

**CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT
FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE**

**“AFGHANISTAN’S SITUATION AND ITS IMPACT IN THE
REGION AND THE WORLD”**

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JESSICA TUCHMAN MATHEWS: Good morning, everybody. Pleasure to welcome you to the Carnegie Endowment, and a particular pleasure to welcome back to the endowment Dr. Abdullah.

We're hearing more and more that 2008 is going to be the year of Afghanistan, or should be the year of Afghanistan. We will see whether that comes to pass, but without any question there is an urgent need for greater attention and for greater effort, international effort. The problems are growing, as is the likelihood that the country could slip back into the grip of unrestrained violence.

A few months from now, early April, NATO will convene its summit in Bucharest, and Afghanistan will be top among the issues that will be discussed. And so leading up to that time we here at Carnegie have decided to organize a series of events to focus on the leading challenges that the country faces this year and that both the Afghani government and the international community have to jointly confront.

Among these are first, of course, the sufficiency and leadership of the military effort; the question of whether additional troops are needed, how many; whether the leadership of the existing forces is appropriately directed for counterinsurgency efforts. Second, of course, the counter-narcotics effort, where the record over the past seven years has been dismal, and the reconstruction process, and how that's going; and central to all of these, of course, the question of the performance of the Afghan government, its ability to deliver basic services and to manage corruption.

To lead off this series, we really couldn't have a better person with us to address at least some of these issues, maybe all, and what's on your minds than Dr. Abdullah Abdullah, who is currently secretary general of the Masud Foundation. As I think everybody here knows, he was also foreign secretary of the country from 2002 to 2006. He, before that, held many posts in the transitional government, as spokesman for the government. He is trained originally as a physician and ophthalmologist; in his period in Peshawar led efforts to take care of Afghan refugees there in the mid-'80s before joining Commander Masud's effort for in the mid – , well, better part of a decade. So the trajectory of his life has really mirrored that of his country; he's been at the center of events now for 25 years, and we are looking forward to hearing from him, an insider's view of where we are, what must be done and the alternative roles of – priorities for the international community and Afghan government.

So thank you so much, we're looking forward to hearing from you.

ABDULLAH ABDULLAH: Thank you very much.

(Applause.)

MR. ABDULLAH: (In Arabic.) Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. I would like to thank Carnegie Endowment for International Peace for providing me this opportunity to talk about the issue of Afghanistan, the situation in Afghanistan, and at very short notice. I

informed them of my willingness to come and to speak here, and it was confirmed soon after. It is like, after two years since I haven't been in Washington, so my first trip after two years.

In Washington, things have not changed that much – (chuckles) – but a lot has changed in Afghanistan in this course. I'll go a little bit back to – I'm going to start with 2001 before getting to the present situation, and then talk about the future prospects.

Before 2001, there was little hope that Afghanistan would be restored as a country, as a state, in its nation – as a nation will be given the chance to live at peace within itself and with the others. Al Qaeda had taken root there, and it was like its global capital. Then came an opportunity in the midst of the tragedy here in Washington and New York. As a result of that, the people of Afghanistan got together, and the international community joined hands, and then, the processes started. The main element in the process was the option or the choice of the Afghan people to start voting for general elections; one person, one vote.

I was in Germany and one of the questions was that, wasn't it early for Afghanistan or too early, or does it work at all for Afghanistan to opt for general elections. And my point has been, and this is my firm belief, knowing the context of the situation fully, at that time in Afghanistan in the conditions of our country, in the views of our people, that would have been the only way to get out of that quagmire which pervaded in Afghanistan for 25 years. We had exercised and experienced every other option in the course of the past 25 years. It had not worked, and had worked against the interests of our people that led to the situation, which was there. So it wasn't, like, an idea being suggested and imposed on Afghanistan, the idea of going for elections as the way of participation in the history of the country and the nation.

I think your help, the help of the international community, made it possible to materialize that dream. Apart from that, one or two other things happened in the course of events. Taliban and al Qaeda were uprooted from Afghanistan; it took just a few weeks before they lost their bases, and that is telling a story of total loss of support among the population or absence of any support from the population because at that time, we were not talking about several thousands of ISAF or NATO or coalition forces. It started with a few hundred of your troops, that and the people on the ground, that Taliban and al Qaeda lost their bases in Afghanistan.

There was an assumption that it is a spent force, al Qaeda and Taliban, and the threat perception within Afghanistan was from the actors within the country rather than the Taliban, which were provided essentially outside Afghanistan and taking root back. That, I think, affected the rest of our strategies. So the threat perception is from the internal forces, then your whole efforts will be focused how to manage it.

And then, at the same time, outside Afghanistan in the neighboring country, Pakistan, there was an assumption that the presence of the U.S. as well as the international community in Afghanistan is a temporary one. And that broad concept of using extremism as an instrument of achieving foreign policy objectives had not changed in Pakistan. In Taliban, in our negotiations with them, they will tell you that it's a domestic issue for Afghanistan and no action was taken against Taliban, backed the leadership of Taliban,

which were that and not only that, but they enjoyed some support as well. So the threat developed within Pakistan. Once Taliban lost their bases, they established their bases in Pakistan. That was the critical moment. I'm talking in the course of 2001, 2002, 2003 and 2004, so that's the framework of time that I'm talking about.

At the same time, the United States got engaged in Iraq. That, in itself, was a major factor. And Pakistan, of course, was cooperating from time to time by handing over a few members of al Qaeda, and that was also something which was appreciated a great deal. As a result, the Taliban got stronger in Pakistan and started attacks on Afghanistan; within the country, that consensus which existed at the beginning was damaged in the course of events which followed.

I mean, from a situation which President Karzai was supported by a majority, an absolute majority of the people and later on elected by an absolute majority vote, towards a situation as of now, where this political atmosphere is one of absolute mistrust between the players, but I see the players. I mean, in this broad vision of a moderate Islamic country, a democratic country, a peaceful country which respects the rights of its citizens and live at peace with one another, all the political forces within Afghanistan are shading this common vision. But when you see the action on the ground, or the way that the state institutions are functioning then you don't get that promise anymore. So that consensus within the country was also damaged.

But then, we had more or less a consensus in the region; I mentioned about the Pakistan factor. Recently, we are hearing about things which are happening from Iran as well so it means that Iran, which has started playing a constructive role, at least to the extent that these reports about the situation is not as such. And among the international community, in a broad sense there is a willingness to continue support, but we hear from time to time sometimes different signals. So, altogether we are not what we should have been after six years from Bonn agreement because of all these factors and all these developments.

The situation, to this situation is such that at least, from what I can see and I can witness, we need a review of the situation in order to draw some lessons. And when I say we, us, I mean Afghans and the international community all together. There are one or two immediate lessons out of what we have witnessed. For example, it is important, it is critical – it was important, it was critical that we hold general elections, but the assumption that you have the popular mandate and because of the votes that sufficed, and you don't have to consider all the other factors which are important in developments in a country like Afghanistan, was not the right assumption. I mean, had that assumption been right, so we have an elected government which millions of people voted for President Karzai, so what is it that we are saying that the gap between the people, and the government is a growing gap. What's the factor behind it? So this needs to be looked at thoroughly. We had opted for presidential system and the power is concentrated in the center; is it functioning the way it was expected? It has to be looked at.

The fact that – just by giving examples – I won't go into details of this and leave enough time for questions later on – the fact that we are deciding in Kabul about everything which is happening, from the level of a district up to the provinces and so on and so forth,

in not allowing the provincial councils to play an effective role in the provinces – is it helpful? I don't think so. We have examples of appointments of governors which were kicked out of one province by the people, appointed to the next; again, the same thing, appointed to the next. The third province before him going there, the people said that we don't want him. He is being appointed to the fourth province. This is not working; we need to look at it. And why it's important and critical – these sort of things might happen somewhere else as well, in a stable situation, but that's different. Here, we miss an opportunity, a great opportunity, of having the people with us which are in its totality, but we don't have them to be more hopeful and to be participants in their lives.

So there will be a lot of examples of such. The fact that we moved from the interim government without any doubt – ignore my participation in these governments. For a while, it was more effective. There were some shortcomings; perhaps there it was taken care of in the transitional government, but it was also effective government. And then, we have elected government and the people expected this to be even more effective. Do we have it? No. That's very evident, and I don't want to get into details of this; that will be talking about my own colleagues, but that's a point.

The present relations between the parliament and the government is not acceptable, and of course it's not to putting the blame on one person, which is the president; of course the people have voted for the president, and even those who have not voted for the president, they have equal rights to expect him to do things about it, but it's for the political leadership as a whole. And there has to be an end to this political stalemate, and the political leaders should get together to work it out. And it's like a rope which everybody's pulling towards itself, and how long do we do this? And it's a responsibility not for this generation, but for the future generations as well. And we – like it or not, our role was like the founding fathers of a nation because a new Afghanistan was born. In whatever we do, it will be taken as an example for the future as well. If we don't leave lessons that the people could look at it and be proud of it in the future, we miss another opportunity.

So these are things – some of the points which I wanted to emphasize, but by emphasizing on these points I'm not saying that – I'm not ignoring or underestimating all those positive developments which have taken place in the lives of the people of Afghanistan. And for millions of our people there was no hope, no prospect. They started their new life; refugees have started returning back. We had our constitution, and a lot has happened that it will be more than what I can speak about today. But it's critical in order to consolidate those achievements, to start the process which is more promising, which takes into account these grievances of the people, expectations of the people and work as a guideline for the people so the people see their future in it. It's critical, and the time is now.

For my trip to Washington at this stage, it's mainly public events like this which I will be addressing. My aim at this time was that I know that some time to come, there will be a new administration, and I was told by our American friends time and again that in the first one of two years the focus will be mainly domestic issues. I want to emphasize at this stage that we don't have more time to miss. So together we have done a lot, and we should have done much more, but still there is opportunity. Don't let this opportunity to slip out of our hand. For us, it will be gone forever and it will be no exaggeration if I emphasize on the repercussions for the rest of the world.

So on that note, I stop and wait for your questions.

(Applause.)

MS. TUCHMAN MATHEWS: Okay, we have some microphones, so please wait until you get them. And we'll start right here, right behind you is coming a mike. And I think it'd be nice if people would identify themselves.

Q: My name is Patrick Fine. I'm with the Academy for Educational Development.

Dr. Abdullah, I want to first say that I have profound respect for the work that you did as foreign minister. I know I speak for a lot of people to say that it was a great disappointment when you left the government.

My question is, I'd like your perspective on – you spoke about the importance of governance and particularly of local governance at the provincial and district level. My question is, in your view why is it so difficult to find governors who are effective, who are not corrupt, and who have the support of the people?

MR. ABDULLAH: It shouldn't be that difficult; it shouldn't be that difficult. And if we get the people involved in it, they will let us know. And there is one critical point in that: If the criteria is personal loyalty rather than loyalty to the nation and to the constitution, and so on and so forth – in personal loyalty, I mean very strict and narrow one, then, we miss the sight of the whole situation and then we are stuck with a few people around. So it's the issue of an attitude rather than the conditions and circumstances.

The issue of capacity is always a problem, and then sometimes the decisions which were made in the past few years was like, okay, get us these criteria. We have a sort of semi-literate or illiterate governor, which has deliberated to some extent in this and this and this areas, but is not educated.

And that person was replaced by educated person, which got its education in Germany – this is an example – master's degree or something, but had not lived in Afghanistan for 20 years. He was sent to a province in Afghanistan to do the job. That was not going to work. The people, in the first instance, would tell you and have told us that it will not going to work. So it's that judgment that we do, but at the same time looking at it with a broad scope, that there are a lot of people which are loyal to their nation, to their country, to the law of the country; but at the same time, they are not the type of people which will express their personal, personal loyalty to somebody, either a minister or higher in the ranks, in the way that you would expect him. And then, you're stuck if you don't change the attitude.

Q: Mark Schneider, International Crisis Group.

I share the gentleman's view, Dr. Abdullah, that your role in government was extremely important during those first several years.

I don't think you have to be worried about the next administration being totally focused on domestic issues. I have no doubt that Afghanistan will be a major, you know, priority for whatever administration takes office. In that regard, however, you didn't talk a lot about the degree of security currently in the country. Last week we saw the bombing at the Serena Hotel. I was there a month ago, and I think that the concern about security, not just in Kabul but around the country, was extremely high.

Since you mentioned the rise in the capacity of Taliban, the United Nations now has almost written off the south and the east of the country in terms of the ability to carry out reconstruction activities on a sustained basis because of the levels of insecurity. It's now entirely sort of painted in extreme risk right now, and I'm interested because there are two elements there. One is the capacity of the Taliban to come across the border, which relates to Pakistan, and the other is really the capacity – and this goes to Dr. Tuchman Mathews' comment about the structure of the international military force in Afghanistan. I think there's a question whether it needs to be a restructuring of the division between the U.S. and NATO in terms of the command structure, and also on the civilian side. We have a competing, if you will, focus of power between NATO, the EU, the U.N. and the major bilateral supporters, including the United States. I mean, it seems to me those issues relate to the ability to change the nature of security to permit the kind of reconstruction and governance that is necessary.

MR. ABDULLAH: That's right. Security, especially in the past one or two years, it has not improved at all but rather we have seen a negative trend. In between, there are some things which might help security in the mid-term or long-term. For example, those core leaders of Taliban, which were leading the fight within the country, within Afghanistan, were targeted and they are not there anymore, so this should be considered as a positive thing, in long-term, which will have its impact.

But there are one or two other things which has happened in the country, which is also in the same way affects the long-term prospect of security in a negative manner; that was a positive side. For example, it was 12 months ago that there was a deal in Musa Qala Afghanistan, and as a result of that there was an agreement with the local leaders. At the surface of it was such that it is an agreement with the local leaders, but as a result of that Taliban took root in Musa Qala. And for the first time after 2001, Musa Qala had turned into a training camp for Chechnyans, for Uzbeks, for Arabs, for Pakistanis, for everybody else, like the old days. So Taliban took advantage of that situation. And then, a few weeks ago Musa Qala was liberated, but there were like 1,000 or 2,000 Taliban already there, and then we had some casualties of Taliban; they left that area. They have gained strength, and they are gone to some other places, and they will hit us back.

Some of these flaws in the strategy will have a lasting impact on security in Afghanistan. What was the message from Musa Qala 12 months ago? That we have to make a deal with Taliban, or it's not for us, it's not for Afghans; even if we don't do it, somebody else will do it. So that has changed the perception of the people; it has affected the psyche of the people. In statistics, in the statistics, we might have a few statistics which will make us more hopeful but in fact, the overall impact has created such a perception is not helpful at all. And I don't want to put myself for a second in a district which is liberated. And it's okay, the government is that; and the neighborhood's district is with the Taliban. At

any time, this district could be overrun. So this is another aspect of security, but when it comes to the military strategies we are all aware of the constraints among the NATO allies back home, their public opinion and so on and so forth.

The right strategy will be to make use of that, what we have, what we can change for good. Of course, why not? But we have to use it in a better way. So this area of stability to extend – stability and security should be consolidated in the areas that we consider it stable, and this area should be extended. At the same time, a more focused effort on those areas which are considered instable, different matters and different ways will work, and there isn't a universal matter to apply to that.

Q: Thank you. My name is Almut Wieland-Karimi, I work for the German Friedrich Ebert Foundation. And I would like to follow up on Mark Schneider's question –

MR. ABDULLAH: Which foundation?

Q: The Friedrich Ebert Foundation. We met in Kabul, so we might recall.

So I wanted to follow-up on Mark Schneider's question on the security situation, and you have explained the situation, especially in the south and in the east, and you have mentioned the Taliban. But I've been wondering whether there are other forces opposing the peace process inside Afghanistan. You've also mentioned the role of the neighboring countries, and I was wondering whether you could give us an assessment of other groups like criminal gangs, like maybe former Mujahideen groups, who are also not happy with this peace agreement and trying to find new opportunities. Since you have a lot of insight, maybe you could explain to us it's not only the Taliban, al Qaeda and who else we should support the Afghan government in opposing or integrating into the peace process.

MR. ABDULLAH: Sure. The fact that the composition of Taliban is not just the Taliban as such; it's also criminal gangs; it's also drug mafia. It's also, perhaps some people with grievances. There is no doubt about it, that's the overall composition. In regards to – when I mentioned about the lessons of the past, one lesson would be from this DDR process. We have demobilization, disarmament, and reintegration. I fail to find anybody to explain to me what is that R – reintegration – means, in real terms, for thousands or perhaps for tens of thousands of people who are in the jihad against the Soviets or in the resistance against the Taliban.

What does that all mean? Apparently, it meant \$100 towards the end of the year, once they accepted that they will give up their arms as a sort of lifetime reward for people who had no choice but to stay in those circumstances, no other opportunities but to stay in those circumstances. So this is a real factor for insecurity, so those thousands of people which know how to fight, and if it ends up in a situation that there is no destiny, no prospect for them – some might have been, and some have been, of course, reintegrated in the national army but in a broad sense, this is very insignificant part of it. There would be recruits for criminal gangs, for the Taliban and so on and so forth. But as a whole, apart from Hiqpatyah's (ph) people former Mujahideen parties, you do see a group of people which are supportive of the Taliban and are involved in violence against the people of creating more insecurity in the country. So there are those interests among individuals and

so on and so forth, but as a whole, there's a lot of opposition to the government one way or another, but at the same time people are not involved in violence against the citizens of Afghanistan.

Q: David Isby.

Dr. Abdullah, sir, the trans-border nature of much of the insecurity coming from Pakistan has been often commented on, and due to the current crisis in the Pakistani governance. Throughout your career you have had to negotiate with the Pakistani government, in good times and bad, and I'm wondering if you can give any specific directions as to how the United States might act to get better results from Islamabad to help the situation in Afghanistan.

MR. ABDULLAH: It's important, and I might not be in a position to suggest something for the U.S. side, but my experience would be that while the focus is sometimes on the immediate result and immediate outcome, one should be able to put it into perspective for the long-term result.

That being said – but you could be dragged in a sort of long-term strategies which is time-consuming and sounds very logical. You should be aware of that factor as well, at the same time. So you need immediate results; you also want to see how it happens in the course of time. But sometimes, sort of pull-along strategies which are the best logic inherent in it would be presented to you, but then the underlying factors will develop quite against that. Always be aware of that sort of logic when it's dealing with these sort of complex situations.

It was at the Carnegie Endowment, perhaps in late 2002 or early 2003, that I said that there are terrorist training camps inside Pakistan. Oh my god, I took everything; they attacked me personally and they said that I was working for President Karzai in this restaurant somewhere, everything that – (chuckles) – because of that, and it was the night. And it was in late 2003 or 2004 when they announced that now, they are attacking those training camps. So that has been part of my experience but at the same time I am involved in a general peace assembly, which was a good initiative between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and a good dialogue venue between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Unfortunately, today because of the developments in Pakistan since the announcement of emergency, we haven't been able to follow it, but for us it is another way of dealing it. But always be aware of those different methods.

Q: Yeah, Kumar from Amnesty International.

Dr. Abdullah, welcome in a different role, and I'm sure you'll be more forthcoming because no government restrictions happen to you at this time. I was a little late, so pardon if I repeat any of these questions.

My first one is, is there any increase in ethnic tensions within Afghanistan, between Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras and Pashtuns? Second is, there are a lot of so-called moderate Taliban who are part of the government now, Karzai's government. How is it affecting

President Karzai's role in dealing with Taliban? Third, is Iran and India; are they involved in any covert or overt tensions inside Afghanistan? Thank you.

MR. ABDULLAH: Did you say that you had one question or – (laughter).

There has been some ethnic polarization, I should say, in the course of the past few years – that's to say the least. And when I mention that the consensus which existed and the process has started with that consensus, it's not that anymore. But fortunately, while the people have legitimate grievances they will not take it at any stage and they have not taken it at any stage beyond that legitimate framework of a debate or freedom of expression or political movement. But then, sometimes political elite take it far beyond wherever they can take it, which is dangerous, which is confusing the people.

And on that front, about moderate Taliban, it is something that I need to educate myself further about – (laughter) – but when the process started, the one process, there was one idea that – no use for a conference or for taking Taliban out; let's wait to bring moderate Taliban into this state, and then we'll take care of the situation. When there was this Buddha (?), the issue of Buddha, everybody was hoping that we are talking to the moderate Taliban. There were two living in Kabul today, of those moderates which were being talked about. At the same time, the explosives were prepared and everything was done, and once it was tried and it didn't work, and then it was demolished, but the talks with the moderate Taliban continued up to that moment. So that's a critical point.

There is no moderation in their agenda. If you're talking about the agenda of Taliban, there is no moderation. It is the re-establishment of the Islamic emirate of Afghanistan, which means the emirate and the Mullah Omar. There, you don't find a moderation. If you are talking about the people, which under circumstances they have to be in that side or this side – we had it in the old days, the communists and non-communists and so on and so forth, that applies to the Taliban movement as well. There will be a lot of people which, as a result of the circumstances, stay there but they are today perhaps after an opportunity which we should look into that, or we should act more proactively to provide those opportunities for these sort of people to come and join the peace process. But our hands should be very clear. The constitution of Afghanistan should be accepted by them, giving up violence and not resorting to violence, terrorism, the rights of the people, and so on and so forth. In that sense, the government of Afghanistan should put more efforts. But there is no moderation in their agenda; at least, I don't know about it.

Iran started playing a constructive role from the Bonn agreement, and continued as such. But recently, we hear the post that it is arming some Taliban groups, some arms have been found according to the claims which have been made. That's one, and apart from that there is a lot of pressure on Afghan refugees in Iran. We know that it is an issue that Afghanistan should be able to deal with it, and it's the issue of the Afghan citizens and we should enable the environment for the return of the refugees, sooner rather than later but at the same time, it's a big humanitarian issue and there has been a lot of pressure from time to time, which has led to the constraints about the relations between Afghanistan and Iran.

At the same time, there were one or two other things which are not that necessary. We can deal with it in a better way. For example, when this national front was formed

everybody said in the government that it's the formation of Iran, which I don't think that that's the case but just to play with the internal issues as such, that it gives a different perception to the neighboring country will not be helpful.

India's been a partner in construction of Afghanistan, reconstruction of Afghanistan, and I think the overall assistance is something like \$700 million for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. There has been always this issue which we had to deal with it, in Pakistan they consider India's role in a different way, and always they put it in the context of their own relations.

We have tried to build linkages and bridges with all countries, including these two countries in the neighborhood of Afghanistan, and assure them that our relations with one country will not be detrimental to our relations to another, but sometimes it is very difficult to be able to convince countries.

But, in an overall sense, Pakistan has been helping in reconstruction of Afghanistan. And our relations with Pakistan in other areas like trade, commerce, country relations, peoples-to-peoples relations, there has been a lot of positive development. But it's been the issue of Taliban which today has turned into a big, big, much bigger challenge for Pakistan itself, which have prevented us from putting this issue behind us for real.

MS. TUCHMAN MATHEWS: We have two questions up front, and then I'd like to take a few in the back. The lady right here.

Q: My name is Nazida Karemi (ph), correspondent for Ariana Television from Afghanistan.

I have two questions, Doctor, one Dari, one English. Is it possible to give me – in Dari?

MR. ABDULLAH: If you allow me to answer one question in Dari.

Q: (In Dari.)

What would be your position for next administration in Afghanistan? And the next question, in view of all these problems in Afghanistan, what do you think about future in Afghanistan?

MR. ABDULLAH: (In Dari.)

The question was about my role in the future administration. My answer was that, I don't know how much I would be liked by the next administration, so I don't know if I can play a role but, as far as Afghanistan is concerned – I mean, Afghanistan's new administration – (chuckles) – then I will not hesitate from helping the people one way or another, that's as far as I can say at this stage.

Q: Thank you. It's already late, and you have touched upon some of the issues I thought of asking, and wishing you to comment on – I'm the former head of the embassy of

Denmark in Afghanistan, and thanks for all the good collaboration we have had over the years. Now I'm with the World Bank here in town.

One issue was more internal, the other regional. Internally, I guess that for some of us it has been a bit frustrating to see that apparently it has been difficult for Afghan political forces to kind of get the national following to a mission that would take on the Taliban ideology head-on, to push the ideology back and not be afraid of being shamed as un-Islamic but defend a position that kind of pinpoint the hideous nature of the Taliban venture. That was the national one.

The regional one you touched upon, but could you elaborate on how India may be even more helpful than it is today in order to, on the political front, do maybe more in order to seek peaceful solutions into Afghanistan because, as you say, Pakistan is the key and the lens of Pakistan, when it looks at Afghanistan, very much is through its relationship to India and its fear of India. Thank you.

MR. ABDULLAH: Thank you.

I think I agree with you, that there is among the political forces in Afghanistan and political elite in Afghanistan, there isn't enough understanding on the basis of those common visions, which everybody shares, in order – not only to deal with the challenge of the Taliban, but also to seize the opportunity to build a nation and lay the foundation for the future, stable Afghanistan. And I think that the initiative should come from President Karzai himself. The others also have a responsibility, everybody else, and he should reach out to all forces, all leaders, and put behind – be able to sort of digest some of the personal views and personal feelings towards some people. This is leadership, this is what is required; this is what is expected. And as I mentioned, it's not just for this generation, it's also for the future generation. And it's a pity that in a situation that a majority of the people are supportive of a process and willing to contribute positively towards it, the situation is such a mess that is not helping us towards getting there.

So it is everybody's responsibility and once or twice President Karzai asked me if I could play a role, which wholeheartedly I offered my service in that regard, but then of course, there has to be a process and some serious agendas in order to take this forward in a broad understanding, which is possible. I'm not saying that it is impossible, but the initiative should come from the president himself, and I think he takes one step, the others might take two further steps towards that goal.

I think in regards to India, which you mentioned, I elaborated a little bit about the amount of support that are giving to Afghanistan so far and the role which they are playing, but at the same time, we are in an environment that we should also take into account concerns which are there, legitimate concerns. The only thing which we didn't do and shouldn't do in the future: to give like the right of veto for one country over our relations with the others. That's not in the interest of Afghanistan. That applies to many situations, but other than that, wherever we can get cooperation and there is a willingness, which is there in India, and India considers stability in Afghanistan in their prime interest, we should take advantage of that. If you can do it further, why not?

MS. TUCHMAN MATHEWS: Let me take a few in the back or gentleman right here in the middle?

Q: Al Milliken (sp), Washington Independent Writers. What kind of medical care are the citizens of Afghanistan receiving now and how does this compare with the time you were in the government and before?

MR. ABDULLAH: The overall statistics are such: our minister of health says that 85 percent of the population has access to primary healthcare. That's the statistics. But like every other area of life there, it is very difficult to judge it that that's really – what does that mean? Then, when you elaborate it, it is too little, but we have been able to do so. But I think in some areas, there have been successful examples in terms of prevention of diseases, vaccination, there have been national vaccination programs, which have helped the health situation. The maternal mortality rate has been brought down, child mortality has been brought down, but still it's around those worst, like in the five, six worse cases around the world.

So there has been improvement in that respect, and sometimes the security situation affects the situation, but apart from that, it is – there have been some improvements in the cities, in the provinces in the rural areas. There are clinics, hospitals, the quality is of course under question, the quality of healthcare, that's a big question mark. But still, the situation has improved and health and education were considered as two priorities and perhaps the most expenditure has been – most resources have been allocated to that, but it is the issue of dealing with limited resources all the time and how to prioritize it. It has been indeed on the priority list. The situation has improved, but a lot more of course needs to be done.

MS. TUCHMAN MATHEWS: Yes, right here? Go ahead.

Q: Ajmal Ghani from the Afghan American Chamber of Commerce. Welcome back, Dr. Abdullah, to Washington. While most of us have supported the current process in Afghanistan, and tremendous progress has been made since 2001, as you have pointed, and besides the external forces, negative forces in Afghanistan, the good governance and ability of this administration is in question in Afghanistan today. We all know you have a foreign minister that has a vote of no confidence from the parliament. The security is getting worse. You know, the interior minister – or the ministry has been called corrupt by a U.N. finding. The economy looks good on paper, but there's lack of jobs, price hikes, corruptions, and there's no more leadership.

What specifically needs to be done in order to correct that or to change that in order to bring Afghanistan back to the process that we all supported in the past?

MR. ABDULLAH: Thank you. There is no doubt that the role of governance and good governance is essential if you are talking about security or development or whatever. That's an essential part. And I mentioned briefly, I sort of touched it briefly, and I didn't go into some details and the situation deliberately. You might understand my position in that, perhaps the next time former interior minister, Minister Jalali speaks he will be more open and candid than me.

And the president talks about it, he talked like a few weeks ago about corruption and widespread and deep-rooted corruption in his own cabinet. Then the people expected him to take action. And though it was later on in another interview by the president, I learned about a different of what he meant on his initial remarks, but still, if that's the case, if the president of the country says that there is corruption in the government, it has to be taken care of. And that's what the people expect. And then the president talks about bringing changes into the cabinet, bringing changes – I mean, positive changes in the cabinet – that people expect him to deliver.

When these things are not happening, of course the views of the people will be affected. And I think these are opportunities which are left for us and we have to seize it. Between now and general elections, it is a must that the people see a positive change, not the sort of the stalemate between the parliament and the executive with the involvement of the judiciary and so on and so forth, that's the critical point. But when it comes to general elections, upcoming general elections, it's important that the international community make sure that it is free and fair.

I mean, I know the conditions and circumstances in our country, and when we say free and fair elections everything is relative, but it has to be seen the same way in the eyes of the people of Afghanistan. The impact would be much more than in any other country because from what I started with, the conclusion of the people will be that it will not work. It doesn't work in this country. It's a good instrument, but it doesn't work in this country, and then this will be, god forbid, the start of another round of instability. That's a must – it's the most critical point when it comes to the upcoming general elections.

But between now and then, if the local governance is as such as it is, if the central government performs in the same way as it does, then you will only witness a growing of that gap between the people in the government, which will in turn lead to further weakness and then as a result a strengthening of the enemies of the state. We should accept that the Taliban are the enemy of the state; they don't believe in statehood, in nationhood, their agenda is far beyond that. When they see these things, they will use it in their advantage, and look at their – the clarity of their strategy and look at the confusion of what we do and the messages that we give.

The Serena Hotel, which, Mr. Schneider, you mentioned earlier, it was like the symbol of security in Kabul. Everybody believed that this a place that you could go and you'll feel secure, go to gym, or have a cup of tea or have lunch or dinner or stay there when foreign ministers were visiting Afghanistan. They hit it very badly. This is the report that I am giving it – I was in Germany when this happened, and I contacted our friends back home.

I learned, that's from a far away, and so there could be – the real situation might be something else – that it was two months ago that there were reports about it, that this is a target. And this – the minister of the interior of Afghanistan had received that report. And for two days, three days, there were a few policemen around, no Afghan police providing security or supporting security, it was only the local – the security for the hotel – which was in place. So they know what they want to do and we're not effective enough to prevent them from getting where they want to.

MS. TUCHAMN MATHEWS: Frederic.

Q: Frederic Grare from Carnegie. Dr. Abdullah, a question calling for a long answer. Since this event is taking place in the run-up to Bucharest, I would like you to elaborate a bit on what you said earlier regarding the need to develop different strategies in the stable areas and instable areas. Could you be more specific about it and tell us exactly what that means, both in terms of use of resources, use also of soldiers on the ground and so on.

MR. ABDULLAH: We know this relations between the NATO allies is a very sensitive issue. (Chuckles.) In the past one or two days, I think we are all educated about it.

I mean, for us as Afghans, every contribution is important. There are countries which are doing, in size or in number, it looks like not that significant, but it's important that too many countries are in this process of supporting Afghanistan; this is why. Knowing about the internal dynamics a little bit about some European capitals and the public opinion have a touch of it, it will be extremely difficult to push some countries beyond these national caveats which they have been given a mandate by their parliaments or their administrations. It would be extremely difficult to push them to ignore these caveats and to take a – (inaudible) – the role. But of course, if on top of what they have been doing today in Afghanistan, something else could be done, why not?

Now, having taken into account these two factors, I think in the areas in which countries are willing to do, if it has worked with them to get some more work done in those areas because the needs are there in the stable areas, in secure areas, wherever. So if there are countries which are willing to do things in some parts of the country but have constraints in moving beyond that, get them to do it more in those areas so, as I mentioned earlier, stability and security is consolidated further in those areas and extended from those areas to the areas which we consider not secure or stable at the same time.

There are one or two things which should be like the red line for the international side. That's like talking to the Taliban. If it is talk, if it is negotiation, if it is a dialogue, whatever it is, it's not the work of the foreign countries in Afghanistan. It is not the work of the PRT or a military post or a military setup or the intelligence of another country. Of course, they can help Afghanistan, enable Afghanistan further and support Afghan institutions to do it based on a strategy which is sound and acceptable for everybody, but at the same time, some of these things have to be taken care of. Then, it's important not to give different messages. If somebody says that we should be there in Afghanistan for 50 years and then the people hear that there is a debate that it's the next autumn or the other autumn that it will be decided by another country either to leave or to stay in Afghanistan, the people will be confused.

And also, it's a time – I think it will be an opportune time for NATO to deal with some aspects of the perception of the people of Afghanistan as of today. The perception will – there will be two perceptions, or too many, but two extremes. One, NATO, the United States is there in order to establish a permanent base, for the sake of establishing a

permanent base in Afghanistan, that's one. The next one would be that you wake up tomorrow and everybody will be gone, okay?

So it's a wide-range perception, but in between, there is a widespread perception that also it sounds very strange. There is a widespread perception that perhaps the international community is not here to prevent us from Taliban's return back, but somewhat, the Taliban were kicked out a door and then they will be brought back through the window. That's a perception, and I know it's so cynical to think that way, but it is a real perception among the people and it has to be dealt with through giving messages and through the actions and programs.

MS. TUCHMAN MATHEWS: The gentleman right here.

Q: Jeroen Cooreman from the Belgian embassy. I have actually two questions, one is on economic development. I mean, when you look at the statistics, you see that Afghanistan has boosted enormous economic growth, but in reality that growth seems to be mostly confined to Kabul, and now we all know that if we want to win the battle over the future of Afghanistan, over a democratic Afghanistan, and to root out Taliban rule, we have to win the hearts and minds of the people in the rural areas. How can that be done realistically in the current security situation and political situation?

And the second question is on the role of the United Nations. We now have the appointment of a new representative to the secretary general, a very high level appointment, Paddy Ashdown, which is in some way an expression from the international community and the United Nations that they want the U.N. to play a more and effective or bigger, more important role. So what are your expectations of what the U.N. and what Mr. Ashdown can do and should do in Kabul?

MR. ABDULLAH: As far as the economic development and economic situation with the people is concerned, at the beginning, we paid perhaps little attention to the issue of agriculture, and we missed the point that some 85, 80 percent of the people of Afghanistan are living on agriculture. And of course today, unfortunately, drug cultivation makes a part of it, a small part of that, but with grave consequences, but at the same time, it's the economy of the people.

And I recall in our second ADF, Afghanistan Development Framework, conference in Kabul that was like one or two years or a year and a half after the establishment of the interim government, in the economic development program of Afghanistan, or development of Afghanistan, we didn't have agriculture as a title. And somebody reminded us.

So this is our inexperience and perhaps that is a lack of focus on the priorities or losing sight of prioritization of the situation in Afghanistan. That – we missed some opportunities and that also perhaps will be regarded as a factor, as well as narcotics is concerned. But then of course security will have its impact on the situation. The focus was on building the infrastructure, which was important of course. Capacity building has been a failure of Afghanistan, and billions of dollars have been spent on technical assistances with very little impact on the ground.

Now, despite all these problems, the people of Afghanistan invested a lot, billions of dollars were invested by the people, for example in construction and the other areas of life. So it's a mixed picture, but full of challenges. The U.N. role and the Lord Paddy Ashdown's role as the future as the high representative of the United Nations, though it is still not a well defined role, but as an Afghan citizen, this will be like the ideal situation for me, that if the representative plays a role in coordinating further among the international community, that was meant to be the main role. And we talked about lack of coordination earlier, or at least I talked about the aspects of it, which means lack of coordination.

If that is being taken care of with such a high representative, high profile representative, and also kind of the role that – interacting with the capitals – in the capitals, the issue of Afghanistan is being dealt in the administrations in the level of directors to make it – to take it a little bit further, that though it – as a state is a priority, as far as the policy of the countries are concerned, but in practice it is being dealt with not in the level of principles of deputy principles but much lower than that.

So to coordinate it there, back in Afghanistan, as well as to give it a high profile and maintain that high profile with the international community, it has to – that's a positive development. But then the other aspect of it which we have to be wary about it, we shouldn't give a perception that now it is a situation that the – rather than Afghan-ization of the process, further Afghan-ization of the process, more role is being given to the internationals. That will have negative repercussions; this has to be – I'm not saying that this will, this is designed to do so, but it will give that sort of impression and we should avoid that impression.

MS. TUCHMAN MATHEWS: Let me take one or two more. Are there any in the back that we have missed? Yes, right here? Can you?

Q: Hi, I'm Susan Cornwell with Reuters. Would you like to comment more directly on the capabilities of NATO forces to deal with counterinsurgency in Afghanistan? This was, you know, what Gates was quoted as saying, and he didn't entirely back off of his concerns generally about, you know, saying that our forces are not – we're not really trained for this. They were trained to fight the Soviet Union coming through the Fulda Gap, so.

MR. ABDULLAH: As a whole, I think even the American military learned a lot in the process of how to deal with this insurgency and this type of insurgency in Afghanistan. So I don't think that anybody was equipped to deal with every nitty-gritty part of strategy and tactics when dealing with this sort of insurgency, whether in Iraq or today in Afghanistan. But when it comes to NATO and to ISAF, there is the issue of the mandate, which is not counter-insurgency, which is not counter-terrorism, which is stabilization of Afghanistan and helping the security forces of Afghanistan in training and so on and so forth. That will also differ from one country to another due to their responsibility which they have taken. So it's the issue of the mandate which is there.

And again, coming back to the perception of that, the people of Afghanistan, there was a perception for example when Canada took the role in Kandahar, that there might be a sort of softer approach towards the Taliban. Later on the people learned that this wasn't the

case, but there is an issue in the mandate. I don't think that one or two upcoming senates will be able to deal with this issue; it's a very difficult issue back there in the capitals.

MR. TUCHMAN MATHEWS: There's one more that's – okay, then that will be the last.

Q: Thank you. I enjoyed your speech. I'm Frye Dunn (ph). I'm currently doing an internship for the embassy of Afghanistan and I studied at Williams College. I want to follow up on a question earlier asked about security. As an Afghan citizen, what stands out to be worked on as a priority for me is security. So I specifically want to know your view if you know, if you agree with the fact that one of the reasons for deterioration of security is that lack of attention by the United States government and the international community as opposed to years after 9/11 as the international government and the United States government was committed to work for peace and stability in Afghanistan. And do you see a lack of attention when you compare it with years after 9/11 and do you think it's a significant reasons for deterioration of security? Thank you.

MR. ABDULLAH: Thanks. It isn't only one factor that you could blame it for security, on the security situation in Afghanistan. There are domestic factors, which more or less I covered it earlier – for example if it is a politically stable environment, that helps security. The issues of governance were mentioned earlier and so on and so forth.

As far as our strategy in establishing national institutions are concerned, I think there was a situation in Afghanistan post September 11th that there were non-state actors in charge of the big-sized, middle-sized armies and so on and so forth. That situation should have kind of come to an end and we should have established our national institutions. In doing so, rather than walking it through, we think to jump from that. We dismantled those – because I mentioned at the beginning that the threat perception was somewhat deviated.

We dismantled those forces and we left a vacuum, that also we shouldn't ignore as a factor, and that vacuum was filled by the Taliban, the fact that Taliban were allowed to receive support outside Afghanistan. All these things were important, including the fact that if not losing sight of Afghanistan, but at least Pakistan was not in the loop as such, the whole situation and the underlying factors which were taking place and developing in Pakistan were not in sight, which led to the further negative developments in terms of security.

MS. TUCHMAN MATHEWS: All right, I – Mr. Abdullah has been, as always, a candid and deeply knowledgeable and incredibly patient in answering so many questions. I hope you'll join me in thank him, and –

MR. ABDULLAH: Thank you.

MS. TUCHMAN MATHEWS: And hopefully it won't be so long until you return.

MR. ABDULLAH: Thank you.

(Applause.)

(END)