CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

FOCUS AND EXIT: AN ALTERNATIVE STRATEGY FOR THE AFGHAN WAR

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TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 3, 2009

Transcript by
Federal News Service
Washington, D.C.

Transcript Not Checked Against Delivery

GEORGE PERKOVICH: Good afternoon. I'm going to bring this to order for a moment. My name's George Perkovich. I'm a vice president of studies here at the Carnegie Endowment. More importantly, I'm not Jessica Mathews, which is my regret, and probably yours. We've had a board meeting the last two days and so she is still tied up in that meeting and regrets that she can't be here to introduce Gilles and General Barno and Ashley and to also, you know, hear the discussion which will follow because this is obviously an absolutely vital issue in U.S. policy and international policy going forward.

And so we're honored to have you here with us for this discussion, and particularly to welcome General Barno to the endowment. As a former commander of coalition forces in Afghanistan, your experience and familiarity with the region leaves you in very high demand and so we're very grateful you could take time out of your schedule to be here and comment on Gilles' piece, but also to have the conversation with everybody who's here today. I had the pleasure of viewing/working on Gilles' piece in its early stages and was immediately taken by its analytical rigor and its kind of relentless pursuit of implications of analysis and, kind of, the lack of happy thinking or wishful thinking, but rather following one's analytical judgment to its conclusions, or where there are not conclusions, to at least, implications.

And so I'm delighted that we've been able to publish the report in this timely manner that we have and that we have the opportunity to have such distinguished and expert commentators to jump into the discussion with Gilles and then turn it all to you. I think you'll – many of you will hear in what Gilles says, but as importantly, do read the paper, you know, views that confound, certainly, the conventional wisdom as it's expressed, often, in this town if not in other capitals today. And I think that's what think tanks do at their best; that's what scholars do at their best, and if you can back it up in the interaction, you've done a public service. And so that's what we're about here today and, again, I welcome all of you. And let me start with Gilles and then we'll go from there.

GILLES DORRONSORO: Okay. Thank you, George. I would like, first, to thank you for giving me this opportunity to share my views about Afghanistan, here. And I see that you have quite a lot of people here, so the situation is probably as difficult as I think. The first – my first point, very quickly, would be about the assessment of the situation right now. Two things here: The first is that I don't think that a military victory is possible, and I know there are some disagreements, there. That's going to be interesting. And the second thing: I don't think that negotiations or possible or doable or a good thing.

No military victory – why? Because it's too late in the war, the insurgency is now extremely strong – a few weeks ago, 600 Taliban fighters crossed the border from Pakistan to Afghanistan to fight against the Pakistani army. It was just an operation. We are not dealing here with very small groups; we are dealing with a real insurgency, able to plan activities – you remember what happened last year in Kandahar, when the Taliban destroyed the local jail. By the way, the state of the jail makes me think that it was, in a way, a good idea to build another one.

You have this level of sophistication that is quite important. And the insurgency is active in more than 50 percent of Afghanistan – doesn't mean that they control the ground in 50 percent of Afghanistan, but they are active. What happened in Badris (ph) the last few months – Badris is north of Herat, it's the western part of Afghanistan – quite interesting. The connection the Taliban have influence is very far north – (inaudible) – also interesting.

Second point: They have a sanctuary in Pakistan. I don't think that in military history it's quite easy to fight and win against an insurgency that has such beautiful, easy access to a sanctuary like Pakistan. Actually, if you are looking at the map, you see that from Kandahar in Afghanistan to Quetta in Pakistan, you have – (inaudible) – the border is quite open. It's very easy for the Taliban to regroup in Pakistan.

The third aspect is that we don't have enough resources. Obviously, when the military situation is going the wrong way, you have always people saying that we need more men, we need to send more money and if we send enough men and money, we're going to win and so on and so on. So you know that; it's been all the time like that. And in this case, I don't think we have enough resources to win; we don't have enough resources to seal the border, of course; we don't have enough resources to fight and win against the Taliban in places like Kandahar, Zabul, Herat, Helmand and so on.

So we have a real problem here. We have 100,000 troops at the end of the year. It's far too less to win the war against the Taliban, clearly, in my point of view. Plus, we have a political problem: More men means that the casualties are going to be up. Probably, there will be around 400 casualties this year, maybe more. It was near 300 last year. And I don't think, in democracies, it can go on like that years and years and years. The case of Iraq is very clear. But the fact that Europeans are now thinking about going out of Afghanistan, even if they are not going to do it right now, Canada will be out in 2011 and the Dutch, also, will be out in a few years.

So we don't have enough resources to wage a full-scale operation and, I mean, go into a point where we can beat the Taliban on the ground. Second point: The negotiations are out of the question because, first, NATO was very clear that negotiation was only for moderate Taliban, and we are still looking for the moderate Taliban. The second thing is that the Taliban do not want to negotiate, because they think they are going to win. So, why to negotiate, except a withdrawal and I don't think it's a good thing to negotiate a withdrawal for this reason. And President Karzai is playing with the idea of negotiation just to be sure to win the elections that are, strangely, planned for August, 2009, means at, really, the high point of the fight in Afghanistan.

Well, no negotiation, no military victory, so we need to change the political dynamic in Afghanistan. And I'm going to try to assess what I understand about the new strategy. First, it's more troops – more troops, more resources, even before having a new strategy – that's the interesting point. Obama wanted to send more troops, but at that time there was no – and I'm not sure there is still very clear what will be the new strategy. Thirty-thousand men, of course, are not going to change the war on the ground in places like Kandahar – I don't think so, at least, but we can disagree on that. At least, it's not going to – we are not going to be able to seal the border, to have huge operation in the countryside – it's certainly out of the question.

It's not very clear what kind of counterinsurgency is going to take place in the south of Afghanistan, where Gates wants to send the bulk of the troops. But I'm very well-read about this idea to send the troops where the Taliban insurgency is the strongest, where the – actually, where the sanctuary is the easiest to access. And I think there, we have, probably, something that is not very well understood – it's about the strength of the Taliban in these places, who are very much part of the population. And I don't think that sending troops there will be very efficient. The other – in addition to that, in these places, state institutions are nonexistent, contrary to Kabul or to the North, where you have some remnants of the state.

In these places, there is no state, so there is nobody you can give the place when it's secure – very concrete there. You can secure places, probably, if you put enough men and money in the South, but what's going to happen after? It's very difficult to know, because if you withdraw, of course – if you exit – the Taliban will be back. And this is the worst place to fight for an Afghan army. It's traditional in Afghanistan, when you want to punish somebody, you send him to Kandahar. It's not a joke, by the way; that's what happened in the '80s – very, it was kind of a novel thing. So I'm not sure that the Afghan army in the state where it is now, and even in 12 years, will be able to secure an area in the South.

The South is the historical place where the Taliban are born, you know, and they have very strong connection with people there, and we should not – certainly not trust polls about the fact that we are welcome in Afghanistan; we are not, especially in the South and East. We are not welcome. And what happens every time, now that civilians are killed in the bombing is that people are going to the street to protest. So there is a very, very interesting and dangerous trend here. So more troops are not going to change, directly, something.

The second aspect is to put pressure on Pakistan – that's the second thing that seems to be clear about Obama's strategy. Putting pressure on Pakistan is extremely complicated. I think it will be counterproductive if it means striking more on Pakistani soil to strike against, for example, Taliban or the insurgency, generally speaking. First, even if something is going to change in the way the Pakistani government and military is dealing with Afghanistan, it's going to take a lot of time. And we don't have a lot of time, actually. So thinking that the key to the situation in Afghanistan is somewhere in Islamabad, I think, is misleading, because we need first to move on Afghanistan, to do something to succeed, and probably, we'll get some men from Pakistan, but I'm not sure at all about that.

So let's not be confused about where are the priorities; the priorities are not in Pakistan because the situation is such that the Pakistani army is not able to take control, again, of these border areas except with a full offensive and, probably, a civil war. And we don't want a civil war in a state that possesses nuclear weapons, of course. The last thing I see about the new strategy is to put pressure on Karzai. And put pressure on Karzai, fight drug – opium – cultivation, and to be, in a way, fighting corruption or cultivation and to be more interventionist in the Afghan politics. I think that could be dangerous.

It depends a lot on the way it's done, but it could be dangerous, why? Because already, the Afghan state has no control over the money sent by the international community. And if we want, for example, to fight corruption, we'll have to put much more control on the Afghan government. And if our objective is, as I think it should be, to empower the Afghan state, it's going to be contradictory. We are going to be inside Afghan politics – we are already, to a certain extent – but much more in the details. It's going to create a nationalist reaction from the Taliban – from the Afghan side. It's going to play the game of the Taliban on their own ground.

And I'm not sure that a policy to fight corruption is not going to have very dire consequences on the way the Afghan state is built or not built. Fighting drugs, for more or less the same reason, is very difficult, especially if you send troops in the South. In the South, if you want a counterinsurgency that succeeds – has success – you have to deal with local people who are not working directly with the Taliban, and most of them are drug dealers, of course. They are connected

to their government, and if you try to eradicate opium in the South, you will have a big, big problem with the people who are actually in Powar (ph), in Kandahar, for example.

So what could be done in this situation, when resources are scarce and where time is running out? I think the move – the first move – is to secure Kabul and around Kabul. That's absolutely crucial. The Taliban are far too close to the capital for us to be comfortable with that. We have to secure Kabul. We have – and 3,000 men is not enough. The reinforcement – 3,000 men from the reinforcement off to go to Kabul, but that's not enough. We have to secure Kabul. We have to build something like a secure area there and to give it, slowly, to the Afghan army. I think that's much more practical than sending troops to Kandahar, where the success is not very likely.

The second thing is to go north, in the sense that – not especially – I mean, we doesn't mean, here, the international coalition; I was thinking more about the Afghan army – going north to retake places like Mazar-e-Sharif, like Sheberghan, who are, actually, not at all Taliban-inclined, but are under control of local leaders. And we should not accept that people like Rashid Dostum, for example, in Mazar-e-Sharif and Sheberghan is taking control of places like that – capturing resources – and that should be absolutely against our policy. But, sadly, we are protecting Rashid Dostum, and I think it's a bad idea.

The last thing I would like to say is that it's important not to make a mistake, because we are in a new phase, there's a new strategy. It will take, probably, one year to assess the new strategy, so next rendezvous, I would say, is summer 2010. Summer 2010 would be almost 10 years in Afghanistan, and I think that's the moment where the European allies or even the public opinion in the United States will ask something about what's going on in Afghanistan very seriously. So I think, first, it's going to be a political problem, and second, I don't see how it's possible to send more reinforcements there. So if we miss this turn, if we have a wrong strategy right now, it's going to be extremely difficult to be back. Thank you very much.

MR. PERKOVICH: Thank you, Gilles. (Applause.) Our first commentator is known to, I imagine, everybody in the room. It's Ashley Tellis, who's a senior associate here at the endowment and who's written and practiced prolifically on all facets of South Asian security, including interacting with NATO and Pakistan and others regarding Afghanistan, so I'd like to get Ashley's reactions. Thank you.

ASHLEY TELLIS: Thank you, George. It's a pleasure to be here with you this afternoon. I want to start by complimenting Gilles for having written a very rich – I believe it's – okay. I want to start off by complimenting Gilles for having written a very rich and a very comprehensive alternative analysis. There is a lot of writing, particularly in Washington, that tends to echo what others have said. And it becomes a conversation that pretty much exists within a certain stream, with variations only on the margin, and Gilles' paper is really a refreshing antidote to that rule, because it's a very detailed analysis of an entirely different strategy from the kind that appears to be dominant in this city.

Having said that, I also need to say that it's an approach that I profoundly disagree with. And it is based on a series of factual assertions that I disagree with. And I think part of the debate that is going to occur about Afghanistan in this city in the months to come will have to first sift through what the facts on the ground are, because if we don't have agreement on what the facts are,

the analytical conclusions that we draw from those purported facts are obviously not going to be sustained.

Gilles starts off with the proposition that our objectives in Afghanistan must be reconciled with the resources that we have and everything to bring to the fight. I think that is a very sensible proposition, as a matter of practical politics, but I think it inverts the problem on its head. The way I think about it is that we've got to start by asking what our objectives in Afghanistan are and whether those objectives are worth fighting for to begin with. If the objectives are not worth fighting for to begin with, then what they are truly becomes peripheral. I would argue that our objectives in Afghanistan ought to be to ensure that Afghanistan never again becomes a base from which attacks can be mounted on the United States and on American interests.

I think this is a defensible objective; I think it is an objective that is inherently self-limiting – it doesn't get us into wild crusades for democracy and other such – and it becomes an objective that, I think, can command the political consensus within the American political system. If we believe that this objective is one of value and that the United States ought to commit itself to pursuing this objective, then the next question we ought to ask ourselves is, what are the resources that are required to sustain this objective? And if these resources are not available, we had better find them. We had better find them if we believe the first proposition – that the objective is valuable in its own right and worth pursuing.

My argument is that replacing the objective of preserving an Afghanistan that cannot be used as a base to attack the United States, with some other objective, like Gilles', which is strengthening the Afghan government against the inevitable American withdrawal, I think ends up reverting the cause and effect sequence that could – that should guide U.S. decision-making. I think it is unclear to me that a withdrawal of U.S. forces from Afghanistan is either imminent or inevitable or desirable. When that decision has to be made, it has to be made relative to the progress we have achieved in attaining the core objective, which is to preserve an Afghanistan that does not become a source of threat to us all.

I think focusing on this core objective of building an Afghanistan that does not become a source of threat is eminently achievable within the resources that the United States can muster, despite all the current economic difficulties that we confront. Let me start off by advancing a proposition that is probably as controversial as some of the propositions that Gilles advanced: The reason why we are in the current situation in Afghanistan to begin with is because we did not adequately resource this war in the first place. Although it was unfashionable to say so during the time of the Bush administration, the fact remains that Afghanistan was a poor sister to the operations in Iraq.

And if we have to win the war in Afghanistan, given all the difficulties that Gilles has highlighted in this paper, then I think we will have to make a decision which involves contributions of magnitudes that are similar to Iraq – not necessarily the same numbers, but certainly something that is a ballpark closer to Iraq than something away from it. This essentially means that if we have to go to Afghanistan in order to win the fight, we have to first make the political decision that this is a fight worth winning. And if we make that political decision, then we have to do all that is necessary as a consequence.

Our preference ought to be do to this with our allies, but if, for whatever reason, our allies cannot make the contributions necessary, then I think the United States has no choice but to reach down into its own resources and fight the fight alone. What is it that we ought to do and why is the fight against the Taliban, in my judgment, still winnable? Let me approach this by trying to explain what I think the Taliban is, at this stage in time. If you decompose the Taliban movement by functional categories, you discover quickly that there are three functional categories in the Taliban movement.

There is the Afghan Shura, which is ensconced in Quetta, the hardcore foot soldiers that support the shura for ideological aims and various ideologically motivated insurgent groups like the Haqqani network and the Hekmatyar network that are allies of the Taliban. This is the first category of the Taliban. The second category are those who are either tribal or village chiefs inside Afghanistan who support Taliban operations in their territories. And there is a third category of Taliban, which is what one might crudely, and somewhat caustically, call the "Rent-a-Taliban." It's the $5-a-day Taliban foot soldiers who are happy to fight the fight not because they care about the ideology of the movement, but because this is the most productive thing to do for them, from a point of view of livelihood and employment.

If we have to devise a strategy to defeat the Taliban, we have to defeat all three components of this movement using different tools. Now, let's remember how we got into this problem in the first place: From 2001 to about 2005, we were actually doing very well in the fight against the Taliban. And we had made great progress in securing Afghanistan as, essentially, a bastion of civility and moderation. In 2005, you began to see a fundamental shift in the calculations of countries on Afghanistan's periphery. And that calculation begins to occur because the United States makes public, for the first time, its decision to transfer responsibility for the war from U.S. – from the United States, essentially, to NATO, which many countries on Pakistan's periphery, especially Pakistan, read as the United States quitting the battlefield.

And from 2005 onwards, you begin to see a surge in Pakistani support for that first group, which is the Taliban Shura and the foot soldiers who, exploiting the sanctuary in Pakistan, have now made life miserable for us in Afghanistan. Because this cancer did not go unchecked, the second category that's essentially the tribal and village chiefs who control, essentially, the traditional social structures in Afghanistan who became particularly vulnerable. These individuals essentially started making strategic choices when they began to see the resurgence of the Taliban movement. And they began to ask themselves a very simple question: Is it in our interests to support the insurgents, who appear to be winning, or is it in our interests to support the government of Afghanistan, which doesn't seem to be doing much for our local interests? This question was only made worse because the government of Afghanistan itself has failed in the fundamental tasks with respect to the delivery of governance, social services, law and order and justice.

And so confronted between this double-whammy of, on one hand, having an insurgent movement that now seems to be in the ascendancy versus a government that seems increasingly remote, increasingly far away, yet not so far away as to stop manipulating local politics, many of the tribal and village chiefs increasingly began to defect, either explicitly or tacitly, towards allowing the insurgents to use the social frameworks in Afghanistan to fight the war against the government. And there is the last group, which is the rent-a-Taliban, which can be reconciled if the circumstances in Afghanistan compel them, with no alternatives but to give up their struggle against the government. And so a strategy that the United States and the coalition has to follow must now be a

strategy that looks at revisiting elements that will deal with all these three elements of the Taliban movement.

I believe this kind of a strategy is within our capacity to build if we understand the nature of the problem correctly and are willing to resource the fight. I believe the discussion towards that end has only just begun. Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. PERKOVICH: And finally, General Barno, who's the director of the Near East South Asia Center for Strategic Studies at the National Defense University. And he, most relevantly and importantly, was deployed in October 2003 to Afghanistan, commanding the coalition forces and the combined forces command in Afghanistan, and so has as much experience there as, I imagine, anyone we can find in this town right now. So we look forward to hearing from General Barno. Thank you, sir.

LIEUTENANT GENERAL (RET.) DAVID BARNO: Surely, that we can find today. So thanks, George. And thanks for the opportunity to talk about this extremely important topic and one that's only growing in its attention and urgency here in Washington, from every day's headlines, from what I can read. This is a great opportunity to comment on a very thoughtful paper. Gilles has done a tremendous job in thoroughly examining the problems in Afghanistan – looking very carefully to diagnose and examine the situation there today and propose some, I think, very striking recommendations, which I'd like to talk to, in turn, briefly. I would also endorse, broadly, everything Ashley had to say here this afternoon, as well.

And I do take issue, certainly, with Gilles' basic premises, which I'll talk to here in a moment. Ashley's very concise, very articulate description of the some of the key issues, I think, are across the board, extraordinarily accurate. And so I would very much endorse his thinking on the things we heard here this afternoon. A note on the Taliban, to begin with, because this conflict – this is a conflict because there's an enemy involved in the conflict, and sometimes, we proceed in the international community and sometimes, even in the military sphere, as though the enemy was irrelevant, nonexistent, unimportant.

And as the U.S. military likes to say, the enemy gets a vote. And so you have a significant, thinking, breathing, adaptive enemy out there, but we also have the enemy who has the virtue of being a known commodity. Not only has the Taliban been around for a significant amount of time – well over a decade – but they've actually governed Afghanistan for a period of time. So as we look at the alternative outcomes here to failure and we look at the prospects for the Taliban having a greater role, maybe a dominant role, in Afghanistan should we fail, I think the results of that are exceptionally clear.

They've been charted out; they're well-known; and they're broadly unacceptable to all of us in the international community and, I think, broadly unacceptable to the Afghans as well. It's important to note that the Taliban existed in Afghanistan before foreign forces existed in Afghanistan. And the reason the Taliban is stronger today and exists today is not because they were invented as a response to foreign forces, but simply that they are now in a position of exploiting lack of governance, lack of capacity, lack of success in Afghanistan over the last three years.

And I very much concur with Ashley's examination of the period of time through 2005 and the change in the dynamics of the fight in late 2005, early 2006, when the U.S. announced we were withdrawing 2500 combat troops and announced we were turning over the effort to NATO. I think that was a psychological turning point in the conflict, and if you look at all the charts that show levels of violence, suicide attacks, roadside bombs, violent incidents, they all spike up into the right beginning in early 2006, in part because of that.

I think the Taliban is very effective using foreign forces, on the other side of the coin, as a recruiting tool, as a cultural weapon to operate inside of the Afghan cultural and psychology and also as an information operations mechanism to be able to leverage the presence of foreign forces and challenges, problems, mistakes, tragedies inflicted by the foreign forces in their campaign for their own series of objectives. But I also would note and dispute these comments about polling – that the vast majority of Afghans, certainly well over 50 percent and typically in the 60 percent-plus range, by a series of different polls, to include ones taken here by the Asia Foundation, support the presence of international and foreign forces in Afghanistan.

That continues today. I think that – I've described that as a bag of capital, that the tolerance of the Afghan population for foreign military forces is a bag of capital that has to be spent very slowly, and that every time we have an air strike that kills civilians, every time we kick down doors in the middle of the night, every time we create some offense to Afghan cultural sensibilities, we spend that bag of capital – that toleration for foreign forces – more and more quickly. And we've been spending that bag of capital at an extraordinarily fearsome rate, here, in the last two years, in part because of civilian casualties and in part because of, simply, the tactics that we've been using.

That's a choice and it's something, I think, that must be addressed. Let me talk briefly about some of Gilles' recommendations, because I think they are the crux of his argument, and whereas his diagnosis, in some cases, I think is quite sound, I think the recommendations have some significant challenges going with them. First, that available resources must shape strategy, not the other way around – I predict, as I think I heard from Ashley as well, that that's going to become the mantra in Washington, here, over the next 12 months – resource-driven strategy. I would submit, though, that if we have a strategy in Afghanistan and we have a strategy for the region, that it's connected in some way to our vital national interests, which one could reasonably argue that the 9/11 attacks touched on in some sense.

The resources behind that strategy have to be commensurate with the level of interest, and if they're vital, that we have the ability to devote some significant national resources to this fight. The typical rate of spending in Afghanistan today for the U.S. in the military sphere is about $2 billion a month. In Iraq, over the last several years, the typical rate of spending has been, typically, around $8 to $10 billion a month. In Washington this week, we're debating a financial stimulus package that will cost in the neighborhood of $850 billion to $1 trillion. And so as we look at the amount of resources that are available simply to the United States to bring to this problem, there's a substantial amount.

There's competition for those resources; we're going to be spending a vast amount of money from the U.S. Treasury for economic purposes, but we have, arguably, vital national interests at stake in this part of the world, and we need to be prepared to invest to ensure that we can succeed in our policy objectives there. Second item: Due to limited resources, our objectives should be clearer and limited, the paper argues. I would absolutely concur with that, but I think those clearer and

limited resources – or clearer and limited objectives, rather – are perhaps a bit broader than Gilles would suggest. I think the first one, clearly, is – along the line of Ashley's comments – that the Taliban and al Qaeda are defeated in the region and denied usable sanctuary and that further attacks on the U.S. and our allies are prevented.

That's the crux of the vital national interest we have at stake in this region. But I think it's followed only shortly behind by a second vital interest, and that's Pakistan. And I think our objective there is to ensure that Pakistan becomes stabilized as a long-term partner to the U.S., friendly to the U.S. and in control of its nuclear weapons. So in addition to the terrorist threat that could fit into that vital interests category, I think we have a nuclear weapons and unstable, potentially failing, state scenario that could be extraordinarily dangerous and impact our vital national interests as well. And I think that fact is now well-recognized here in Washington and we hear senior leaders regularly talk about that.

So at the top end, those are, in my judgment at least, vital national objectives. And I think they are followed by a couple of others that might look like a stable, sustainable Afghan government that's broadly representative of its people and in control of its territory. They would certainly include NATO presence that's recast in a way to ensure that NATO and its effort in Afghanistan are successful. And I think there's a regional set of objectives as well, which is that the regional states are confident of U.S. staying power and commitment in the region, and as partners in the war on violent extremism.

Now, I don't consider those objectives to be maximalist – I don't consider them to be unconstrained – but I consider them to be thoughtful and focused on what our vital interest are and how to achieve those vital interests in the region. A third recommendation is to look at the key idea of lowering the level of violence, and associated with that, the fourth, the only meaningful way to halt the insurgency's momentum is to withdraw troops. I find that to be counterintuitive from my military logic. I think we are in a position where there is the possibility of success, number one, in Afghanistan, which is meeting those policy objectives I just described, but I think an inherent portion of that success is to develop a winning strategy that defeats the Taliban.

That doesn't mean that there's an American solider in every village in Afghanistan and it doesn't mean that there's 500,000 troops in Afghanistan, but it does mean a serious re-look at our strategy and a reorganization of our military structure and the way our forces are being used in partnership with civilian structures to deliver better effects on the ground. Over the inaugural weekend, while all of you were sharing Washington with 1.8 million of your closest friends, I was at Afghanistan at Regional Command South for three days. And so I got to spend time in and around Kandahar at the Canadian PRT and the NATO base there, spent time in Zabul province with the governor and at our provincial reconstruction team there, and spent some more time with the British in Helmand at the headquarters of Three Commando Brigade and their PRT.

So I walked out of that with, I think, a much clearer picture of what the threats are in that part of the country and what's achievable and what our current problems are today. And many of those problems, quite candidly, in my estimation, are induced by our willingness to take on a structure of military organization and a lack of a military strategy to deliver the potential for the forces we have in the fight right now, much less, the new forces that are coming in. So I think that's an extraordinarily important change that needs to be made out there.

The final point I think I'd make is that we have to, as is suggestion in a best-selling book, begin with the end in mind. We have to know where we are going in Afghanistan in order to craft a strategy for Afghanistan, and then to identify the resources required to implement that strategy in Afghanistan. I think all of those tasks are achievable. I think the end in mind is very critical to our directions. I don't think that we can have a strategy where our end and our published end and our visible, overt end is exit.

Sending a message that our ultimate goal is leaving simply empowers the enemy to wait us out. Several months back, I was at a dinner with a group of international officers who had served in Iraq, and one of them was an American brigade commander who had served out in Anbar province. And he said the situation in Anbar with regard to working with the tribes didn't change and we didn't have any leverage at all in trying to approach the tribes until we, the Americans, changed our narrative from, don't worry, we're leaving to a narrative that said, don't worry, we're staying. And when we changed that narrative, all different manner of tribal entities were willing to partner with us to move in some new directions to have confidence in what we were saying with them.

Whereas, when the message was, don't worry, we're leaving, all of them were hedging their bets against the next, you know, strongest tribe that was coming into town and it wasn't gong to be the Americans. So I think that's a message that carries into our enterprise in Afghanistan as well, and I think we have the opportunity to achieve our objectives and our ends there, but we have to reorganize the way in which we're doing it. And we have more than adequate resources to do this if we're organized properly with an effective strategy, and I think that's two of our major shortcomings today. Thank you.

(Applause.)

MR. PERKOVICH: What I want to do now is open it to discussion and then I want to leave enough time before 2:00 for Gilles to comment on – no, I want to open, take some questions from the floor and bring the audience in, but at the end, I want to make sure there's enough time for you to comment on whatever you wish. And because there are a number of people here, I want to take two at a time. And we'll begin right here – there are two hands right up in the middle.

Q: Thank you. My name is Satifar Harshimi (ph) from Voice of America, Afghanistan service. I had a question from Gilles – thank you for your presentation. And you didn't focus much on the development – civilian development – in Afghanistan, so can you elaborate, what do you really want to do – what do you want to say about that? And do you think it is a priority to do some development in the Afghan institutions and make it functionable, because it's not, like, as Ashley said, it's not providing the basic services for the Afghan people? And you said that you think that the international forces should get – transfer the control of territories to Afghan soldiers and Afghan security forces; are they ready at this time? And you said we don't have much time?

MR. PERKOVICH: The – whoever – yeah, thanks.

Q: Afzal Khan, private consultant. I just want to throw light on Afghanistan, from the perspective of what you people on the podium said. The Soviets couldn't do it with 150,000 and about another 150 Afghan troops who were very well-trained under Dostum and others; now, the problem is, we went into Afghanistan to get bin Laden. In seven years, we couldn't. And the connection is being made that if we are not there, they will attack America. The nine hijackers

trained in Hambourg and the airfields of Florida, where they learned flying – I don't think they learned flying in Afghanistan – and none of them were bearded, like the Taliban.

So people keep on saying the next attack will come from there. I find it hard to believe – a bearded Taliban flying a plane or doing a nuclear attack. So my point is, when you say that the U.S. has to be there, okay, there's no oil in Afghanistan, the troops are too few and the insurgency has grown. From terrorism focus, it has become a Pashtun resurrection. There are 40 million Pashtuns, Pakistan and Afghanistan combined. Now, let me tell you, my hometown Peshawar – I was there in 2001.

Ten thousand madrasahs children went to fight Americans in Afghanistan. Not only madrasah students; there are students from army schools, government schools, English-speaking person – even people within my extended family that wanted to do the jihad in Afghanistan. So the Pashtuns are doing it as their jihad like they did against the Soviets. So it's a big problem that cannot be solved with, what, 60,000 U.S. troops.

MR PERKOVICH: Thank you. Thank you.

MR. DORRONSOROS: I'm going to, maybe, to answer the first question about the civil development. Yeah, I did not address, directly, this question, actually. Two points: First, we have to reorganize, totally, the way we are giving money. That is to say, we have to go back to what was tried in 2002-2003 to put, for example, NGOs under the control of the Afghan government very seriously. Foreign help should go through the Afghan government. And, yes, it's going to be more corrupted, but I think it's absolutely essential to give the command to the Afghan institutions, even if they are weak and corrupted.

And the second point is that we have to be extremely careful about where we are spending our money here. I mean, Afghan money, our money – it's not very clear. As you know, a large part of the money is going south, geographically speaking, and maybe not only geographically. Why? Because we think that it was a very mechanical way to – I mean, no strategy planning, of course, it was a total mess from the beginning, and that's why I do not agree at all that everything was all right between 2001 and – it is actually the contrary, you know. The war was lost, basically, between 2001 and 2005, but we'll come back later on that.

But we have to invest where we have military control and not where we do not have military control. That is to say, we have to define strategic areas where we can build schools, where we can have judges, where we can work roads or whatever, and the Taliban are not coming back at night to destroy what we are doing in the day. So we have to simplify, we have to focus, and it's there that we can maybe rebuild something of an Afghan state. It's certainly not by throwing money the way we are doing, with plenty of different actors – NGOs, European Union, USAID, whatever – I mean, it's a total mess. Kabul became a total mess the last few years. And we have to stop that. The Afghan government is the weakest actor in Kabul right now.

The second thing is – you want me to comment on the second? Yeah, very briefly, I agree with what you said: Afghanistan was a trap and we failed to understand that. What we are doing now is not fighting al Qaeda, you know. You're not fighting al Qaeda bombing Helmand – that's not true. Al Qaeda is using the Taliban to fight us. And of course, we've done the wrong thing. We are exactly doing that. We are losing men. Al Qaeda is in Pakistan. Nine-eleven (9/11) was

certainly not planned in Jalalabad, but it was planned, probably, partly in Pakistan and much more in Germany. And that's why I disagree, you know. It's not because you stopped fighting or you're fighting less the Taliban, that you don't fight al Qaeda. On the contrary, you know, we will be in a much better position to fight al Qaeda if we don't have to fight the Afghans.

MR. BARNO: Very briefly, I fundamentally disagree with the premise that it's just too hard to succeed in Afghanistan and that there's no military solution. It seems like I heard that exact quote about two-and-a-half years ago here, regularly in Washington, about Iraq. In my judgment – and I'm extremely familiar with Afghanistan and very familiar with the Iraq situation over the last three years – Iraq was a much tougher military problem two years ago, three years ago, than Afghanistan is today. And so we are – we've almost succeeded in inducing ourselves into a panic state of, we simply can't succeed, no one's ever succeeded in Afghanistan, it's too hard and it's not worth the resources.

I think in that outlook, we have to be very specific, very thoughtful about what we're willing to accept as an outcome here – and if we are willing to accept the Taliban as an outcome as the Afghan dominant political force and the Afghan government.

I doubt that many of us would accede to that result and I think we have to – if that's the case, therefore think through carefully what are our options to prevent that from occurring. And they aren't unlimited and they aren't resource-unconstrained, but they're not impossible and they don't simply involve slightly changing the players on the chessboard in order to do that.

So that's the fundamental question here, is what do we want this to look like five years from now and what are we willing to accept? And, again, unless we're willing to accept the Taliban being in power, we have to be able to take on, I think, a fairly reasonably resourced approach to prevent that from happening. And I'm not sure I've heard that yet.

MR. PERKOVICH: Yes, right here, Federica and then –

Q: Thank you for a terrific panel, as usual. I have two questions. Now, the first question was to the commentators.

MR. PERKOVICH: Federica, tell everybody else –

Q: Sorry. I'm Federica Binam (sp) from the Brookings Institution. I forgot. Now, the first question goes to a commentator. If – I mean, you say that 2005, it's a turning point because that was a time in which the American administration handed over to NATO the Afghan – the fight in Afghanistan. But is there a causal – I mean, can you show me a causal relationship between – for that – or is just the fact that the Taliban got reorganized by that time and re-attacked? So that would be my first question.

Second question, I mean, if you are so convinced that the U.S. will be much better alone, without the NATO forces, be my guest. Sorry to say that, but the NATO countries are facing a crisis just like the U.S. And the public opinion is against sending more troops. They don't see the point of doing that. They are demonstrating against – in my own country, in Italy, people are against, demonstrating in Vicenza in the U.S. Air Force base. I mean, if this is not going to be helpful, we'd better concentrate our efforts somewhere else.

And to Gilles, the question is, Italy is holding the G-9 presidency now this year. And at the level of foreign-affairs ministers, they intend to stress the issue of Afghanistan and try to help in finding solutions. What your suggestion would be to the G-8 presidency specifically to do to help out in Afghanistan? Was it clear?

MR. DORERENSORO: No, I'm sorry.

Q: I was saying that Italy is holding the G-8 presidency this year. And among the intentions of the foreign minister is to help, try and help in Afghanistan. So there will be in the ministerial meeting in June, the foreign-minister meeting for the G-8, the question of Afghanistan will be at the center of the debate.

So what would be your advice to the G-8 foreign ministers and to the Italian presidency? And that's it.

MR. PERKOVICH: Somebody was right near Federica. Come forward. I think this gentleman here –

Q: Yes, thank you very much. Hussein (sp) from the Turkish Embassy. Just one question, short questions, to Mr. Gilles Dorrensoro: Mr. Dorrensoro, you mentioned that in Kandahar and in Helmand Taliban is very strong and we have little success so adding up new troops there would mean little to gain success. On the other hand, you pointed out that instead of that we have to concentrate on the North and on Sheberghan and Mazar-e-Sharif and especially you mentioned – generally those two.

So isn't it controversial – I mean, wouldn't it be, I mean, on hand just acknowledging that we are failing against Taliban; on the other hand, trying to open new fronts against more peaceable parts of the country, creating new fronts there. Isn't it controversial just – would you elaborate a bit on that? Thank you.

MR. DORRENSORO: Yeah, the second question first. I know the links of – (inaudible) – with Turkey. I mean, it's complicated and very long story. Since the '90s, actually, Rashid Dustum (ph) is going regularly now in Turkey and he has a strong connection there. So I understand your question, but still I think it's not very healthy to have somebody who's been accused of war crimes – very seriously accused, I mean, there is real basis for that – was behavior we have seen in Kabul the last few years that is not exactly – (inaudible) – with the status of a general, I understand it.

And who is undermining the authority of the central government to be in four different places, like Sheberghan in Mazar-i Sharif. I think it's a huge problem. I don't suggest that we send the U.S. or European forces there to just clean up the place, but I suggest that at least we should be careful about not reinforcing people Dustum and even to put under control at least part of the – (inaudible) – military infrastructure in the North. That's a very important thing. If we want to rebuild an Afghan state, we have to be sure that nobody is able to have private armies in Afghanistan – that's a central point.

The second question was about what should we do in regard – I mean, your advice, I don't know – but what's my analysis about the presidential election or what should we do there. It's a

very complicated issue; I'm very surprised that the election is supposed to take place in August when it's going to be extremely difficult to vote in the South of Afghanistan – I mean, likely. So I don't understand exactly the move – I'm not sure that's going to be – that the election is going to take place, actually.

What is sure is that according to the Afghan constitution Karzai's mandate is over in May or June – May, I think – May. So after that it's not really clear what the legal authority of Karzai – it's not clear at all. I think that what could happen is that there will be some kind of so-called traditional loya jirga – there is nothing traditional, but I mean it's the usual translation. A loya jirga in Kabul or in Jalalabad and from there, there will be some kind of legal transition to Karzai but I'm not sure that actually a new election will take place.

And if the military situation is too bad, I think it will be very unwise to have election because first, the legitimacy of Karzai will not be reinforced and second, we could have a real security, human problem, you know, people could be killed and it's going to be really a mess. So what could be suggested is a loya jirga and the postponing of the election to November, when hopefully the level of the fight will be a little bit less. That was my – I was not supposed to answer but NATO town in 2005? No? That was for the commentators, I think. Yeah.

MR. PERKOVICH: (Inaudible) – take a couple, two more and then – (inaudible) – three and then – the gentleman right behind you, yeah.

Q: Thank you. Scott Worden from the U.S. Institute of Peace. I wanted to ask a question to clarify a little bit the goals discussion that's happened with the panel. In particular, I mean, I think that – on the panel but also in the press – there's been a shift from ensuring a robust Afghan democracy to preventing al Qaeda from returning. And I'm not sure that we have that clear a choice and I wanted to get some comments on what is the connection between having a stable government in Afghanistan and institutions that can run themselves with preventing al Qaeda or whoever else from coming back to camps after we leave.

I really don't think that we can just simply fight the Taliban and go but we really need to leave something in place and I wanted to get more details on that.

MR. PERKOVICH: One in the way back. Yes.

Q: Hi, yeah, I'm Radia Ishkurdian (ph). Thank you, George. Gilles, in your paper you've talked about the Pakistani army not being trained for counterinsurgency. That's simply not true. The Pakistan army has been waging counterinsurgency in Baluchistan, in urban Karachi, in occupied northern territories of Kashmir since 1973 onwards. None of these sometimes-intense counterinsurgency operations have led to a civil war, so why should a counterinsurgency in the FATA region lead to a civil war? Thank you.

MR. PERKOVICH: One more up here in the front. (Inaudible.)

Q: Marvin Weinbaum, Middle East Insitute. Ashley, you've said that we've got to specify where our vital interests are and you note it is the danger to the West and it's al Qaeda. At the same time, people are linking that with lowering our expectations. Isn't there a danger here, which we've already seen, that our mission there is going to be seen as exclusively a military mission? And

doesn't that carry the danger; one, that the Afghans will say, you see, it's once again the United States pursuing its own interests.

And at the same time, can you really secure the country against this restoration of the Taliban and al Qaeda without also creating the conditions where the Afghan people are prepared to have us there and don't view us as occupiers, so that the comprehensive strategy becomes absolutely essential?

Let me start with Ashley and General Barno and then work my way to Gilles, who can answer questions and then give a summation, you know, response to.

MR. TELLIS: Let me take the question that Federica asked. I never said that coalition support is unessential; I think it's very important. The point I made was, if coalition support is unavailable for whatever reason, whether it be domestic politics in our European allies or something else, then the United States must be prepared to go it alone and that's a very different proposition from telling the Europeans to take a hike. We want them there because this is a joint fight.

This question that was asked about the relationship between a stable Afghan state and what the relationship with al Qaeda is – I share the view completely that you cannot make the distinction between simply a fight against al Qaeda. You have to commit to building what I think of as a minimally effective state and a minimally effective state in my view would be able to do three things. One is it should be able to maintain control of events occurring within its own borders.

Two, it must have some mechanisms of responsive government; that is, issues of legitimacy get addressed. And three, it must be able to serve as a vehicle that brings economic development to the people that need it. And so, to my mind, this whole business about recalibrating aims and expectations actually confronts us with fraudulent choices because in order to win the war against al Qaeda we have to create this minimally effective state and if we have to create this minimally effective state then you better make certain that we're successful in all these three dimensions that I flagged.

I would say the same to Marvin. For reasons of time we ended up focusing on the military dimensions because of the direction that the discussion took, but I would be the first to argue that what we need in Afghanistan today is essentially an integrated strategy of which counterterrorism or counterinsurgency in the classic kinetic sense is only one component that has to be embedded in a much larger framework. And that much larger framework must look very carefully at issues of governance, particularly what the Karzai regime has or has not done.

It has to look at issues of responsiveness because Karzai has attempted to essentially appoint regional satraps who are beholden to himself but really have no legitimacy and no standing in the populations that they govern. And in many of the areas – in RC South in particular – the Taliban have basically supported groups that have been disenfranchised as a result of Karzai's choices. And so there are issues of governance that have to be addressed; there are issues of reconstruction.

We've poured an enormous amount of money but you know it's a chaotic mess because everyone is operating at cross-purposes. How do we, in a sense, bring centralized direction to this process? And in addition to all this you have to do kinetic counterinsurgency but to that – to my mind – if you do these other complimentary dimensions – if you get those right – then in a sense

kinetic counterinsurgency just provides that critical minimum that you need but it doesn't become the thrust of the effort.

GEN. BARNO: And just to touch a bit on Marvin's point as well, classic counterinsurgency theorists will describe a successful counterinsurgency as only 20 percent military and 80 percent all the other elements of power. I think virtually all military commanders who are operating in this arena now believe in that and adhere to that and it's location by location, but it's substantially non-military in its application. In Afghanistan I think the objective of a holistic, integrated counterinsurgency strategy is not to kill the Taliban, it's to make the Taliban irrelevant; it is to create a set of conditions where no one has any interest in what the Taliban has to offer.

And I think broadly that basically would have to entail securing the population, but securing it in order to grow governance and economic capability there. At the same time, buying time to grow larger Afghan and more effective Afghan security forces so that somewhere three years down the road you have a crossover point where the Afghan forces can move into the lead and international forces can move into a more supporting role.

But you're doing that for a purpose and the purpose is to create time and space to grow governance and to grow economic stability so that three years from now, four years from now, five years from now the Taliban have no attraction whatsoever to a population that has much better options. That's basically how I would see the broad approach to counterinsurgency in Afghanistan.

MR. PERKOVICH: I'm going to turn to Gilles but that's how I read Gilles' paper – with exactly that logic but focusing on strategic centers but for precisely that – and focusing our effort there, growing Afghan forces to be able to stabilize and control those areas, creating time and space for governance and economic development in those areas to then create attraction and example to make others outside those areas see a shift in the balance of power. So I'd be curious – how big a difference –

MR. DORRONSORO: Well actually, we do not disagree with you on that, except that I'm very – being French maybe – I tend to think with limited resources. And I mean, how many men do you have in Afghanistan? When people talk about securing population, what does it mean concretely? You have to go in every villages to secure the population? It's out of question. Let's be clear: Nobody has the means to do that. Plus the fact that people don't like foreigners in Kandahar area. I mean I'm sorry, but it's kind of sociological fact here and that's the only place in Afghanistan where people– (inaudible) – on I; that's the only place.

And while saying that, we agree we have to build some security where we can build some kind of state institution. And that should be where it's possible and where it's possible it's certainly not – the best choice is certainly not Kandahar – it's around Kabul of course because there we have a local middle-class – we don't be exactly – (inaudible) – but we have people who have some kind of feeling of being from urban places and not from rural areas. We have people who don't like the Taliban because Taliban did not leave a very good memories from the '90s and so on and so on.

So I mean, let's be clear here: Talking about counterinsurgency means we have to keep security. And by the way, it's not what's happening right now. What's the – (in French) – the U.S. and countries done right now? Take the example of the province of Wardak: The U.S. – it's the U.S. there – the U.S. troops are moving all around the valley to the top of the valley – it's a beautiful

valley, by the way, so I think it's worth it – and then they go back. So if they are okay there is no fight; there are not okay there is some kind of fight. So they stay one night in the villages and they are back.

And what? Of course next day the Taliban are back. That's exactly the counterinsurgency of the Soviets in the beginning of the '80s: It does not work. I mean, that's the basic thing. After that we can discuss about goals, about what's the national interest, but basically on the ground, I mean, you have to see things that are working and not working and that kind of thing doesn't work. If you want to secure you have to be there all the time – means you cannot secure all Afghanistan; you have to choose.

It's not the valley of – (inaudible) – or the valley of Wardak you have to secure, it's the only city – I mean, city – little town in Wardak called Meydan Shahr. You have to be in Meydan Shahr – but you really control of Meydan Shahr. That's it – that's because we don't have resources enough to bring security to all the population. Let's be real about Afghanistan; let's start with what we can do.

And probably – I have also question to – okay, the frontier corps and the Pakistani army – the counterinsurgency and that was a question. I mean, I would say – I'm going to use a very mean argument, but if the U.S. wants to train the Pakistani army in counterinsurgency and if the Pakistani generals are accepting that, maybe we could infer from that that maybe it's not exactly what it should be. Well, second point: frontier corps have been used in counterinsurgency and as you know very well, it doesn't work.

It doesn't work; 2004 was a terrible, terrible disaster for the Pakistanis army. The Pakistani army lost probably thousand mans – much more than what is usually said. It was a total mess; it doesn't work. You have to understand that the tribal areas – especially in the FATA – what's called the FATA – in this places people are extremely well-armed, even in the '90s when it was possible to go there. It was a lot of fun to go there because people were friendly, basically. People were extremely well-armed. If you want to go there you have to go with a lot of troops, you have to use tanks, you have to use air strikes, you have to use all that; I mean, it's a war.

I mean, going to tribal area is a war; it's not some kind of light counterinsurgency. You have to understand that and I don't even think about Baluchistan, where it – you remember what happened in Baluchistan in the '70s? Who wants to go back to that? But now the role of the state versus democracy-state and the objectives in the West: That was the last question – I mean the first question. I think that we have to stop fighting the Taliban because Taliban are not a product of exportation. We have to stop fighting Taliban because it's the wrong adversary.

We don't need to fight Taliban; we need to fight al Qaeda. And where al Qaeda is very good is to link itself with the Taliban and we have to delink – the delinkage is the basic thing of the strategy there. If we continue to fight the Taliban we are losing of time. What's the use – tell me – what's the use to fight the Pashtun tribes in Badghis? Badghis is a few hundred or few thousand kilometers from the border – from even Pakistan. What's the use of that? What's the use in fighting in Wardak where people certainly don't have connection with al Qaeda? What's the use of that?

We are losing of time there. Al Qaeda is in Pakistan mostly. We need an Afghan state to first, to resist the Taliban oppression and probably in the long-run make them irrelevant – I'm not sure but we can try – or make a deal with them. The day where we will not fight the Taliban will be – we'll have much more resources to fight al Qaeda. And by the way, when we are fighting al Qaeda it's with the Pakistani state, it's with drones, it's air strike, it's whatever – but it's not going from Afghanistan, actually.

That's a very clever, I mean, a very interesting thing to see when you look. When we are striking al Qaeda in an efficient way it's not because we are fighting in Kandahar, it's because we are striking directly where they are. And that must be clear in you mind, I mean, you have to disconnect the Taliban problem from al Qaeda because all the strategy of al Qaeda was to connect the two and sadly we made the wrong choices.

MR. PERKOVICH: All right, well let me ask you to give our speakers all a round of applause and thank – (applause) – all of you.

(END)