CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

WHAT'S REALLY HAPPENING IN AFGHANISTAN: A REPORT FROM THE FRONT

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GEORGE PERKOVICH: Welcome, my name's George Perkovich. I'm a vice president for studies here at the Carnegie Endowment, and it's my pleasure to welcome you this morning. I think more people will be coming in as we get going in the early stages, but I wouldn't want to penalize the people who made it on time, so we're going to start now.

It's really a pleasure for me to introduce Gilles Dorronsoro and Karen DeYoung. We have here – Gilles is a visiting scholar here at the Carnegie Endowment. He's worked on and done research in Afghanistan for many years. He has written both in French and in English; his English book-length treatment is "Revolution Unending: Afghanistan, 1979 to the Present". It's available from Columbia University Press. I've read it; it's quite an interesting history that takes you back into many of the – (audio break) – today.

Gilles is just back from Afghanistan, a special research trip this year. He was not an election monitor; he was actually out learning what's going on related to the war and the dynamic with the Taliban. So we're very, very happy to have his very current perspective from what's happening on the ground in Afghanistan.

And we thought it would be useful to have a format where Karen DeYoung from the Washington Post interviews Gilles and draws out, from the perspective of what's happening on the ground in Washington, Gilles' sense of what's happening in Afghanistan so that we can have a dialogue between two people who really have a sense of what's happening on the ground on both ends of the war, at least from a standpoint of U.S. foreign policy.

Karen needs no introduction to readers of The Washington Post. She's one of the leading figures at the Post. She also is the author of a biography – "Soldier: The Life of Colin Powell" – much of which she wrote while she was here visiting at the Carnegie Endowment.

And as I mentioned, when you read the Post and you read the stories of the administration's review of Afghan policy, Karen's been writing those, and so has a real good sense of what the deliberations are in Washington. So Karen's going to interview Gilles and then we're going to turn it open to a wider discussion before we close at 10:30. So again, welcome, thank you.

KAREN DEYOUNG: Good morning. This is my disclaimer: I don't have a watch, so I'm putting this here. It's turned off; I'm not doing that BlackBerry thing.

I think this is a really good time to be talking about what's happening in Afghanistan, obviously because a lot's happening, but it's also a moment of kind of suspended animation. We're waiting for certain things to happen; we're waiting to find out exactly what's in Gen. McChrystal's assessment; we're awaiting the likelihood of a request for more U.S. resources; we're waiting for Congress to weigh in on the issue and to start asking, hopefully, more pertinent questions than they have in the past.

The administration itself has promised some new metrics which are due to Congress before the end of this month; the outcome of the Afghan election is in doubt; the Europeans now have called for a meeting to kind of assess where everything is in Afghanistan, looking at where the United States is taking them and where they do or do not want to go.

So I think we want to talk about the future and what's likely to happen, but first I'd like to talk about the recent past and specifically about Gilles' recent reporting trip there, and most specifically, to start with, about Helmand.

We've had a major offensive there this summer with 15 to 20,000 coalition troops, about 10,000 Marines, and I wonder if you could start by just talking us through what the objectives were, what the strategy has been for achieving them and how successful it's been.

GILLES DORRONSORO: Thanks. Actually, there were two big stories in Afghanistan this summer. One was the election – we'll talk later about it. The second one – that was not really covered – was Helmand offensive. You remember that the new strategy is shape, clear, hold, build. It's the new strategy of the U.S. Army. And the first place where they wanted to try this new strategy was Helmand. Helmand is – you see where it is on the map –

MS. DEYOUNG: It's just – I think you can, but it's stuck here. There you go, take it through there. There you go.

MR. DORRONSORO: So Helmand is around here, and the mic is not working, yeah? Okay. And it's in the South – this is just west of Kandahar – and it's a place where the Taliban are extremely strong since a few years now. And the idea was to clear the central valley of Helmand, where you have also a lot of opium production.

So what happened is that the Marines were supposed to clear the south of the province and the British troops were supposed to clear the northern part up to Musa Qala and to Sangin, places where a previous offensive from the British troops failed in 2006, 2007 and 2008.

And what happened is that the Taliban refused to fight the Marines in the South because the terrain is absolutely not good; it's too flat. And, very cleverly, they went north and they stopped, basically, the British. So it has been two months extremely difficult for the coalition, a lot of casualties, and more importantly, the places were not clear. The "clear" phase of the strategy never worked.

Why? Because a significant number of the local population is supporting the Taliban. Taliban are local fighters in Helmand. Some are coming from Pakistan, and most of them are locals. So people are just supporting the people they know.

The second thing is that there is no local police, no state, in Helmand, and so when the coalition troops control a village, they don't know what to do about it. How do you control a Pashtun village when you don't speak the language; when you don't have a local police to tell you, okay, this guy is potentially dangerous, this guy is okay? So, actually, they don't know what to do when they are in control of some places.

And the last thing is that the Taliban have been very clever. They are back inside the supposedly cleared area. They are putting explosive IEDs; they are organizing ambushes, and, so, slowly they are destroying what would have been the control of the area.

So this failure is very important. Why? Because it's the end of the clear, hold, build strategy. The McChrystal strategy just died in Helmand. So the consequence, immediately, is that there is no

U.S. strategy in Afghanistan right now. So asking for more resources – we'll speak about that later – doesn't make sense since we don't have a real strategy that is working.

Now, what to do about it? If you go out of Helmand – if you say, okay, Helmand was a mistake, we have to have a different strategy in Helmand – it means the Taliban will be back in the area where we are now. If we stay there, we are going to put 20,000 men, probably the best-trained men we have in the coalition, in a place that is not very important, not very strategically important and, for years and years and years, with high level of casualties. So we are in this kind of dilemma in Helmand right now. That's why I think it was even more important story than the election, per se.

MS. DEYOUNG: Doesn't Helmand have a kind of psychological importance, though? It's a place where there have been kind of sporadic victories followed by long periods of retreat. And it was also the place where once the – you know, we can argue whether the coalition troops have actually cleared a place of Taliban – but when they're sitting there, the idea was that they were supposed to bring in a lot of resources, a lot of civilians, a lot of money.

They say they're doing that, they say that their crop-substitution program is working; that they're starting to build stuff; that they're forging relationships with local officials; that they're trying to get more Afghan security forces there. Is any of that happening?

MR. DORRONSORO: Well, different things, yeah. First, you cannot have a real program of development, reconstruction, whatever, if you don't have a local administration. There is no local administration, actually. The previous governor in Helmand was a drug dealer, was supported by Karzai, and the British got rid of him a few years ago.

But now you have a governor in Helmand that has no local support. There is no police that is independent from local drug dealers. So if you want to have a kind of security; if you want to have irrigation program, whatever, you need minimum control of the ground, and you need some kind of local administration. We don't have those things, so it's not going to work.

And the idea that Helmand is a kind of special place, yes. Why? Because in 2006, the British decided to clear Helmand because the Taliban were very aggressive. They were in the North and they failed – the British failed in 2006.

And since 2006, Helmand is becoming the kind of, I would say, the kind of equivalent of the Panjshir in the '80s for the North, you know. It is the place where major, major power – British and the U.S. – is launching offensive every year and it's not working and the Taliban are still there. And local population all clearly have this perception that the Taliban won against the coalition this summer.

So it's becoming a kind of a mythical place for the people. The fighters in Helmand are very good because we have trained them, in a way, because – launching offensive every year. I mean, if the guys survive, that means they are very good. And they are very, very good fighters right now. And they are hunting the coalition's troop; it's not the reverse. I mean, it's not the Marines hunting the Taliban; it's the Taliban hunting the coalition's troop. And I think psychologically, they have won. It's very clear to me.

MS. DEYOUNG: Will it not make any difference if these development resources and civilians are brought in and they can actually –assuming they can do it; that the security allows them to do it – they can actually start launching some projects and really get these kinds of supposed hearts-and-minds operations under way, or are you saying it's just impossible to do it?

MR. DORRONSORO: I think it's just impossible. You know, Lashkar Gah is the provincial capital of Helmand. Inside Lashkar Gah there is no security. So if you want to send the engineers, for example, or, I don't know, NGO people, whatever, they have no choice but to be really inside the military bases. So I don't think it's going to be very easy to find people doing that. It's very dangerous and you don't have access. It's a rural area; there are no cities really in Helmand.

So how do you have access to villages, how do you work with people in the villages, how do you connect with them? There is a high level of suspicion against foreigners in Helmand, and especially the British, actually, for historical reasons. And I don't know how do you connect with these people? There's the fact that we are destroying the opium crops right now and people are not very happy about that. So even people who are not really Taliban, they feel that the coalition actually is providing insecurity; not the Taliban way, but another way.

MS. DEYOUNG: On the poppy crops, the Americans say they're not destroying them anymore; they've instituted, with the assistance of Gov. Mangal there, this crop-substitution program, which has not been highly successful in other countries where it's been undertaken.

They say that the governor is going around from village to village and holding shurahs; that they're distributing wheat seeds; that they've got 30,000 farmers converted to growing wheat. Should we believe that this is happening or not happening?

MR. DORRONSORO: No, I mean, it was happening, something is happening, but not because of the U.S. policies there; because there is overproduction of opium in Afghanistan since the last two, 3 years. So the production is really too much.

So you will have less production next year even if you are not doing anything. But probably the production is going to start again in two or 3 years. But right now, the price of opium is down, seriously down. So people can be convinced to shift to wheat because it's – economically speaking – it makes sense.

But the idea that the governor of Helmand is able to have shurah in villages – I don't buy it just because for security reasons, it's extremely difficult to move, you know. Look how many people have been killed in Helmand since – it's the highest – the highest casualties for the coalition are in Helmand. It's been like that – I mean, since 2001 it's more than 200 people killed there.

And it's worse, it's all the time worse, you know. Plus the fact that the North of the province is totally out of control and the South is also out of control near the Pakistani border. And the coalition just hold a few outposts, they don't control the ground, the villages, the people.

MS. DEYOUNG: What are the consequences of failing there? This has been our primary objective throughout the summer.

MR. DORRONSORO: I mean, depending what is the next step of the policy, if we think that we can fix Helmand, we are going to send more troops – means there is going to be more target for the insurgency and it's going to be a real disaster.

Another operation like Helmand, I think – and I am careful about what I am saying – I think the war is lost. We cannot afford another Helmand operation. That's too costly, that's – psychologically it's a disaster and we are going nowhere. So if we try to fix Helmand, it's going to be the turning point of the war, in a way.

If we are clever enough to say, okay, we've made a mistake in Helmand so we have to withdraw to places we can really hold – Gereshk, Lashkar Gah; really, the central part of the province – we can send troops somewhere else and we can do useful things. And so we probably have to evacuate the northern part, and the Musa Qala – something that is absolutely useless basically. If we are doing that, it's just going to be a bad operation, and in two, 3 years, probably, it's going to be forgotten. But if we try to fix it, it's a disaster.

MS. DEYOUNG: I wonder, though, what the political consequences are, in Britain, for example, where abandoning Musa Qala, where they've lost a lot of people – how will they be able to sustain popular support, political support, if they've set this objective? And however they want to massage the announcement of it, or drag it out – to essentially declare it a failure – how can they sustain operations there?

MR. DORRONSORO: It's going to be extremely difficult, but if they stay, they will have more casualties and no result in 2 years. So the same question – we will come back in two years. So there is no easy answer.

I can understand that the British population is kind of shocked in that, okay, we have to go out of Musa Qala because there is nothing to do in Musa Qala. And it's useless, basically. I understand that point. But if you stay there, it's going to be worse. We are going to lose every month, every week even, one, two, three, even more, soldiers. So it's going to be worse.

The point is that after a certain level of casualties, I think the British – the Canadian have already decided to go out of Afghanistan – but the British probably will say, we don't want even to fight in Afghanistan. If we have alternative strategy where the level of casualty is relatively low, the British can stay in Afghanistan. So better to have a lower level of casualties and a longer presence for the British than to say, okay, we don't want to evacuate Helmand; we don't want to withdraw from Musa Qala and Sangin in Helmand; and in 2 years, it's going to be a political breakdown in Britain. And they will want to go totally out of Afghanistan. So better to have this kind of long-term view than shock them.

MS. DEYOUNG: Well, if they're not succeeding in Helmand, where should the bulk of the troops be? I think there are many in the U.S. military who actually agree with you; who think that this was a mistake. And I think that part of McChrystal's proposals will be for a kind of redeployment, reconfiguration, not only of the command structure but also of where the troops are. What suggestions would you give them, where should they be?

MR. DORRONSORO: I am not going to stand up – (chuckles) – but just have a look at the map here. All that is green around the South and is this part – it's where the Taliban are really in

control of the countryside. And we don't have the resources to take it back from the Taliban because it's all Pashtun area; because the border is full open for the Taliban; because the Pakistani government is not doing anything against the Afghan Taliban.

In these places, there is just one strategy that is viable long term – it's to stay in the city, to secure the city and try to secure the major roads. Actually, you cannot go from Kabul to Ghazni by road. I mean you can go, but it's risky. It's risky, and for foreigners, it's suicidal. Even this major road is not under control.

So, if we stay in the cities, we can secure the cities, we can probably get some local support because people in the cities are more open to what we are, to a certain kind of modernity. And we should stay out of the countryside because we cannot work there. People are clearly against us in this area, so it's better to be extremely careful. Just to secure the cities in the South and East is going to be a lot of work. It's not easy, but it's doable.

In the North, it's another question. In the North, we can do counterinsurgency. The problem is that we don't have the kind of troops to do counterinsurgency in the North. Especially in Kunduz – you see this map has been made in April – you see Kunduz, this little green spot there? You have to devote more than double that green spot. The Taliban are in control, actually, of three or four districts in Kunduz, and a little bit south. So, that's where we should put some kind of military pressure. It's a counterinsurgency; it's a real fight.

But we have German troops. German troops are mostly useless in the North because they are using most of their energy to protect themselves. So basically, you have 4,000 German troops in the North. A better job could be done by 500 Marines. So, here we have a political problem, it's both military and political. Is it possible to say to the German, okay, thank you, but we don't need you anymore in Afghanistan? (Laughter.) What's the cost for NATO? But if we don't do that, we are losing the war. So it's another kind of cost for NATO.

But basically, maintaining German troops in Kunduz and in Mazari Sharif is to be certain that counterinsurgency is not going to be efficient and the Taliban will continue to grow and to destabilize all the northern part.

So I would say, the strategy in the North must be counterinsurgency, but we don't have the kind of troops to do it, so it means we need a political crisis in NATO. And in the South, we have the kind of troop to do counterinsurgency but it's not working because it's already lost. The heart and mind battle is totally lost in the South. So we have to be much more defensive in the South. So there are, according, to the North and South you have two different strategy actually.

MS. DEYOUNG: What does it mean, both for the strategy and for Afghanistan, if we, as you proposed, get out of the South? Just let it be as –

MR. DORRONSORO: – the countryside, not the cities.

MS. DEYOUNG: – as the Pakistanis keep saying, "Greater Pashtunistan," which they don't like, obviously. What does that mean for future strategy?

MR. DORRONSORO: Well, there are two things. I don't suggest we totally go out of the South. I suggest that in the South we just keep control of the cities and we secure the cities. Because right now you are going to Kandahar, you cannot go to the old bazaar of Kandahar because the security is so bad that people don't want to go, actually.

So Taliban are totally infiltrated in most of the cities in the East and South, so we have a major problem here. We have to address this problem. I don't suggest that we go out, totally, of the South. But for the countryside, the Taliban are already in control. It's nothing new, you know. You cannot go out of Gardez; you cannot go out of Khost, because it's Taliban run.

So what I am saying is trying to get back this area from the Taliban is losing our time and resources. For the general picture, we have a major problem. It's not with the Taliban; it's with al-Qaida and this kind of network. They are not interested in staying in the countryside in Afghanistan. They are much more comfortable in Pakistan.

So giving – or leaving – the countryside to the Taliban, much more precisely, is not going to be a major strategic threat for the United States; first, because it's already the case and second, because when you are planning something in the United States, you're not planning it from the countryside near Kandahar or near Khost. You need a city. You need a place where you can connect with people. You need to be in Islamabad. 9/11 was planned in Germany, not in Afghanistan, actually.

So to answer your question, to leave the Taliban in control of the countryside in the Pashtun areas is not a major strategic fight because we can still strike people we're interested in very selectively. But to have a full war in the Pashtun countryside, we are going to lose – we've lost already. We are going to lose more resources and it's going to break us politically and psychologically in a few years.

MS. DEYOUNG: Wasn't that one of the criticisms, among many criticisms, of the Soviets in Afghanistan; that they really never made an effort to control the countryside? That they stuck to the cities, and that that was a losing strategy for them?

MR. DORRONSORO: First, it's not true because they tried very hard from '82 to '85. You have huge, you have major offensive of the Soviets in Panjshir, in Wardak, in all the East – Nuristan – you have major offensives. You have in Herat, in Kandahar. I mean, we forgot how violent it has been in Afghanistan. But no, no, no, the Soviets, they tried very, very hard to get control of the countryside. But they failed. They failed and they thought about it, and after 2005/6, you have a new strategy: securing the cities and basically not fighting that much with the Mujahideen. And it worked – it worked.

If you take the situation in all the northern cities, but even in Kandahar, even in Heart, what's very clear is after '87, '88 and much more after the Soviet withdrawal, the Mujahideen were not able to enter the city.

In '92, Kabul was absolutely intact. Jalalabad was perfectly intact. So this strategy is working, you know? What didn't work in the Soviet case is that they stopped financing Najibullah after '91; after the coup in Moscow.

So that was the end of the Soviet Union and they didn't want to bother about Afghanistan anymore. But we are not in this kind of situation. Anyway, whatever, except in case of Taliban victory we're going to finance the Afghan state for decades. So let's face it. Let's not – you know?

MS. DEYOUNG: I know you're written in the past about the Taliban and about their evolving strategy and I wonder if you can talk a little bit about what you've found on this trip. What have we learned about them during this year's fighting season? Have they actually improved? Have they changed their tactics? Who's in charge? How organized are they?

MR. DORRONSORO: The first thing I've learned is that – I was in Kunduz in April and I was again in Kunduz in August – and I was extremely surprised because in my last report I wrote that Kunduz was unstable and that we had to be very careful about Kunduz and that in a few months it could be bad. But, well, I wrote that and I thought that maybe it's not that bad. (Chuckles.)

Actually, I was overoptimistic. The Taliban are extremely strong in Kunduz now. In April, it was fighting groups of 10, 15 men and now it's 50, 80, one hundred sometimes. So it's a fully organized insurgency. It's extremely dangerous. It's cutting the road from Tajikistan to Afghanistan. It's a major strategic place. They are mostly in Kunduz and Baghlan provinces but they are destabilizing all the area. So it's a major problem. So that's the first thing I learned.

The second thing is that – I knew that already – but it's nationally-organized movement. The Taliban are not this kind of loosely organized group, you know, doing whatever they want at the local level. The day of the election you have 400 attacks against the government or the U.S. – of the coalition's troops, you know – 400 for the whole country. It's probably one of the most violent days since 2001. So the Taliban did not negotiate with the government on the local level to allow election, you know? It's a national strategy.

Mullah Omar is much more in control than a few years ago. It's more centralized; it's efficient; they have a good propaganda network; it's working well. And the offensive in Helmand is a major problem for that. Why? Because Helmand is directly under the control of Mullah Omar.

So what they see as a success in Helmand is very good for Mullah Omar. It's reinforcing the leadership of the Taliban. And because of so, we have killed all the local leaders in Helmand. So now we know that they are operating directly from Quetta, in Pakistan, where the leadership of the Taliban is settled. And that's directly reinforcing the top leaders of the Taliban and not local leaders.

And the third thing, probably, I have learned from this summer is that they are better tactically. In 2008, they were very courageous and a little stupid in Helmand because they tried to resist frontally to the Marines. And they were attacking, actually. It's very courageous, and very stupid. They were killed by, probably, hundreds.

Right now, they are not doing that. They are using mostly IEDs, with ambushes after. They have a very good sense – always a very good sense – of the terrain, of course, because they are farmers, they are living there. And they are extremely aggressive, extremely aggressive; very courageous and extremely aggressive.

So they are becoming better because we are training them, we are fighting them; so they learn or they die. So some die, but the others learn. And they will be probably much better next year than this year.

MS. DEYOUNG: Well a major part of the U.S. strategy, at least as the secretary of defense has described it, is founded on a belief that a large percentage of the Taliban are people who are just in it for the money, are press-ganged; sort of vaguely don't like foreigners because foreigners have not shown any advantages to supporting them. Are you saying this is not true? That this is, kind of, wishful thinking?

MR. DORRONSORO: Yeah, yeah. Wishful thinking. Not true. Dead wrong. (Laughter.) I don't have a lot of vocabulary in English but, I mean, I think you got the idea. I don't understand.

I mean, I wrote in a paper for the Carnegie when I was back in April: Take the Taliban seriously; stop thinking that they are this kind of losers. It's not because they have a strange outfit and they are looking a little bit middle-aged. These guys are really, really good. They are good fighters; they know why they are fighting.

And it's not because you're giving $10 to a guy who is going to commit suicide attack or is going to – I mean, I wouldn't fight the Marines for $10 a day. I mean, come on, no, no, they are local, they know why they are fighting and they are dangerous. Plus, the fact that in Afghanistan, the way to get prestige – prestige means also, marriages, weddings, whatever and money, long term – is to fight – in the Pashtun areas especially. So people are fighting. There are a lot of young people – unemployed or employed – but they are fighting.

You know in Kunar, on the border, what's happening? That's why the U.S. outposts were evacuated in Kunar – a lot were evacuated. It's because the local people don't want foreigners in their valley. That's it, you know?

So you have this very well-known thing – that young people in the village living not very far from the U.S. base are going to the mountain, fighting and firing on the U.S. posts, and they are back for the night. Or doing that in night and back for the day.

So it's kind of game almost and you cannot win this kind of situation – so that the heart and mind thing is just one thing. If you want to be friends with these people, you go out of their valley. They don't want foreigners in their valley and there is something very deep about Afghanistan, when people don't want armed foreigners in their place. That's a basic thing. They don't want it. They don't accept it and they fight.

And don't forget that the self-perception of the Afghan is that they have always won against the British, against the Soviet and against us now. You know, they have this idea that they are going to win anyway. So the morale is very good for them.

MS. DEYOUNG: But I think we also hear – and we certainly hear it from political leaders believe that the Afghan people also want their daughters to go to school; want to make a decent living; want to have a competent government; and that to the extent that we can either produce that or credibly promise it, that that works to our advantage.

Is it that their dislike of armed foreigners in their valley is greater than their dislike of local people who want to take those things away from them or are we deluding ourselves about how much they want that?

MR. DORRONSORO: It depends where, which ethnic group, if the people are from the city or the countryside. So we have allies in Afghanistan, potentially. Our allies are people in the cities, non-Pashtun ethnic groups like the Hazara. You can travel alone in the Hazarajat, in the center part. I think it's written. You can travel there.

It's strategically marginal because it's high mountains; not a lot of population there. But it's quiet. You can invest there. It's no problem, you know. You can have irrigation projects. You can build schools. You can do whatever you want in these places and in Mazari Sharif also. That's two places that are extremely quiet. So you can work there. And people are relatively friendly. The thing is that it's better not to go with Humvees and arms and whatever. It's better to stay as civilians.

If you are speaking about places like the city of Jalalabad, the city of Kabul, the city of, even, Kandahar to a certain extent, there we have people want modernization. They want school. They want to send even their girls to school, you know. You have all that. It's not a solid majority of the population but it's the people who can support us in Afghanistan. That's why we need to secure the city.

Because what's happening now is that the Taliban are inside the cities in the Pashtun areas. So, if somebody is overtly supporting the coalition, he's going to be killed or he's going to be obliged to move. We have to stop that. We have to really secure these places because that's where we have some kind of social support.

So, it's very different. If you are in the Kunar valley, nobody is supporting you. If you are in Kabul, yes, there is a local bourgeoisie. You can play with this.

And I think the major thing to do right now is to map Afghanistan according to places where we have support. And we should invest money where we have support. Not in Helmand. It's the highest development aid per capita is in Helmand. It's useless. It doesn't work, you know? But we don't invest money in Mazari Sharif or in Hazarajat, where people are ready to accept the money and to do something with it.

MS. DEYOUNG: The ultimate exit strategy of course, is developing the Afghan security forces, and the plan now – the plan already is to double it – but I think soon the plan is going to be to quadruple it.

How is that going to work? Is it possible to take untrained people, train them, develop their loyalty to a government and put them in a place where they're actually going to feel invested in defending that place and have the resources to do it?

MR. DORRONSORO: Two remarks: If you want the Afghan army to secure the countryside, it's not going to work because it's hard work. It's difficult to do, a lot of causalities, and people are not trained to do that. So if you want to send the Afghan army to secure the places that are not really secure in Helmand, it's going to fail.

The second thing is, we have – about this election – a trend of privatization of the security in Afghanistan; private contractors plus local militia. Dostum or Ismail Khan in Herat, or that, you know. You have this trend. So it's weakening the central state – if there is a central state – and weakening the national army. That's two bad trends in Afghanistan right now.

The thing that is possible is to use the Afghan national army on the defensive role. If the guys have to secure the city of Khost, there will be an outpost just near the city. They will fight because if they don't fight they are going to be killed. But they will fight protected – by walls, by whatever. They will not go in the villages where it's extremely dangerous and they don't have support, they don't know the ground, they don't know a thing.

So if they are protecting the cities, protecting very specific places, yes, Afghan national army can do decent work. But that's one part of the question; the other part is about the police. We tend to use the police as a kind of army in Afghanistan, so we are losing the contact with people.

What I've seen in Kunduz is that more and more, the police is a kind of local army, you know, because there is no army in plenty of places in the north. So they are fighting the Taliban in direct ambushes; I mean it's really a war. And the police is not trained to do and should not be trained to do that, because if they are doing that, they cut themselves from the population. They are becoming too much militarized. And I think that's a bad trend. So we should develop the army to fight the Taliban and we should use the police more in the cities, in the villages, just in places that are relatively secure.

MS. DEYOUNG: Do you see any productive outcome to the current electoral process? Is this going to make things – is there any way this is going to –

MR. DORRONSORO: That's a really good question.

MS. DEYOUNG: Is there any way this is going to make things better?

MR. DORRONSORO: Well, we have already lost the election, I mean, as a coalition. We have lost first because the whole process was a mess; second because the turnout was very, very low, so it means that the Afghan people do not trust the system. Some were afraid by the Taliban, but in a lot of places, it was possible to vote without taking personal risk and people did not vote. Why? Because they don't trust; they are very cynical about Karzai and about everybody, actually. So we have lost that.

Second, we have lost because Karzai is going to be reelected most likely, and Karzai has made deals with the worst people in Afghanistan, Fahim, Dostum, Sherzai in Jalalabad, his brother of course in Kandahar. So what are we going to do? Karzai is going to be weaker than before the election, of course, after what happened. Politically, he's going to be weak. The guys around him will not want any kind of reform of the state, because when you are Fahim or when you are Wali Karzai, you don't want an uncorrupted police; you don't want new – you don't want reform. So Karzai is going to be reelected, there is no chance that he is going to reform whatever, and so it's a major problem for us, because whatever strategy in Afghanistan, we need an Afghan partner to do the job and it's going to be almost impossible.

MS. DEYOUNG: That's encouraging. (Laughter.) I'm going to ask one more question and then open the floor, and this is a kind of self-interested question – we heard this morning that a New York Times reporter who had been kidnapped by the Taliban, they say, has been rescued with the death of his interpreter and driver, I think. How do you work in Afghanistan? You obviously – you've been there many times; you have very definite views about it and you've reported it out. How do you gather information there; how do you travel around? I don't know if you're with troops, if you're by yourself, if you have your own security, how do you operate there?

MR. DORRONSORO: Well, I mean, I went to Kunduz, the same roads, so I thought about it before. Not before, actually, because the first time I didn't think it was dangerous. So I went there and the Taliban broke the road, so it was a little bit. But when I was back, I thought, well I should do something, and basically my strategy is to be very low-key. So I am dressed like an Afghan; I am going in collective taxi with five or six people; and most of the time the Taliban do not stop that kind of car. They stop cars that are a little bit fancy with just one guy, one driver and a guy. So that's – and you travel between nine and 12, because that's the –

MS. DEYOUNG: Are you by yourself?

MR. DORRONSORO: Yeah, mostly. But it's dangerous to be with – it's more dangerous to be with military than to be alone, you know, because I am not a target. And you travel in the morning in this road because the Afghan National Army is more active in the morning than in the afternoon, you have to know that; and so in the places where it's a little bit tricky, the Taliban tend to strike early in the morning or late in the evening because they can fight and go away when it's night. But it's tricky for them to strike at 10:00 because they will have trouble to withdraw without air strikes. So it's – you have four, five hours when it's good.

MS. DEYOUNG: But obviously, when you're in a place and you start talking to people, it's immediately apparent who you are; you're not one of them.

MR. DORRONSORO: Oh, yes, very much. It's like in English, I have some trouble. (Laughter.)

MS. DEYOUNG: Does that not make you a target, or are they too preoccupied with other things?

MR. DORRONSORO: Well, I mean, cell phone, I think we should forbid cell phone in Afghanistan. It makes the security terrible, because you speak to somebody who – you take a taxi; you don't know who is calling who. So that's – cell phones are terrible for that. No, you have to be careful and low-key. But I am old, so I tend to be extremely careful.

MS. DEYOUNG: (Chuckles.) Let's turn questions to the floor, if you would raise your hand and someone will bring a microphone. If you could, identify yourself and, again wait for the microphone. We'll start on this side. Yes, sir. Yes.

Q: Thank you very much for providing some ground truth in a city that certainly needs it. I have a two-part question. One, could you give some – oh, I'm Mel Goodman from the Center for International Policy. Could you give some approximate number for Taliban forces north, south and nationally? And two, why do you think that investment anywhere in the country, what you call the

cities, would be effective without police, without security, without an army, without governance, so on and so on?

MR. DORRONSORO: Well, the first question is difficult to answer. I would go the other way around. Let's take a concrete example. You have probably 400,000 Pashtun people in Kunduz. You have also none Pashtun Taliban, but let's keep it simple right now. If you have two or three percent of the Pashtun men taking a gun, that's enough to take control of the area, basically. So it's not really the number of troops, because it's difficult. People can be mobilized for one operation and not the day after, so it's difficult. But you have 1,500 police and military in Kunduz. You probably have more than 1,000 Taliban operating in the area.

So that's just for this place. Altogether, what we have to know is that they have men; they have enough men; they are motivated; it's not a problem of recruitment; and they have enough money to give them a weapon and whatever. So I would say they have enough men. It's not the level of men exactly, but they have enough, they have enough.

Remember that the PKK, for example, based mostly in northern Iraq, can fight, and politically it's a major problem in Turkey with a few thousand guys. I mean, there are a few thousand. So if you consider that you have this border with Pakistan, totally open, even on hit-and-run operation, a few thousand Taliban would be enough to be a major security problem for U.S. coalition. Of course, it's not only that; it's plenty of places, it's okay. But I think that's the most important thing. They have enough men.

The second point was about what should it work in the cities when there is no governance, basically. I think you are mostly right. I don't say it's going to work; I say it's the only place where it could work. It's not overly optimistic, but what I'm saying that in these places, you can find people who are interested in the state, in the idea of the state. You can recruit people who know how to write, to read. You can find people from the Communist regime who are still interested in working in the state, and that's doable.

And depending on the places, when you have a good police chief, and sometimes – I mean, they are killed mostly now, because the Taliban are targeting them especially, but when you have a good police chief, it can change the local situation in the city, really. Look, in Ghazni it's totally corrupted. But in Kunduz it's not that corrupted, in Kunduz City, just the city of Kunduz. So people are not complaining especially about the police, and it's exactly the place where if you secure the area, you can have a result. It's not perfect, whatever; but it's plausible. Plus, you can have schools. Really, you can build on that and you can give people something to believe in.

For example, Kabul. Kabul is a mess. The city is a mess. You don't have asphalt in most of the roads, and it's supposed to be the capital of Afghanistan. We did not invest in Kabul. That's very sad, because Kabul is millions of people. And that's exactly the place where we should work, and we are not doing it, and I think it's bad. So if there is a state back in Afghanistan one day, it's not going to be in Helmand; it's going to be in Kabul, Kandahar, in Jalalabad. Jalalabad is very quiet, very rich place due to contraband and a lot of things. And that's where you can have taxes; you can build things. You can show the people that being under the government is not necessarily bad. And people from the countryside are going to the cities.

So after a few years, I say, okay, the Taliban, probably they give us security in the countryside, but the government, it's dynamic; it's the cities, why not? You see, that's my point.

MS. DEYOUNG: Yes?

Q: Judd Heriot, documentary film producer. My question is, is the Taliban a monolithic force politically, socially and so forth or is it very, very diverse? And if it is diverse, is it possible for them to really seize control of the country?

MR. DORRONSORO: The problem is not that they are monolithic or not. We know they are not monolithic, but the coalition is not monolithic. I mean, nobody is monolithic, that doesn't – you know? Yes, they are socially diverse because the Taliban you found in Kandahar are not exactly the same that you found in Kunduz, of course. The real question is, do we have an organization able to control its members or people are doing what they want? And it's very clear to me that Mullah Omar is appointing Taliban responsible for district and provinces. And the guy is already in charge.

You have conflict from time to time, but it's very marginal and it's never been out of control. There has never been high-ranking Taliban joining the government in the last 6 years, 7 years, as far as I know. You never had this case of a province shifting or district shifting to the government because the local Taliban leader wants to make an agreement with the government. Never happened. And if a guy is trying that, he's going to be killed very quickly. So no, they are in control; doesn't mean they are not diverse.

And to think they are diverse is not a problem. To think they are diverse is a plus for the Taliban, because they can adapt to the local conditions. The Taliban in Badghis, for example, just north of Herat, they are very tribal. It's basically tribal, Pashtun tribes, you know. Is that a problem? No, because that's the people who are in control locally. And yes, the Taliban in other places are not tribal. Haqqani network, for example, is not tribal in its definition. Is that a problem? No, they are not fighting in the same place. Afghanistan is a very diverse country, so no, it's good for them, I mean.

The second thing is that are they able to control ground? Yes, they can clear and hold. It's working for them. Why? Because they know the place. When they are in control of a village, they know that this guy is not reliable because his brother is working for an NGO in Kabul. So the family is under control – really under control. They have to obey the rule or they leave. So they can clean the area. There are spies – whatever – but it's relatively marginal. So they can control an area. They can ask homes to – but not in this context – but in the 1990s they were able to disarm people. Right now they are not disarming people because they need the arms to fight. But, yes, it's quiet. They are appointing judges, so basically the security is okay. And when we are trying to get back this district we are providing insecurity because we are fighting.

So the local population, you know, the bargain is that, okay, the Taliban are in control. They are not necessarily nice guys, but basically if I am not doing anything political I can do what I want. I can do business, I can even – in some places they are very relaxed about music, and you have a beard or not – I mean, they are not making that much trouble to people. It's for political reasons, of course. If the coalition is back, it's going to be hell because the coalition is back. So first wave is

going to be destruction, people are going to be killed. But the coalition is not going to stay there because the Taliban are mixed with the population.

It's going to be a war; it's going to be IEDs everywhere, so people are going to be killed. So the rational bargain for people at the local level, in the Pashtun area, is just to shut up and to support passively the Taliban. They don't want especially to see us back, you know?

MS. DEYOUNG: But I think the part of the question is too: in these disparate areas where you have in the northwest, where you have tribes where you have a different kind of Taliban in the east and different again in the South. Do you see a point, or has a point already been reached where they are able to coalesce as one force, or is there just no need for them to do that?

MR. DORRONSORO: They are, actually, basically since the beginning. It's not new, you know? In summer 2002 people from Quetta, Taliban from Quetta, Pakistan, were sent to Helmand to ask people to do the jihad again. So, you know, it's not the local revolt randomly distributed. It's national strategy since 2002, trying to use the local tensions and the fact that this governor is totally corrupted and slowly progressing. And then Taliban from Kandahar are going all the time to Herat, to be sure that Herat is destabilized. So they are not sending fighters; they are sending more money, trying to recruit people and everything. But no, it's a national organization.

MS. DEYOUNG: There he is.

Q: Arnaud de Borchgrave, CSIS. If we were to follow your strategic recommendation for cities only, falling back on the cities, would we not be setting ourselves up for what the Viet Cong did in Vietnam in 1968, which was called the Tet Offensive? In other words, getting into the cities, causing hell and then getting out. And at that point most allies would say we've lost the war.

MR. DORRONSORO: Yeah, absolutely. That's a danger. That's why I said more precisely in the paper, that we have to secure the cities, seriously. And then we have to have this buffer area around the city where we can have local allies because it's very bad to be directly under the fire. But there is no alternative. If somebody is telling me that we have 50,000 reinforcements, we can win in Helmand and in Kandahar and roll back the Taliban, and I say that this guy is not competent. It's a joke. It's a joke. And we have a major problem. Everybody knows that in Afghanistan.

It seems that in Washington there is a loss of communication, loss in translation or whatever, but it seems that in Washington some people are still thinking that reinforcements are going to give you the control of the Pashtun countryside. It's impossible. But you're right, there is a danger. That's why I'm saying, be careful. Build the buffer area seriously.

But you know, on the other hand, what happened in '88, remember when in Jalalabad, this big offensive in Jalalabad was broken. I mean, there was a huge fight and Jalalabad was not taken. I'm not sure that the Taliban are really able to take the cities. There will always be a number of suicide attacks. That's totally inevitable. That's not the main problem, in a way – sorry for people walking in – but that's not the main problem. The main problem is to avoid the Taliban infiltrating the cities to a point where they cannot – an insurgency.

And it's the case in Kandahar right now. The northern part of Kandahar is totally infiltrated by the Taliban. They Taliban are killing who they want – almost who they want – in the city of

Kandahar. There we have a problem. We have to secure the area. We have to have a better security system around the city and the police inside the city. You know? That's the thing. And of course, when I'm speaking about cities, it's not exactly cities, per se, because mostly it's quasi-cities. So "city" doesn't stop there.

I mean, for example, it's not the "city of Kabul," it's the "province of Kabul." In the case of Herat, it's not the city, per se; it's the city plus Injil district; it is south and west. And all the Injil district must be under control, and it's not under control right now. Mazari Sharif is easy; Kunduz is relatively easy to define. But, you know, you have to be very careful about what we call a city.

MS. DEYOUNG: Bill?

Q: Thank you. Bill Goodfellow, Center for International Policy. You haven't mentioned al-Qaida. You know, it's as if the Taliban attacked us at 9/11 and all of a sudden, we're in a fight with them, but the real problem initially going into Afghanistan was to go after al-Qaida. Now, how do they fit into this whole thing? And, I mean, we really don't have a beef with the Taliban other than we don't like the way they run their country. But, where does al-Qaida fit into this? I mean, that's really the enemy.

MR. DORRONSORO: My first answer would be, look at the situation right now. It's the dream of al-Qaida. We are stuck in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is becoming, again, some kind of magnet for jihadists all over the world. We are, on a daily basis, humiliated by the Taliban in Afghanistan. So the situation cannot be better.

So I think what they want is the war to go on; that's the basic thing. They are not fighting in Afghanistan; they are not in Afghanistan, basically. So are we fighting al-Qaida, fighting the Taliban? Not now, at least. No, I don't see a relationship. Taliban is in Pakistan.

The second thing – I mentioned it but I have to mention it again – is if we secure the cities and if we keep enough, let's say, military capabilities in Afghanistan, we can strike al-Qaida. It's not very different from what we are doing now. It's not going to be better; it's not going to be worse. So saying, 'stop fighting in the countryside' is not undermining, let's say, national security for the U.S. or for Europe. You know, it's totally different.

Long run, what we can do is Afghanize the war, slowly, when things are more or less under control; have less casualties; keep military capabilities in Afghanistan on the small scale, but very efficient with target operations; and, mostly, for al-Qaida, it will be the worst because the Afghan war will not be on the front page of the newspaper every day; and mostly for al-Qaida, it would be the worst because the Afghan war will not be on the front page of newspaper every day. And resources that are affected right now in Afghanistan could be affected towards other things.

The war in Afghanistan is costing, I don't know, the figures are terrible and you never know, you never know. But for the whole coalition, it's probably 4 billion a month. It's crazy, you know. If you're just funding the Afghan army, and Afghanistan, let's say, with one or 2 billion, and not fighting the way we are fighting right now, we save money and we can use money to do something else, you know.

Q: Ravi Khan of Voice of America Television. So what you're saying is that one strategy is not going to work for Afghanistan because situations are different in different areas, and Taliban are even diverse. So can you give us, in one sound bite, area by area, of what strategy we should have; somewhere we should have counterinsurgencies; somewhere we should have something else; we should study the situation, and then cater to it?

MR. DORRONSORO: (Chuckles.) Of district by district – region by region? The South, basically, is lost. So if you take Nimruz, there is nobody there; but Helmand, Kandahar, Zabul, Ghazni – these areas, we have to be extremely defensive and focus on the cities. We have a big problem in Kandahar because Kandahar city is slightly out of control, and there is no clear border of the city. So the Panjwayi district, for example, is totally Taliban and it's a major security problem. There is no easy fix, and the idea to take back Panjwayi is totally suicidal. So that would be the South.

I would say Herat – (inaudible) – is basically we have – (inaudible) – but it's not for Herat. We have to be very careful. We cannot control anything. Ghor province is out of control; we cannot do anything about it.

Herat, we can do a lot. We can use Ismail Khan's militia there on the West. We can try to secure Injil; it's very difficult, but it's still doable. I am not sure it's doable with Italian troops. I have to check that.

And if you go north, the districts in Faryab who are Pashtun; we cannot do anything about it right now. What we can do is to build defenses in the next – Jawzjan – but not using Dostum militia there because they are too violent and they will create ethnic conflict – large-scale. Takhar – that is quiet.

And after, the major problem is Kunduz. And there, we have to send troops that are fighting the counterinsurgency war; so not German troops. It would be mostly British or American. It means a major reorganization of NATO. The region-based organization is not working. It's quite bad, actually.

Badakhshan is a little world in itself; I will not speak about that. And we have to secure the road between Jalalabad and Kabul; a major road that is cut most every week by Taliban ambushes. But I mean, I don't want to go too precise in detail, but in the east – Khost, Paktia, Paktika – probably, it's still possible to have local deals with tribes when they are close to the city.

What is clear is that we're on the edge, you know. If we are doing the things we have done since 2002 – sending more troops and not changing the strategy and not having a real good strategy – we are going to lose.

So what I'm saying now, what I'm describing now, is a strategy for now. Next year, the (---) is going to be different, and if we wait one year, I don't think we can do it.

Q: (Off mic) I wanted to ask in the South, in Helmand and Kandahar, and the extreme drug situation. And, obviously, you know a lot of that's fueling the insurgency with the Taliban, and in terms of getting a handle on any of that; in terms of more massive drug eradication.

And also the relationship between the warlords and the Taliban; and, you know, the traditional feudal leadership and the Taliban. And is there a way to build a wedge into that?

MR. DORRONSORO: Well, the first question, I'm not sure that the drugs is fueling the insurgency. In the South, the major political impact of drugs is actually on the governmental side. You know, local officials in the South – it's not a secret – are the major drug deals in the South; not the Taliban. So what's going to happen if there is an eradication program of just less opium in Helmand and in other places, is that there will be less money for Afghan officials; that's the major political effect.

The Taliban also sees our coming from a gift from the Arab countries – from Pakistan, local taxes – and also from us because when NGOs are working outside the cities, they have to pay locally the Taliban. That's a major source – (inaudible) – the Taliban. The Taliban are not going to be really moved by the fact that there is no more – (inaudible). It's irrelevant, basically.

The second question is about the warlords. There is no traditional warlord in Afghanistan. "Warlord" is a new thing; it is coming from the '80s, so it's not traditional – I mean, at least, depending your age, you think that the '80s are traditional – but it's something quite new.

So the thing you have to see immediately on the map is that the warlords are in the north – Ismail Khan, Dostum – the real warlords – I mean, regional power. Guys who are able to have a militia of thousands of men – they are in the north; not in the South.

In the South you have tribes working for the government, locally – especially in Kandahar, where the brother of Karzai has built a local system with what we call the zirak tribes – the Popalzai, Barakzai and Alokozai. That's it; it's a local system. And it's going nowhere because they are a minority; most of the people are excluded from the benefits of opium or just contracts with the Americans, or whatever. So it's not very stable.

So I don't know what your question was exactly targeting, but, mostly, if we are putting back the warlords in the game, it's going to be a disaster because it means that we don't think that the state is going to be rebuilt; things that we are preparing – the next phase of the civil war – we exit, and it's a total mess and civil war, and I don't think it's a good idea right now.

JESSICA MATHEWS: Jessica Mathews, Carnegie. Can you talk, Gilles, about the role of Iran and of India now? Are they any significant factor, and ought to be, in coalition thinking?

MR. DORRONSORO: Yeah, I think, Iran is still the same as the last time we talked about it a few months ago, I think. I was describing Iran as a kind of marginal player in Afghanistan. They're not even really in control of the Shia operations; they are not that influential, actually. They are influential in Herat, of course, because Herat is close to the Iranian border, and they are not in the policy of destabilizing Afghanistan, especially. They don't want the Taliban to be back in Afghanistan. They have a good relationship with Karzai.

You can always find some arms coming from Iran because the Iranian government is not totally coherent; because people are arms-dealing, of course. But, basically, the Iranians are not a big deal in Afghanistan.

The Indians are much more a problem, actually, because they are extremely aggressive in the way they are doing business in Afghanistan. They are opening plenty of consulates; they are much more "there," you know? And it's fueling the competition with Pakistan.

What's a major problem in Afghanistan? One of our major problems – (chuckles) – in Afghanistan is that the Pakistani want the coalition out of Afghanistan because they want Afghanistan part of their sphere of influence. And they want it very much. So actually, the Pakistanis are not our allies in Afghanistan – let's be clear about that. They are supporting the Taliban, clearly – the Afghan Taliban, very clearly.

So everything that is fueling the competition between Pakistan and India is bad for us because it means that the Pakistani are, even more, going to support the Taliban; even more, they would like to control Afghanistan.

So basically, Indians are not very helpful right now. But even if they were helpful, I think that the Pakistani military is so focused on India that whatever the Indians are doing, they would think that it's a threat. We've never been able to convince the Pakistanis that India was not going to attack them, India wasn't a threat, and it's existential – whatever we are doing, it's not going to work – at least, I mean, in the next few years.

MS. DEYOUNG: It's interesting. When I talked to the Pakistanis, at least, about Afghanistan, the main thing they want to talk about is India and what the Indians are doing in Afghanistan; not about what the Taliban is doing in Afghanistan or in Pakistan, but what roads the Indians are building – they can give you maps that show all those roads provide India a route from the west into Pakistan in the event of an invasion, so that India can have a two-front war, I mean it's pretty extensive.

MR. DORRONSORO: Absolutely. It's a major—we're not able to change the worldview of the Pakistani elites and that's it. I mean we have to deal with that.

Q: Robert Boggs, Near East South Asia Center, NDU. Thank you for your comments, very revealing. I've read recently, an article by an American who travels repeatedly to Afghanistan and he makes the following analysis: that one of the consequences of the long-term coalition support for the Karzai government has been that the traditional modus vivendi between the Pashtun areas and the non-Pashtuns, has broken down. In fact, he said that in a recent trip he had never experienced or seen such tension as now exists between the Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns and then in some cases, even some of the Pashtun tribes or sub-tribes in the South are so resentful of the, sort of, monopoly of power that Karzai has created for himself and his group. That they, even though they're Pashtuns, they are alienated as well. So his argument is that Afghanistan, it may be so broken ethnically that it won't be possible to put it back together again at all.

MR. DORRONSORO: There was an ethnic hierarchy in Afghanistan until the civil war, I mean the civil war plus the Soviet invasion in '79. Now what we have is Hazara people, or Panjshiri people or Uzbek, who are refusing the fact that the Pashtun must be the primus inter pares and in control of the state.

So that's clear; you have a major problem in Afghanistan. Are we going to have a, kind of, sharing-power system where the Uzbek, the Taliban, whatever are able to negotiate – not as ethnic

group but full political parties because people who are doing politics are not ethnic but political parties. Or are we going back to the system, like in the Taliban area, where the Pashtun are more equal than the others to put it like that? It's not very clear, but what is clear and I agree with that, I put that also in a report, is that the level of ethnic tension is extremely high. I've never seen that the last 20 years. Extremely high.

Most of the Pashtun people are refusing Karzai as their representative in a way because around Karzai they find that most people are Hazara or Panjshiris or whatever. So Karzai is, even if he's himself a Pashtun from a big family, a very famous family of Kandahar, Karzai is not seen as a Pashtun.

We have a major perception problem and the thing, to go further, is that we don't have another candidate except Karzai who could be attractive to the Pashtun and acceptable to the North, the equivalent of Najibullah. Najibullah was the perfect man to go out of the civil war. He was tough, he was Pashtun but in a way was also from Kabul, so linked to Palchamis (ph) and to Tajik people. He had this kind of profile that could be perfect. We don't have another Najibullah. We just have Karzai who is a Pashtun but not seen as a Pashtun. But in the North he is a Pashtun so he has no support. I mean, you see this kind of totally impossible situation.

What could happen, we'll see, but what could happen, if the militia in the North are back in the system is that you will have ethnic cleansing in the North that could happen if Dostum is back from Turkey, I mean definitively back from Turkey. If Dostum is using his militia in Faryab or even, Jowzjan, you will see more and more Pashtun leaving the area. Right now, you have thousand of Pashtun people well-obliged to leave the North because of Dostum and his militia. There are near Lashkar Gah in Helmand and they old Taliban. And that's bad. That could happen. Not in Kunduz, because in Kunduz the Pashtun are probably 40 percent of the population so you don't have ethnic cleansing in this kind of situation. But in west of Mazari Sharif, situation is very unstable and there it could be very bad.

MS. DEYOUNG: We're just about out of time and so I wonder if maybe you three, well, we've got four, if you could just briefly state your questions and then we'll give you a chance to wind up here.

Q: Hi, my name is Jennifer Noyon, I'm with the Department of State. And thank you; it's been very, very interesting. I was hoping someone else would ask the question but since no one has, I'd just like to hear your comments on what you think the potential might be for some kind of peace talks, reconciliation, reintegration, however you phrase it.

MR. DORRONSORO: Of the Taliban, yeah.

MS. DEYOUNG: These two – we'll get these questions and then you can –

MR. DORRONSORO: I'm sorry, yeah, yeah.

Q: Andrew Burton, House Committee on Homeland Security. In your opinion, is the United States, compared to 2001, how safe are we? And if we were to move to a strategy where we moved away from the southern part and we're not fighting the Taliban and moved into the cities

defensively, will that put us in a situation where we are in a greater potential for an attack on the United States?

MS. DEYOUNG: In the middle and then there is one more in the back there.

Q: What do we know about Taliban contacts with al-Qaida?

MS. DEYOUNG: And, finally, way in the back.

Q: (Inaudible) – Islamic Society of North America. The question is concerning agriculture. Since most of the country depends largely on agriculture, why hasn't the United States invested – and its allies also – invested more in agriculture?

MS. DEYOUNG: That's it.

MR. DORRONSORO: That's it? Okay, I will start with agriculture. I see a lot of problem in investing more in agriculture. First problem is that you don't know, in most of the area, you don't know where the money is going. If you don't control, if there is no security in the area, you could be very easily in the situation we've known in Gardez and around Gardez and this places where the U.S. PRT has given 200, $300 million there, something like that, and we've absolutely no political result because you're giving money to people, to farmers, the Taliban are taking their percentage, that could be 10 percent, 15 percent, so it's fueling the insurgency. That's one problem.

Second problem, there is a possibility of creating a war economy. I mean by that, people are more and more used to live with money that is coming from outside and not directly related to the work they are doing. It's really a problem, you know? We are fueling anticipation, expectations that are not realistic.

I don't think it's our job to make all the Afghans living very well and have nice cars and whatever; I don't think it's our job. Our job must be, more specifically, to build roads because it's infrastructure, to build schools, police posts. But all that is related to the state and the work of the state.

I don't say that the state should never intervene in agriculture, of course, but it's not the main business. Our main business is to build infrastructure that the state can use. Very concretely. We spent money in the North but we never build a state. So what's going on? Now it's back to chaos, slowly. You know? That's a major problem. We spent money on agriculture in the North, so the people are living better, sure.

But if the Taliban are back, what's the use of that? Instead of financing agriculture we should have built a better police and better infrastructure in the North. But on the other hand, when the situation is quiet and when they are enough state structure it's good sometime to invest, specifically in certain projects.

The contact about Taliban and al-Qaida, I do not know. And I am very skeptical about people who think they know. What we know, you know, it reminds me – the Rumsfeld thing, the unknown and the known and everything. What we know is that al-Qaida is not operating in

Afghanistan on the significant base. Probably they are giving a few advice for explosive or whatever, but they are not in Afghanistan. That would be the thing we see.

And it's clear that they are not interesting in being in Afghanistan. So it's a way to answer to the question. The al-Qaida, to strike on Europe and United State or Western countries, mostly, they need to be in places where you can connect with the rest of the world – and trust me, the Pashtun countryside is not exactly the place where you can connect with everything.

The other thing is that, if al-Qaida has any kind of base in Pashtun countryside, you can know about it very quickly. It's not at all impossible to know it and to strike there. It's must more difficult to find al-Qaida in a city because you don't – I mean – (inaudible) – you don't know. That's why the cities in Afghanistan must absolutely stay under control. But I am not especially afraid about the countryside.

There was one question about reconciliation. So if you're working in the State Department, just to give you a tip, it's going nowhere; it's not going to work and you're losing your time if you're trying to do whatever it is about reconciliation. Maybe I am wrong, but at least I am clear. (Laughter.)

It's never going to work because – and it's not a matter of principle, you know, I'm not buying this old myth that you never negotiate with terrorists and all that bullshit that is totally – (laughter) – because everybody is doing it, of course, so why not?

I mean, speaking with Taliban is a good thing, in itself, but what do you want to say to them? It's good to meet people, but you have something to discuss and the Taliban are going to ask you, when are you leaving? That's the main question. And if you don't answer this question, it's a non-starter; there has never been a negotiation. If you answer this question, you're destroying your own strategy. So, basically, it's going nowhere. Okay?

If now you think that we can find people inside the Taliban who are ready to speak, it's something else: You want to destroy the Taliban by dividing the Taliban. It never worked. It's not going to work right now when they feel they are winning and I don't see any possibility of that. So both ways it's not going to work, it's dangerous, potentially. If you start negotiation and, of course, it's going to be known and so it's really a bad idea.

MS. DEYOUNG: We've gone a little bit over time and we've had, I think, as you've said, to be clear, we've had a lot of clarity today so thank you very much.

MR. DORRONSORO: Thank you, Karen. (Applause.)

(END)