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EVENT TRANSCRIPT

Talking to the Taliban: Quick Fix or Political Solution?

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FABRICE POTHIER: Okay, are we ready to get started. Ladies and gentlemen welcome to this Carnegie Europe briefing on Afghanistan. Today we're going to talk about talking to the Taliban and on purpose we chose a question that sounds a bit provocative, but I think it puts the issue in the right perspective in the sense that: is engaging with the Taliban a quick fix or a mission that has gone bad, or is it more a long-term political solution that will bring the conflict in Afghanistan to an end? I have to say it's a real pleasure to have my colleague, Gilles Dorronsoro who is the visiting scholar at the Carnegie Endowment at our Washington office, to have him today with us, because I think if there is a person who can bring his views both from the ground but also from the brain and from a very articulate brain, it's Gilles. So it's a bit special today also because, as you can see from Gilles's outfit, he's straight back from the field, from Kandahar, Gardez, and Kabul, so it's also interesting to have him share these very fresh views on the situation on the ground.

It's also a special presentation because, as you may have noticed, there are two versions to the report that you are presenting today; there is obviously an English one but, more interestingly, there is a French one, une version Francaise, and this is a first for Carnegie and this is something we are now planning to do on a more regular basis, to produce our materials in French. We already do so in Arabic, in Mandarin, in Russian and obviously in English, and French is the next language we want to add to our multinational outlook. So it's special for an organisation like Carnegie, which wants to become a truly global think-tank not only by having offices across the world, but also having real views and backgrounds from the various regions. So without further ado, I'm going to turn to you, Gilles. You have 15 or 20 minutes and then we will open the floor for what I hope will be an interesting discussion.

GILLES DORRONSORO: Thank you. Well, first sorry for the casual Wednesday. I'm going to give you particularly three reasons why we have lost the war in Afghanistan and then I will explain why it's important to start thenegotiations now. The first point is that there is no more a US strategy in Afghanistan. There is a very efficient PR machine; there is the ability, for example, to

use Marjah, the operation in Helmand, as a success story. But there is no more strategy in the sense that the US military doesn't have now some kind of coherent plan to change the situation in Afghanistan.

First we start with Marjah. Marjah is interesting. Why? Because it's a place which has no importance in Afghanistan; this is a district that nobody knows about. Most of the Afghans cannot put Marjah on a map. It was not very important for the Taliban either and it was chosen by the US military as a test for the counterinsurgency strategy. And it was at test not that much for the Taliban themselves but for the Western media. What we have seen there is a huge PR operation sending embedded journalists for two or three days in Marjah, building the image of a success when, in fact, Marjah, as we know already, is a failure. Why is it a failure? It's a failure on two grounds. First, you know that Marjah was supposed to be an example of the counterinsurgency strategy so it was the shape, clear, hold, build and we are now at the clearing phase, the second phase, to clear, and the cleara doesn't work. So the Taliban are still inside Marjah and the US military is in control basically of the Bazaar and the main roads and nothing more than that. So I don't see how it will be possible for the US military to clean the place of the Taliban fighters.

The second big problem we have is the idea that you can have a government in a box so you can send a governor or chief district, but also the whole police, the whole administration, from outside. That's why the current governor of Helmand has been chosen basically by the British; that's why the district chief of Marjah was in Germany not so long ago, and that's why the police, for example, is not local but is from outside, and the military also. It doesn't work. Why? Because actually all the decisions are made by the Americans on the ground. It's not possible to do the government in a box in Afghanistan; it's not possible to bring an administration from outside. It's not possible, it's not workable to have a police force that is mostly Persian speaking in a place where people are speaking Pashto; it's just not working.

What we are seeing now is that the population doesn't want to work with the US military because they don't trust them; they think they are not going to stay and of course, since the local Afghan administration is not local, it's not trustworthy, we have this situation where the few people who are working with the Americans are under pressure; a lot of them have been killed already and the Taliban network inside Marjah are still there. Marjah is a very small place. Marjah is not a city of 80,000; maybe you have seen that in the newspaper. It's a series of villages, so it's extremely difficult to control. So I would say that both on a theoretical plan and practically Marjah is a failure. Marjah is a clear demonstration that the counterinsurgency strategy described by McChrystal in his 2009 reforms cannot work in Afghanistan.

The second aspect is Kandahar. The big operation now that is going to start in June is the operation in Kandahar. Kandahar is the biggest city in the south of Afghanistan and it's also the place where the Taliban started in 94. What are we seeing right now in Kandahar? We are seeing first an operation that is extremely difficult to describe. The US military or the ISAF, because there will also be Canadians there, are not able to really describe what they want to do in Kandahar. Why? Because they cannot reform the local administration. So what is already clear is that what we are going to see in Kandahar is not counterinsurgency because you have the same very corrupt administration that is going to stay in place in Kandahar. The strong men in Kandahar, as you know, is the half brother of President Karzai, Ahmed Wali Karzai, who is going to stay there. The networks that are in control of the local economy, the local police, are going to stay there. So with maybe reinforcement of around 10,000 men I don't see, and nobody sees clearly, why the population should or will shift on the coalition side in a few months. It's just not very rational to hope that the American reinforcement is going to change anything about the political situation in Kandahar. Plus, as you know, the city of Kandahar is largely under the control of the Taliban right now, at least at night. You have groups of three, four, five Taliban fighters with their Kalashnikovs patrolling the city of Kandahar, not very far from the

centre. The Taliban are killing all the people they think could work with the Americans, or refuse to make a deal with them; it's around one a day over the last two or three months. So they are basically in control of this city.

So what exactly are we going to see in June/July? You are going to see the reinforcement of the American bases around Kandahar, north of Kandahar, also in Arghandab Valley north. You're going to see probably a few more bases in the west of Kandahar but I don't see how this could change the strategic situation, the balance of the power in the south. Of course the argument that the Taliban are demoralised is obviously wrong; the Taliban have a very good morale, they are winning the war and they know it, especially because they know that after 2011 there will be no more American reinforcement. So if they don't lose the war in the next 18 months they are normally going to win and they know it.

So that's the south and even in the south you see clearly that there is no convincing strategy, there is nothing that is really grounded in the reality of Afghanistan in what the US military is doing. The east is a little bit different; the east is lost basically. All that is south of Jalalabad what's called the Loya Paktia, is basically out of control. What you are seeing now is a few American bases, an archipelago of bases, with a lot of difficulties to go out. The US military, but also the UN who is in Gardez, for example, have a lot of trouble to go out of their base. It's extremely insecure and, much more importantly maybe, the local population, the local tribes, because this part of Afghanistan is really tribalised, the local tribes do not want to work with the Americans. Why? Because first there is some cultural problem: they don't want to have special forces in their villages, but secondly it's extremely dangerous because if they work with the Americans they are going to be killed, especially the notables in a village, with working with Americans, cannot go out anymore of this village – he is going to be killed, and he can be killed even inside the village by a direct operation or by IEDs or whatever.

So what we have seen in the last few months is again and again the US military trying to build some Afghan militia in the east, near the border especially. What we have seen again and again is people refusing to work with the Americans in these areas. It doesn't mean that the tribes are necessarily pro Taliban, but they are neutral. In the east you don't have anymore some pro government tribes. First, the local population is just fed up with the Afghan administration, too much corruption, too much violence, but also it's extremely unsafe to work with Karzai or with the Americans, so the tribes are neutral. They are not going to fight the Taliban, just waiting, and I don't see with a few thousand men in the American bases in Khost or Gardez or whatever how it's possible right now to change also this balance of power, how to make the tribes work with the Americans or Karzai.

So that's the second front. The eastern front is basically lost. It's extremely important because it's the place where the Taliban are crossing a lot from Zabul to the south of Jalalabad of course; it's very easy to Haqqani at least part of the Taliban, but all the Taliban movement, to send troops inside Afghanistan now. They have a good network; it's working mostly well except in a few places now in Logar south of Kabul where the Americans are tougher, but mostly the border is open except for maybe 50 or 100kms. It's just due to one thing is that on the Pakistani side you have some Shiite tribes who don't want to work with the Taliban, who are Sunni, and they stopped infiltration. But we cannot do much about it one way or another. It's just 80kms, something like that. For the rest of the border, it's totally open.

First, you will remember that that is north of Jalalabad you have another situation where the Americans, there are a few bad tactical defeats, are withdrawing from Kunar and Nouristan two places where there is no more any kind of control on the border. So from the tribal areas, the Pakistani tribal areas, to the French who are based not very far from Kabul, there is nothing, the Taliban can cross with whatever they want.

The last point is the north and we are going to talk a lot about the north. Let's say that you have more and more Taliban activities in the north: Kunduz, Baghlan, these two provinces are becoming really Taliban. And in other places it's no more the Taliban exactly, but it's more the disorder that is growing. And so I will go to my second point from that. What we have seen since the August 2009 election is the deconstruction of the Afghan regime. You know what happened at the last presidential election; it was a huge fraud and as far as we know, probably 10% to 15% of the people voted effectively for Karzai and since then there is no stable government in Afghanistan. The parliament is refusing to confirm a few ministers and, more importantly, Karzai has lost all legitimacy. He's just, I would say, in the eyes of the majority of the Afghans, just somebody who should not be there.

The other problem is that Karzai, because of these elections, is more and more dependent on a few networks, criminal or warlord networks. His half-brother in Kandahar of course but war criminals like Dostum in the north or Fahim, marshal Fahim Mazar-e-Sharif for example, but all these people, their kind of interest is mostly economic interest. It's short-term so they make a lot of money from the US presence in Afghanistan. When you are sending reinforcements it means you need contractors, so it's a lot of money. You need private security, it's also a lot of money, and they have a cut in everything that is going on. So they want more Americans; at the same time they are not going to reform the state to do anything that is positive in the eyes of the coalition and I would say that what we are seeing is the coalition losing total control of Karzai. It's not only what we've seen it in newspapers: Karzai is saying that basically he was thinking of becoming a Taliban himself.

What's going on really in the ministries, the fact that the Ministry of the Interior, for example, is totally corrupt from the top to the bottom. The fact that more and more what's happening in Kabul doesn't impact too much on the provinces around. What's happening in the Health Department in Herat or in Mazar-e-Sharif has nothing to do with what's happening in the Health Ministry in Kabul. So it's the deconstruction of the state. If you compare between 2004 and 2005, the presidential and legislative election and today, it's clear that we are losing all perspective to build an Afghan state now. The last nail in the coffin will be the legislative elections in September where it's going to be corruption, a lot of provinces where it's just not possible to have an election because most of the districts are in the hands of the Taliban and it will be the last... Let's be clear, the parliament right now is corrupt. But you have still maybe 100 MPs who are trying to do their work honestly and I'm not sure they will survive the next election. And when I'm saying survive, could be also physically survive.

So what's my conclusion? All the discourse of the coalition has been we are pushing with this offensive in the south to destabilise the Taliban because we will be in a better position next year to negotiate. That's McChrystal's discourse, but also Petraeus, but also a lot of US officials. What's going on the ground indicates exactly the contrary. If we wait until 2011 it's going to be worse. Karzai is not going to be stronger in 2011 or I'm missing something, but I don't see what. We can talk about it but how could Karzai possibly be stronger in 2011? I don't see it. On the other hand, the spin about Marjah and the spin that's going to happen in Kandahar, I bet that whatever's going to happen in Kandahar is going to be described as a success in the newspaper for at least a few months. This is short-term policy. You can manipulate the newspaper, you can manipulate the media more generally but it's not going to go on for years. I would say that in a few months people are going to understand that Marjah is a failure, that Kandahar is a failure, and then what's going to happen exactly? No. We have seen already the Dutch under political pressure to withdraw; what's happening right now in Great Britain is interesting also because Afghanistan is not so marginal an issue at all in the political debate, and we could see that again and again.

In a case of, for example, a bombing in Kabul with heavy losses of foreigners, the shift would be very strong from what we could call right now a disapproval of the Western presence in

Afghanistan to something that is much more political opposition to it. Right now basically 80% of the French, for example, are against sending reinforcements, but it's kind of soft opposition. What could happen next year is a much stronger and much more clear opposition to the Afghan war. We have seen that in Italy and in Germany and I think it's growing. We should not wait also because, the more we are waiting, the less likely the Taliban will negotiate with NATO because if I am right in my description of the situation, we just have one thing to do, is to exit right now. We have heard inexactly that the Taliban has won; there is a subtle difference between the two and it's all the purpose of negotiation to try to get something from the current situation.

Here we have at least three problems. First, Karzai is the main problem in the sense that Karzai is organising, as you know, a peace jirga, a peace meeting in the beginning of May. It's not going to help because nobody from the opposition will be in this jirga and Karzai is occupying the political space; he is making a lot of noise but nothing is going to work. Why? Because the Taliban aren't interested in negotiating with Karzai because Karzai cannot really deliver. At the same time it's embarrassing in a way because the coalition is not starting negotiation on its own and I think it's a mistake. The idea that you can leave the negotiations to the Afghans between themselves is a dream because, as you know, the Taliban are under control to a certain extent of the Pakistanis, so it's never going to be an Afghan - Afghan thing. The Pakistanis will be here and you remember that the number two of the Taliban, Mullah Baradar, was arrested by the Pakistani services, just for one reason - he was starting negotiations directly with the Afghan Government; that's the only reason.

The Pakistani Army is still supporting fully the Taliban; that's another reason why it's not going to work and the counterinsurgency is not going to work. So that's the first problem. What are we doing with Karzai? If we leave the negotiation with Karzai it's not going to work; also another reason is that Karzai has no interest in the end of the war because the end of the war and the political settlement means that Karzai is out of business. He will politically die in the political process because one of the major things will be to choose a new leadership for Afghanistan. So I don't see how it's possible for Karzai to survive if there is real negotiation in Afghanistan and that should encourage us to of course to negotiate because it's the only way we have to get rid of Karzai.

The second point is that we have a major difficulty about the format. Who are we going to invite to the negotiations? If we invite everybody, India, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Russia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, the EU and the Americans, probably forgetting somebody, it's not going to work because every country has its own agenda and the agenda in some cases fully contradictory, India, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia. And in this case nothing is going to work, so I suggest that we start from the other perspective. Let's think about who can be the spoiler. The spoiler is mostly Pakistan because Pakistan is supporting the Taliban since 2001 in fact even before then, since 2001, and it's a major spoiler. Pakistan has proven that you cannot have a deal in Afghanistan without Pakistan; that was the big mistake of the 2001 Bonn agreement. The second thing is of course we need the Taliban, we need Karzai, we need us; we need the coalition. I think, beyond that, the more you add players, the more complex the deal could be and probably impossible too. There is marginal places, Hezb-i-Islami, the second party in the opposition and this Hezb-i-Islami is really problematic. I have no clear idea about should we put Hezb-i-Islami in or should we put the Hezb-i-Islami out of the negotiation. I think we'll be probably obliged to have Hezb-i-Islami in the negotiation, knowing that if the Hezb-i-Islami didn't change its policies and its politics since the 90s, it's going to be extremely difficult to deal with.

The last point is how to do it. I think one of the key elements in a political process would be to start with a ceasefire and some kind of amnesty to get the leadership of the Taliban back in Afghanistan. Now, that would be very important because if the Taliban leadership, Mullah Omar and let's say the 20 or 30 people who are important inside the Taliban, they will be much less

under pressure from Pakistan. So the amnesty plus the ceasefire is a way to Afghanise the Taliban, to bring back the Taliban in Afghanistan, to distance the Taliban from the Pakistani Army. And it could make, I think, it much easier for the coalition.

Having said that, we are in Afghanistan mostly because of Al-Qaida and the end game for the coalition is first to have some bases in Afghanistan to strive against radical groups like Al-Qaida or Lashkar-e-Taiba, for example. We need, secondly, a coalition government in Kabul, the Taliban, but also the Shia, the Hazara Shia, , the Halimi. We need people from the north like Abulla [?], maybe even the Dostum, even if he's a war criminal, and we need somebody probably from the west like Ismail Khan. All these people don't exactly like each other of course; they have been at war for years, decades in some cases, and the only things we have that can build some kind of trust is a slow withdrawal. If we can make a political deal and enhance the chance of the deal surviving the withdraw, if we withdraw slowly, so withdrawal in three or four years would be perfect. If we withdraw in six months, of course, it's going to be again a civil war, a new phase of the civil war that has been going on since 78.

So all that is not absolutely great or good news, but I think what we should probably think about is the time constraint. The more we are waiting, the weaker we are, and the most difficult the negotiation. Thank you very much.

FABRICE POTHIER: Thank you very much, Gilles. I think we have plenty to reflect on and probably to challenge you. So let me take the first questions. If you could kindly introduce yourself before asking the question. If you need more time, I have two questions for you, Gilles. One is: you mentioned Hezb-i-Islami and being part of the armed insurgency, but we also know that they have MPs that are members of the Afghan Parliament. So that made me think about do we see a radicalisation of Afghan politics under Karzai because often we give the argument that if we bring the Taliban within the mainstream politics, we are going to radicalise those politics? But the impression is that they are already radicalised in a way. So if you could elaborate on that.

I think people might be also interested in hearing a bit more about what type of security guarantees can you provide basically to make sure that you won't see, with the return of the Taliban, a return of Al-Qaida, and the notion of sanctuary, of terrorist groups that are clearly a red line for the US and the broader coalition. India is an important player on that because obviously India's reluctance towards bringing the Taliban in the political main fold is because of Lashkar-e-Taiba and other groups that have a hit, both in India but also in Afghanistan, Indian interests. So how do you make those security guarantees stick when actually you are withdrawing the troops? So if you could elaborate also on that.

GILLES DORRONSORO: Okay, so the first question, we tend to think that the only fundamentalist in Afghanistan are the Taliban and it's not true obviously. Just go out of the centre of Kabul and most of the women are wearing the burqua, for example, and of course if you going to the south or wherever, if you are 50kms from Kabul most of the women are wearing the burqua. So the idea is that, culturally, the Taliban are not the only fundamentalist party controlling, but politically also the difference between the ideology of the Ettehad leader, Sayyaf, or even Halabi in a way, or people like Ismail Khan and the Taliban are not that big. I'm not sure that the Taliban are so different from the mainstream politics in Afghanistan and that's a real problem after ten years of Western presence in Afghanistan. Now there is no liberalization of politics of culture in this sense. On the contrary, I think that outside the little bubble of the well-known bistrots in Kabul like Atmosphere, it's much more fundamentalist and Sharia oriented politics everywhere. There are a few exceptions like Rashid Dostum because he is an ex-communist, because he's an alcoholic, because his personal life and criminal life is against most of the tenets of Islam and common morality also. But except for this one, I think

most of the people could find a middle way, like Shariatization of the justice and everything. So radicalisation is already there in this sense.

Now the biggest problem I think for the Hezb-i-Islami is that this party has always travelled a strategic base on coup d'état. They don't have social support really. They have probably less than 5% of the fighters in Afghanistan. But what they want is a state structure and a lot of governors and also a district chief are Hezb-i-Islami. And it's the legal part of this, because actually you have two Hezb-i-Islamis and the third one is marginal. But you have two, one legal in Kabul, one illegal in the mountains of Pakistan with Hekmatyar. But the legal one, of course has a relationship with the illegal one and you know that two weeks ago the Hezb-i-Islami was in Kabul, the illegal one was in Kabul and of course they are dealing together. I'm afraid that if there is a political void in Kabul, not now but later, the Hezb-i-Islami could try again to make a coup and that would be very bad because they started the next phase of the civil war in 92. I don't trust really Hekmatyar about a deal because his whole life he betrayed, he changed sides and he is not very trustworthy. So I would say it's not more radicalisation in the sense of culture or fundamentalism or Islam, the problem. The problem is the strategy of this party that is extremely dangerous, historically extremely dangerous.

About the second question, you're very right to mention Lashkar-e-Taiba because I don't think Al-Qaida is that really a problem. I think that Pakistan, the Pakistani Army, is against Al-Qaida; they will fight Al-Qaida and they are fighting Al-Qaida too. If the US Administration can say, okay, we've killed the number three of Al-Qaida, you know, it's the most dangerous position in the world, to be number three of Al-Qaida because they are killed all the time. If they can do that, it's because the ISI is giving intelligence and you see a difference. The ISI, of course they know where Mullah Omar is living because he's under the direct protection of the Pakistani military but they are not giving the address. But when they get Al-Qaida operative, they give the guy, they do not protect Al-Qaida because Al-Qaida is against the interests of Pakistan as seen by the Pakistani military at least.

So Al-Qaida is not the major problem. The major problem is that Pakistan has already used groups like Lashkar-e-Taiba to strike India. First it was a clear and strict instrumentalization of these groups; now these groups are more or less autonomous but you never know exactly. What would happen is that Afghanistan could be used against India and of course for India that's difficult to accept.

FABRICE POTHIER: And we saw that in two attacks, one last year, one this year, in Kabul against the Indian Embassy and the Indian expatriates who were staying there.

GILLES DORRONSORO: We have seen that already. What we could see very well, more than Al-Qaida camp in Afghanistan, we will see Lashkar-e-Taiba in Khost [unclear], and that's a major point. So I think here we need a clear Pakistani guarantee on that, and second we don't just need guarantees as a piece of paper; we need bases in Afghanistan to strike these groups that are attacking India or potentially Western countries. So I think it must be a long-term agreement with the Afghan Government so we can have a few bases in Afghanistan. It doesn't mean 20,000 men; it's just a few thousand men in some strategically placed bases in the north, mostly, I think, and then from that we can strike people who are clearly doing things we don't want them to do.

The second part is that the only real guarantee we have is what kind of regime we have in Kabul. If we have a coalition government where Haqqani – nobody likes Haqqani – but he's useful. If we have Haqqani as part of the deal, we can probably think that the border will be under control. If Haqqani is there, if you have the fragmentation of all these networks on the border, if the Taliban are not part of the deal, long-term the radical groups will come back to Afghanistan for sure. So the only people who can, to a certain extent, secure the border are the Taliban and that's the strategic problem we have.

FABRICE POTHIER: Let me now turn to the questions.

JO COELMONT: Ladies and gentlemen, Jo Coelmont, the Egmont Institute. Thank you for your expose, it was quite rich. I have two questions. The first one is the theory about Afghanisation and making sure that the armed forces and the police will be able to take up their responsibilities as in a normal state. What do you think about that? Is that a feasible solution? And second, more importantly, I would like to continue on what you have just said, you said to us that it's best to enter into negotiations as soon as possible and if we withdraw quickly we will lose everything. If we withdraw over three or four years it will be more successful. But that is and end date. My question is, what is exactly the end state that you would have in mind and what are the preconditions to come to that end state? I understood that you are not so much looking for a truce but some cutting deals more than something else. But if you could clarify that element, I would be very grateful.

ALAIN DELETROZ: I'm from the International Crisis Group. My question is very simple. What do you think the coalition can negotiate with the Taliban? And linked to that, you said yourself that they had a tradition of coup d'état in a way, once they come close to our...

GILLES DORRONSORO: I was talking of Hezb-i-Islami, not the Taliban.

ALAIN DELETROZ: Okay, but do you really believe that they will accept the partial deal in which they would not take over the whole state again and come back with a kind of ruling we've seen them apply in the past?

FABRICE POTHIERGILLES: You mean that they might accept but not respect the deal, yes?

ALAIN DELETROZ: But first the deal, what do you discuss with them about?

GILLES DORRONSORO: Your question isn't exactly that because I'd say we have plenty of things to discuss with the Taliban, no shortage of subjects of discussion, so your question is exactly can we make a deal with the Taliban, first, and are they going to respect the deal, second. I think that's more the question because the subjects of negotiation are here, the withdrawal of the Western forces, is it a partial withdrawal, is it a total withdrawal? When? Is it an automatic withdrawal every six months 10,000 are leaving, or is it a conditional withdrawal? There are thousands of questions and everybody thinks these are interesting questions so the Taliban are going to discuss that. We have here a problem: do they want to negotiate? That's something else. What I am seeing is that we are losing ground so quickly in Afghanistan that if we do not start quickly a negotiation they will have no interest in negotiating because it's too late, they just have to wait. Already in a way if they are just waiting, keep fighting, they are fighting well, their movement is expanding in the north; the south is lost, the east is lost. Why should they negotiate? There are two reasons. First, the Pakistani Army is going to put pressure because they want a political deal, they want a slow withdrawal under their control; that's the Pakistani Army.

The second reason, they can think – and that's an answer to your second question – that they can make the deal right now and then take the whole power later, except that that's the start of course, but we don't want sincerity – that's not a problem of sincerity. It's creating a new context and what we can do next, it's not necessarily going to work, but the best bet we have is to think that after four or five years of the kind of coalition government working more or less well in Kabul, slowly the Taliban will think that it's workable, that probably they don't need to start a new fight. With all the problems they will have to start a fight, but to take Panshir or to take Sheberghan, that's the idea, that's why withdrawl should be sure, to change the perception of the Taliban, because the Taliban of course will get a large part of the cake because of the

balance of power on the ground. Of course Kandahar and all the east, the south, will be under the Taliban, of course. We have to stop with this idea that we are losing a war and we want to write the negotiation treaty. People who are losing a war are not going to control the condition and the end game. It's not reasonable and if we wanted to put our condition, we should have won the war. But sadly we have lost so that's an end. Let's be realistic here and the idea that the guys are middle-aged because their trousers are too short and they have flipflops when they are fighting, okay, maybe, but still who is winning the war?

So I am very sceptical of the idea that we should not even start the negotiations because they are bad guys.]. Of course you negotiate always with your enemy. If you negotiate with your friends it's boring, so it's not going to be boring to negotiate with the Taliban. We agree on that. But that's the only people we can talk with and, by the way, I prefer the situation where we have to negotiate with the Taliban than a negotiation where we would have to speak with a different... Just think about the Hezb-i-Islami being the 95% of the fighters and the Taliban 5%. That would be much worse. So, yes, they are going to try to get all the power, that's sure; that to us is to build a new context.

So the Afghanisation, there are two different things. First, for the police it's over. The Ministry of Interior is so corrupt from top to bottom that what do you want to do? We are training more and more people but the training is short, too short, because we want to produce numbers so it's not very good quality. Plus instead of training ourselves, we ask the DynCorp or other mercenaries to do the job. It gives a bad idea of what we are, who we are and what we are doing. Everybody's here for the money and plus the quality of the police recruits is just... 90% do not know how to write or read, and reading is more important than writing, but to read. A lot of them are drug addicts and honestly, in an Afghan family, to send your son to the police is very risky. So the quality is very low and it's not building something. Next year it's not going to be better. For the army the situation is a little bit different.

The army, there is some marginal progress but the real number of the army is not 95 or 100. Officially it's 100,000. It's more 60,000 something and in a lot of places you have numbers but the people are not in place; they are just paid but they are not here. What we have seen in the last few months is that the Afghan Army does not fight. In Marjah they did not fight. What we are seeing in a lot of places is that they do not fight, except to defend themselves just to survive. But they tend to make deals, plus there is a lot of programs that 60% or 70% of the officers are Tajiks so the army we are seeing now in the south is Tajik speaking, I mean Persian speaking so it's not so good. But the army is still very popular.

So, it's also an answer to your question, if the army... We should train the army; we should go on with that. The army could be the little difference, make the difference, because for the Taliban if there is a national army, to restart the fight the fight would take all the power – it will be to fight with the national army. And that can make the difference, especially if we had a ceasefire for a few years. People don't jump on their gun like that, even the Afghans. To start back a civil war when you have money because drugs will be here of course, when you have money, when you have opportunities to go back to war, why? So the army is still marginally something useful.

RAF ROSVELDS: Raf Rosvelds from UNHCR. When you talk about the Western side, the coalition side, who has to lead the negotiations, what will be the role and the place of the civil side of it and especially the UN? Because in the past we've seen, for example, Michael Semple and also a UN person being evicted out of the country. Now we've seen the emergency where people when they want to talk to the Taliban, just to work, in Helmand they are being set up or whatever the circumstances of this case. Will there be any place for the civilian side of it, or will it be just the military who will dominate everything?

JOHANNES VOS: My name is Vos. I'm from the Council of Ministers here in the European Union and I'm retired. What is the impact of the drugs or how do you see the role of drugs and, secondly, maybe a more difficult question, what is the role for Europe, if any?

FABRICE POTHIER: I think they are three very good questions, especially the role of civilian agencies and the possible role of the EU.

GILLES DORRONSORO: Okay, there are two different things here and so your question in fact is a double one. One is the UN as such, and the other part is the NGOs. So for the UN there is a role, of course. The UN has been a little bit in trouble with the last presidential election and a lot of infighting and they have lost, to a certain extent, their credibility. But at the same time the Taliban, I think, [unclear] and except once, the UN has not been targeted in Afghanistan by the Taliban. Some people have been killed because they were there, but as such the UN is not really a target. So I think, yes, they have a role here because it's neutrality; it's people who can organise a deal and nobody is going to be killed during the meeting. Because the Taliban had a bad experience with the night raids and whatever, so they think they can be killed on the spot by the Americans. So, it's important to have some kind of amnesty, and sometimes the UN [unclear] there. So, yes, I foresee a very important role. The second point: plus it's good for the coalition because it's a way also to send the UN to explore some diplomatic possibility and say, oh no it's just the UN and nothing to do with that, so it's very useful.

The second point is I am very worried about the NGOs and the civil society because basically we have created some kind of almost artificial, but not in a pejorative sense, but some kind of artificial Westernised generation in Kabul and in a few places. Now we have said, okay, human rights, women rights, and why not and let's go to the university and let's get a job, let's have a pair of jeans in Kabul. There are plenty of interesting things culturally actually. Plus NGOs have plenty of money so NGOs, good, bad, whatever, but they are here. And at the same time we are going to ignore them in the negotiations clearly. The negotiations are going to be a very real politic thing and the US Army is going to negotiate with the Pakistani Army, the Taliban with Karzai, whatever, but nobody is going to take care of this kind of more modernist part of the Afghan society. My suggestion would be to create some kind of coordination, but a political coordination of NGOs or women's associations, all these people, and be very vocal. Then the coalition, to a certain extent, will be obliged to do something. They are not going to be enthusiastic but if you have a women's association in Washington that is vocal, that could have an impact. Where it is going to be the trick, it's going to be the new constitution, if there is a new constitution. And what is going to be the Human Rights in the new constitution? Probably we'll need a new one. So that's one of the major points.

So I would say what I describe as a very political negotiation is probably going to happen. At the same time it is time for NGOs and all the civil society thing to be much more autonomous and much more political because the structure of the game in Kabul, as you know, is that you are doing the women's rights or you are doing whatever, you're working agriculture somewhere, and that's it. No, that's not the game now; the game is political. So politicise the NGOs: that would be my advice, and make them work together because that's the game now.

Yes, the drugs. No, it's not difficult. There is a comical aspect of every year in strength mostly you have a new report from a UN agency or for the British or whatever saying that they have a good idea so it's going to be an eradication of opium in Afghanistan. The first time I think it was in 87 or 88, that was not the start; they started before. So it's a joke, basically, stop thinking about that; there is going to be opium in Afghanistan, that's life and just relax because we cannot do anything about it and it's a political nightmare. What we should be careful about it is that American agencies like the DEA and people like that are actually extremely dangerous people. They have a very narrow and technical agenda and they are actually very instrumental in creating a real mess in Afghanistan. So we should shorten the leash. Clearly Afghanistan is a

[unclear]. It's a war, it's serious, so let's keep drug professionals, the professionals of the drug eradication, let's say, out of the game, because it's difficult enough like that.

The second question is about Europe. I think I am going to give you this, just one word. Europe could have been very useful before. From 2002 to 2006 that was the... Europe is very good at social engineering, transforming society very deeply. We have seen that because in Europe the EU is made of that. We are transforming people and societies peacefully but very, very strongly. It's almost a Soviet style without the violence, with everybody smiling. We give money. But it's incredible, the things we are doing, we are transforming our own governments, so much more than the UN, the EU has this extreme power of breaking and remodelling society, except that in Afghanistan, first there was no European [unclear], of course, second, very quickly it was about corruption. We created this nexus of corruption between Afghans and the Westerners. Corruption is not an Afghan crime. It's a Western/Afghan problem and we initiated correction, clearly it's obvious.

Right now we are in a phase where it's hard politics. We have to be sharp, quick, very cynical and that's not Brussels]. It's not the face of the EU institutions. So we are out of business and, in a way, that's life and the only lesson we have to take from Afghanistan is that NATO is not functioning, of course, obviously. NATO is not functioning, NATO is not a military functioning alliance anymore, if it were one, and so what about the European defence? Are we going to look at the British that are totally overrun with technical and logistical and political problems with 10,000 men in Afghanistan? The French are the same with 5,000, the Germans are a disaster and the Italians are paying here and there to keep it quiet. The Spanish are just surrounded by Taliban; that's where we are. So we are naked and everybody knows it. Or we continue in a hypocritical way, the US is going to take out everything and it's not so bad and NATO is such a great thing. Or we take it the hard way. It means, okay, we need a European defence because it doesn't make sense to have a British, French, German. Logically, politics being politics, you know what's going to happen.

I think there was one question about the end game. The end game is the perfect thing ideally. The perfect thing would be the Taliban reintegrated in Afghanistan, being part of the Afghan political system, some kind of loosely competitive elections beyond there with a government with, let's say, a third or half the ministries belonging to the Taliban, American bases in a few places, control of the border in the south by the Taliban, in the north by the Afghan National Army or something like that. Slow stabilisation with money. We have to keep money. And slowly the stabilisation of the political system; that would be perfect and then we can focus on the political mess in Pakistan. That would be perfect, I'm not sure it's going to happen, but that should be the *idée régulatrice*, like one philosopher said, that's the compass we need.

FABRICE POTHIER: On this note - especially about Brussels, this drew a lot of smiles - Gilles, let me thank you for sharing in such an honest and broad way your views on Afghanistan. I also would like to thank the audience. I know the space is not big and as of September we'll have a much bigger space to welcome you, Rue du Congrès, in Brussels. But in the meantime, I would like to wish you a good day and enjoy the few sandwiches left and the drink. Thank you very much.