recover from whatever shock that they're facing, build up their capacity to bear that shock a little bit better the next time and the next time. So helping on the path to what is, I get a little overused, but to be to be more resilient to oncoming shocks. And I think that's what bears out with our 30 years nearly, well actually over 30 years now, of work in Afghanistan. That all of our programming there has moved away from any type of response to systems level issues. So we are really working with, in this country, so let's draw the picture of Afghanistan a little bit. Nearly 30, 32 million population. About 75% of that is under the age of 25. So imagine that for a second, right? And you saw how expansive that is. So their population basis, and then it's just spread out. 34 provinces, most of them are in some kind of civil war state. So the centers of the provinces are under government control, other than for a period, Kunduz was taken over by the Taliban. But outside the center,

the provincial capitals, it's either the Taliban, or now starting to be ISIS, or some warlord, or some other faction. There's just so many factions that you start mapping them out that are in control. So a country that is still pretty much in turmoil after what, I mean it's pretty well laid out in the article that you read. Unemployment between 35% to 85%. And there's a lot of hidden unemployment that doesn't even get counted. When you go into water resources, there's a photograph that's taken from an airplane, it doesn't make any sense because it's tilted, which shows what they call the Registan, the desert, as it just is complete desert. And I've heard from them that it goes all the way towards the Arabian Peninsula. I mean it's that kind of desert. Desertification is a major issue in Afghanistan. Water resources are scarce, and that's another area that we are working with communities on social water management, especially around irrigation because that ties in with the agricultural team that we have been working with. Only 25% of the households are on the electric grid, are connected to the grid. And even that grid is not reliable. So when people see lights on, on those lights, they say, oh that's working. And I mean that's something to comment on, not to just take. So it gives you a little bit of a sense of what's growing in the country. With this context, we are working on, especially in the south and the northeast, in various provinces, on water management, as I said, on agricultural, all the way from new techniques that hopefully one day could become a viable alternative for poppy, though poppy cultivation has been on the rise this past year. We are specifically focusing on high value crops like pistachios and saffron, for instance, that can compare in terms of price somewhat to poppy potentially. Especially for those people who want to see an alternative that they want to move towards. And we're working in partnership with universities, trying to not just do a project around it, but to really change the syllabus that's being put out by agricultural universities. So illiteracy is high amongst farmers, and previously when new techniques for growing something would come out, they'd be so heavily written, you know, there's just so much theory that an illiterate person is going to think it's a joke. So what we've been working on is producing manuals for cultivating these new crops that are less familiar, especially the varieties that we're introducing in complete, like, graphic form. So keeping the population literacy in mind. We are working, especially with youth, given the huge youth population we have, building their skills with a path to employment. In Helmand and Kandahar, in the last seven to eight years, we've worked with around 30,000 youth, 30% of them women. This is Taliban heartland. Taliban came out of Kandahar and have a huge presence in Helmand. And to be able to work with women on vocational and technical skills was a major achievement. It was actually the community's trust that made it possible. Okay, I'm going to speed it up. I'm so excited about this topic. And so youth skills. And then we are also working on solar energy as an alternative for all those people who are not on the grid. And that hasn't really taken off and we're hoping that it would soon. In Pakistan, too, we've been working since 1986. From 86 to 2001, it was all about Afghan refugees. That was the only thing we focused on. In 2002, we finally started working with Pakistani populations. Pakistan, by contrast, a country of 200 million, nearly the same size as Afghanistan, maybe a little smaller, 200 million. I think the sixth largest population in the world, the 26th biggest economy, and 147th in the Human Development Index. Both Pakistan and Afghanistan are, according to Transparency International and being there, one of the biggest veins of their existence is governance and corruption. They are fairly high on the corruption indices. And I was surprised that that didn't come out more in the article that you read. But that is undercutting a lot of what's going on in both countries, really. So in Pakistan, one of our flagships is public health programming. This immense population of people, which has some really...