

**CENTER FOR  
STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (CSIS)**

**PRESS BRIEFING WITH ANTHONY CORDESMAN TO DISCUSS  
AFGHANISTAN FOLLOWING HIS TRIP ADVISING  
GENERAL MCCHRYSTAL AS A MEMBER OF  
HIS STRATEGIC ASSESSMENT GROUP**

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H. ANDREW SCHWARTZ: (In progress) – following his recent stay in Afghanistan. As Tony pointed out on the way in here, on a Wednesday or are we at Thursday today? Wednesday. You can tell I've been on vacation. Yes, on a Wednesday in August, there's very few people I would get up this early for – (chuckles) – except for Tony Cordesman. So with that, Tony?

ANTHONY CORDESMAN: Thank you, Andrew, and thank you very much for coming, ladies and gentlemen. I'd like to stress something at the outset: I'm presenting my views, not those of other members of the strategic analysis group and definitely not those of Ambassador Eikenberry, General McChrystal or any other U.S., NATO-ISAF or other official or officer in Afghanistan.

I was only part of a team of people who had very different views. They were backed by a series of separate military staff exercises, which are not complete, as well as civil efforts. And I think that it should be clear that Ambassador Eikenberry and General McChrystal are going to present their own views when they're ready, as well as the secretary general of NATO and others.

I say this, too, because I'm going to address a much wider range of issues than purely the problem of military strategy inside Afghanistan, which I think really is only one of the problems that need to be addressed. The fact is that we have to go far beyond the normal limits of counterinsurgency. We're involved in an exercise in armed nation-building and we are doing it at a time when we have to see Afghanistan find ways to restructure its government, create an effective government, create effective forces and simultaneously meet challenges like al-Qaida, the Taliban and pressures from outside powers.

Above all, this is a war shaped not by strategy but by years of neglect and systematic under-resourcing. More than any other set of problems, what becomes clear in Afghanistan is that for half a decade, we failed to react, failed to provide the troops, failed to provide the money, failed to provide a structure which focused on the war and which, by all of the outside assessments, wasted vast amounts of the aid money, the military money, the efforts of the people engaged on post-conflict reconstruction activities at a time the country drifted steadily towards crisis and war.

In fact, seven years after we entered the war, what is most striking about Afghanistan is how many people are still acting like this was the first year in Afghanistan, how many of the exercises are disconnected and theoretical, are involved with experiments, have no real operational content or have operational content which is divorced from the overall impact on war-fighting or practical development in the field. And you see these problems are much more critical on the civil side than they are the military side. Virtually all efforts have been stovepiped and dysfunctional, but that dysfunctionality and lack of unity of effort in coordination is far worse on the civil side than it has been on the military side.

I don't want to give the wrong impression. There are some truly outstanding people from every country in every organization I've encountered there. Many of them individually are accomplishing a great deal within the narrow confines of how they are allowed to act. But there is no unity of effort, there is no meaningful campaign plan that ties them together. There is an almost endless series of stovepiped, bureaucratic problems and lack of unity of effort. What should be an integrated civil-military effort and a focus on winning the war in the field is a dysfunctional, wasteful mess focused on Kabul and crippled by bureaucratic divisions. It is further crippled by Afghan corruption, power brokering and by the individual national caveats and tensions within members of ISAF and NATO.

And this is why when we talk about this, we're talking about five centers of gravity, not simply one. Obviously, one is to defeat the insurgency. But the second is to create an effective, coordinated NATO-ISAF effort – a military effort for the first time. The second is to take building up Afghan national security forces seriously, to give them the resources, the goals and structure necessary for war-fighting.

It is to give the Afghan government – and I say that broadly, not the central government but government at every level – capacity and effectiveness enough in the field to win the support of the people, and to deliberately and systematically counter a pervasive pattern of corruption and power brokering which is doing as much to lose this war as the actions of the Taliban and the insurgency.

It is to create an effective, integrated civil-military effort, one that ties together not simply NATO-ISAF, but the U.N. efforts, the member country efforts and the NGO and international community efforts to tie these to measures of effectiveness, to honest accounting and transparency and to a level of integrity which is lacking today and again, helping to lose this war. And finally, there is a sixth center of gravity, which is obvious. That is what's happening in Pakistan, it's what's happening in Iran and it is what is happening in countries outside.

I think you can still win this war. Our problem is not that we face a strong opponent; our problem basically is the need to look very firmly in the mirror and realize how badly we have structured, resourced and managed this war and to see the power vacuum we have created which has empowered the Taliban, al-Qaida and extremist movements.

What do you need to do to win? One is to take this war seriously. One of the things I was struck by inside of Afghanistan is the number of people who said I shouldn't call it a war. For some reason, the word "conflict" is politically correct in Europe. You can't fight a war as a fantasy. You cannot have an effort which is so divided that most of the aid resources go to post-conflict reconstruction in mid-war, which means they're not being used where people need them, they're not serving the interest of the Afghan people and they focus on theoretical development goals which will be meaningless if we lose the war in the process.

You need to refocus the intelligence effort to focus on the nature of the insurgency, not simply finding threat forces in the field and defeating them. If you look at the latest report that came out of the United States and out of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, which came out in June – actually in July – you're going to look through a report which is little more than

rubbish when it comes down to dealing with the threat. It focuses on the kinetic issue. It totally ignores the expansion of Taliban and insurgent influence throughout the country. It provides no maps, no descriptions of the steady expansion of areas of influence. It makes no effort to map or analyze where the Afghan government and NATO-ISAF forces are effective, where aid efforts are effective or to describe the real-world problems in implementing.

We, the United States, are going to have to provide the resources if we want to win. Most of the incremental resources will have to come from us. This means very substantial budget increases, it means more brigade combat troops and it means financing both the civilian effort needed in the field and a near doubling of Afghan national security forces. Those forces not only have to be doubled to provide a minimum level of coverage; we have to face the fact we do not need civil police in a country which has no courts in something like 95 percent of the villages and areas inside the country, has something approaching a court system in really a handful of districts and provinces and where the police cannot survive unless they have paramilitary capabilities and outside support.

It means really coming to grips with the dishonesty, power brokering and corruption of the Afghan central government and, where necessary, bypassing it – working directly with the provinces, working with districts and working with local governments, putting constant pressure on the central government to be honest, effective and develop real-world capabilities, none of which are present in any significant way in most of the areas where this war is being fought.

At the same time, it means coming to grips with our allies. It means finding – to the extent we can – a coordinated unity of effort in both the military side and the civil side that cuts across the stovepiping isolation and dysfunctional nature of what is being done. And finally, it means something which was brought constantly to my attention by people inside the aid community – the problem of corruption, waste and dysfunctional behavior is just as serious in the economic aid effort as it is in the Afghan government.

The kinds of problems documented by Oxfam that have been reported by former senior Afghan officials are problems you hear at every level, in every place you visit. The lack of measures of effectiveness, of transparency, of accountability are a crippling problem that has wasted vast amounts of aid money that should have gone to the Afghan people and to the areas which are critical to winning this war.

And finally, let me just make one last point. When we talk about winning, we are not talking about transforming Afghanistan into some mirror image of the West or accelerating to the point where it becomes a developed country within the foreseeable future. We're talking about basic security, basic stability, basic economic opportunity for the Afghans and creating a country which will be free of international terrorism.

One of the problems we all face in Afghanistan is we have set impossible goals according to impossible timeframes which Afghanistan cannot possibly meet. We need to serve the real needs of the people in achievable ways. If we pursue a dream, we will lose the war. And with those remarks, let me open things up for questions.

MR. SCHWARTZ: We'll take your questions now. If you could identify yourself and your news organization where you're from, that will be very helpful for the transcript. Arnaud.

Q: Tony –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Arnaud, could you hit the microphone please?

Q: Tony, I don't know if you've read the piece in Foreign Affairs – current piece in Foreign Affairs by two scholars. And they are suggesting that there's a way of flipping the Taliban and dividing it and perhaps pushing out the hardliners in favor of people who will be on our side. What do you think of that?

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, I don't want to comment on any given article, Arnaud. But frankly, is the Taliban often drawing on very large numbers of young men in tribal groups, which are basically supporting the Taliban, because the Taliban is there threatening people, providing money and pressure? Because the Afghan government is seen as corrupt and ineffective? Because people want some kind of basic justice system, which seems to be one of the areas where the Taliban has won large-scale popular support?

Could an effective effort in the field change that behavior pattern? Yes, I think it probably could. It did in Iraq. It has done it virtually everywhere where you have been able to move resources and capability into areas dominated by an insurgency. Will given leaders in Afghanistan shift their behavior? Probably. This is not a country dominated by deep, serious conviction that, sort of, jihadist, extremist perversion of Islam is something that really has broad support.

But are there very large numbers of people who really do support these extremist views who are tied to cultures and tribal societies which advocate the Taliban, Hekmatyar, Haqqani? The answer to that is yes. And one of the realities in counterinsurgency is, if you want reconciliation and you want to turn people, you have to show you're winning and you have to show you have capability in the field.

When you try to make a deal in mid-crisis when you're losing and the other side believes you're losing, what happens is what we've already seen in Afghanistan and Pakistan: Every bargain turns into a gain on the part of the extremists. Every supposed ceasefire is followed by either a new military engagement or an expansion of influence on the part of the threat. The idea of flipping the leadership of the Taliban at this point is simply a fantasy.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Tom?

Q: Tom Bowman with NPR.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Tom, could you hit the microphone and, Neal, if you could get Arnaud's?

Q: It seems everyone you talk with agrees with you about increasing the size of the Afghan security forces. Everyone you talk with in Kabul is in agreement on that. But if you listen to what Jim Jones has had to say about asking for more troops, what he told General Nicholson out in Helmand and what Biden has apparently said about his lack of interest in increasing U.S. forces, what about McChrystal's staff and your talks with those folks? Are they in agreement that more U.S. forces are going to have to be sent over there as trainers?

MR. CORDESMAN: Tom, having been involved in the strategic assessment group, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on the views of anyone that I was working with at an official level. I think, however, that if you look at this in terms of any of the field manuals that are written on this subject, if you don't provide those resources and additional brigade combat teams, if you do not, I think, effectively, move the Afghan security forces toward doubling them – which doesn't mean you have to complete this, but you have to do enough, move forward, to win.

I think unless we are prepared to commit those resources, unless we're prepared to do things like double the embassy budget, for example, because for more than half a decade, we've provided less than half of the request that was actually sought by the embassy teams to fund our activities. If we somehow believe that a civilian surge of 700 people and tailoring our force posture to the views of a completely different set of strategic priorities, which is what we had before General McChrystal and Ambassador Eikenberry came in, this is going to win, the answer is no; it's going to lose.

And, quite frankly, it would probably be just as well if people in the National Security Council and the White House made their judgments after they get the assessment they need rather than try to resource constrain an assessment in a way that can lose the war.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Thom?

Q: Thanks. Thom Shanker from the New York Times. I'd like to get your assessment of the sort of order of priorities for al-Qaida and the Taliban. The reason I ask is when the Obama administration ruled out their Afghanistan-Pakistan strategy, the goal was all about smashing al-Qaida international terrorism.

In your comments, Tony, you said that victory would be supplying the basic security, stability, economic opportunity and make Afghanistan free of international terrorism – again, no mention of the Taliban. So unless the Taliban have become international by being in Pakistan, where do they fit and are they simply a subset of the campaign plan?

MR. CORDESMAN: I think when you say “defeating the insurgency,” remember the insurgency is the Taliban, it is Hekmatyar and it is Haqqani. So they are the central focus.

Q: Nobody uses the word “insurgency;” it's all “international terrorism.”

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, I did use both words, so forgive me. But when I say you defeat the insurgency, I'm not talking about al-Qaida; it isn't present in any organized way. We

are talking about a very diverse set of movements and, over time, the separation between al-Qaida's international goals and the goals of the various elements of the Taliban, Hekmatyar, Haqqani are becoming harder and harder to determine. Obviously, we have seen what's called the Pakistani Taliban. The fact is that, for all the rhetoric, you still see Pakistan tolerating the existence of the main Taliban activity inside Pakistan.

I think that my leading source of leaks of sensitive classified information is the New York Times and I could hardly argue with the New York Times in saying that the ISI remains actively present and supporting the Taliban and other movements, that there is no indication that Pakistan is cracking down on the Taliban in the South, that, frankly, if they happen to be Afghan Taliban, it is amazing how difficult it is for anyone in Pakistan to keep them in jail or do anything else to restrain their activities.

But there is obviously a broader part of your question. Afghanistan is only part of the problem with Pakistan. We need to be a lot more honest, strategically, too, about centers and sanctuaries. We are watching problems build up in Yemen and Somalia. There is no one focal point of this kind of international terrorism. So when you ask about the broader campaign, was it misleading to put all of it in al-Qaida in Pakistan and focus on that? Yes. I don't know of anyone in the intelligence community who would take that position seriously. Is it politically convenient? Yes. Is it realistic? No.

MR. SCHWARTZ: We're going to go to Andrew.

Q: Andrew Green (sp) from Reuters. Dr. Cordesman, I take your point that it's about much more than just the military effort, but do you have any rough estimate in terms of how many more brigade combat teams are required there?

MR. CORDESMAN: You know, everyone who is an American citizen is qualified for two jobs. One is to be president and the other is the field marshal which directs all U.S. military and strategic planning. So I can share the ability to give you an exact number of brigade combat teams with every American citizen. But the fact is, there is no easy way to do this. First, it is a major exercise that is going on inside the U.S. and NATO-ISAF team. The figures are one they will come up with and they have the military expertise in the real world to give it.

The second reality is, this is an experiment. This isn't some historical ratio. There is no way to easily calculate this. You're going to have to make the best guess you can and we'll probably learn more from what's happening in Helmand right now about what's necessary because this is the first real systematic effort to come to grips with shape, clear, hold and build since the United States achieved some successes in Eastern Afghanistan where it did have troop ratios which were fairly adequate.

I'd also note that you have all kinds of people quoting historical ratios. There are two points I'd make about this: There is a very good study and draft from Leavenworth – I wish I could quote the author – that documents quite clearly there is no historical basis for these ratios, that you can draw them in many different ways with equal validity.

The second thing is why on Earth a historical ratio based on completely different conditions, technologies, tactics and similar factors should have any relevance is by itself questionable. And, third, if you're wondering why there is a ratio in the field manual, there is a ratio because they felt they had to put something in. And they put the number in over the direct objection of most of the people who were actually working on the field manual who reached the conclusion that these ratios simply don't have general validity.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Bob?

Q: You alluded very briefly to the civilian surge. And I'm wondering, from what you saw over there, is it really unfolding adequately and quickly enough and fully enough?

MR. CORDESMAN: No. No one, I think, would make that argument. It took us six years. It is rather ironic that the Bush administration finally chose to fund an increase in civilians during its last year in office knowing that when they came, they would be arriving under a different presidency. The way that they are trickling in – and “trickling” is the operative term – they can't possibly meet the needs in a place like Helmand. Much of the job will have to continue to be done by the military working with far too few civilians and that will be true at least through the end of 2010.

I think the word “surge” has to be put in quotation marks because we're talking about some day, maybe getting 700 civilians out of which we have never defined how many are going to go in the field, who they are or when they're really arrive. And the actual recruiting is falling far short of the goal.

This is one of the areas, again, where I would hope that we shift from looking at theory to measuring what actually happens in the field because, time and again, what we are getting is reporting of the intention or the plan and not the reality. And you don't win anything with plans; you win them with actual resource deployed effective in doing something.

Q: Why do you think it's not happening?

MR. CORDESMAN: Why is it not happening? Because it takes a long time to recruit people, because there is the rather strange illusion that we have lots of people in the United States who are real experts on Afghan agriculture or are going to fluently speak Dari and instantly wander out into the field and work with tribal groupings.

The fact is, like many of the arguments about smart power, what we do have are a lot of pretty good people who are on multiple tours, some of which we can recruit to go back who have had prior experience in the field. But the idea that we are a country filled with instant experts on Afghanistan willing to work under really grueling, high-risk combat conditions in the field that are instantly going to deploy because the policy shift occurred and are going to do so with the necessary skills, I mean, how much of this is even remotely credible? And, again, what is the operational reality versus the political goal?

MR. SCHWARTZ: Over here.

Q: Siri Nuarva (ph) with VOA's Afghan TV Service. I'm curious – you didn't mention the upcoming elections, both presidential and provincial. And in terms of your five centers of gravity, this whole governance issue is key. So if you would please comment on the security and the hoped-for effectiveness of these elections, please.

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, first, let me say that one of the things we had better learn if we ever do this again is you do not create legitimacy by having people elected. You create legitimacy by providing effective governance in the field to the people who need it. The problem with this election is, first, the provincial elections don't elect governors; the people who come in have absolutely no jurisdiction over money, all of which, thanks to us, goes through the ministries in the central government, which I think at this point in time may have two ministries, maybe three, that are not actively corrupt and ineffective.

There is effectively almost no real staffing of the provincial governments. To the extent people have power, it is by being appointed where you have enough contacts with the president and the power brokers so you have real influence. The district councils, if they are elected, are going to be under people who often don't have an office, much less a staff.

Out of 143 urban or sort of more or less populated areas with dense populations in Afghanistan, the bulk of them, when you really look at it, have almost no government services, court system or functional operations other than aid workers. And out of the 4,000-odd Afghan villages – and these are figures which are, at best, a guess coming out of AID – most of them don't have any meaningful government presence ever.

So what is the election going to do? You know, the joke, I think, throughout Afghanistan is that President Karzai has offered provincial governorships to approximately six times as many people as there are provinces. And the number continues to count. If he wins, it will be an election where people probably legitimately got to vote. But basically, his power brokering going out to people who are corrupt, self-seeking, to get blocks of votes, basically means that, will he have a legitimate election? No, he won't.

If one of his rivals wins, the rival that's most likely will not be from the leading ethnic group. He will inherit this mess of ineffective ministries and the central government we created from the outside, largely to prevent warlords and regional power brokers from taking power. But where we put so much power under the central government and the president that has "let's make a deal" with ex-warlords has in fact empowered them at the expense of people at the provincial district and local levels. So it's a little hard to get emotionally excited about the level of reform that's going to come out of the election.

Q: I have a follow-up on that. Jose Diaz with the Reforma newspaper from Mexico. What's your assessment of the position that the U.S. government has taken towards the Karzai government and, in general, towards the election?

MR. CORDESMAN: I think that the U.S. government has gone to considerable trouble, particularly Ambassador Eikenberry, to make it clear that he will talk to people from the

opposition; that this is not a pro forma election; that the election will have honest registration and honest votes. But the fact is that the change in the team in Afghanistan under Ambassador Eikenberry, General McChrystal and others, came after most of the basic power brokering that will shape the election was done.

So the problems that were reinforced for more than half a decade in, basically, tolerating an increasingly ineffective and corrupt central government are not problems that can be corrected quickly or where you can alter the course of this election.

Q: Hi, Courtney Kube from NBC News. I know you don't want to talk numbers of additional troops in Afghanistan, but could you even give us sort of an idea of what you're talking about? I mean, are you advocating as much as doubling the size of the coalition presence? And then we heard for a long time from Secretary Gates and some military leadership about a concern for too big of a coalition presence; that that would then – local Afghan civilians would turn against the occupiers. It seems like you disagree with that. Is that true, and why?

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, understand first that one of your problems is we're talking about 40 countries-plus, most of which operate under national caveats and restrictions where, at least in some cases, their foreign ministers have openly lied about the level of restraint and limits on their behavior and that of their aid workers. And all of you as journalists have only to look at the Web pages of these governments and contrast what any of you who have been in Afghanistan already know to see the level of that problem.

I think when you talk about the difficulty of a troop presence, there are a number of issues here. First, it would be extremely dangerous to simply have an increase in U.S. brigades, which is the only country that really can deploy significant amounts of additional combat troops. There are two countries that can probably project power – Britain is already, I think, moving toward the limit of what it can easily do.

But if that's done without building up the Afghan forces and putting them in the lead, changing the concept of partnering, bringing in more mentors and trainers, yes, simply putting in more outside NATO-ISAF troops will not, by itself, help. It is something where you have to tailor the increase in U.S. forces to, first, trying to break down these national caveats and barriers within NATO-ISAF and, second, to increases in the Afghan forces, which not only are increases in numbers, but increases in the visibility of the role, increases in their presence in the field, so people see Afghans moving toward the lead, Afghans in the hold mission.

But another aspect of what has happened – and I think anyone who has watched the fighting in Afghanistan is aware of this – why do we have so many problems? Because we go in kinetically, we fight, we defeat the Taliban, often in populated areas, and then we leave. And the Taliban come back. And basically, what you have done is what, at best, is called mowing the grass, because it grows right back. But often, it is to discredit NATO and ISAF and our forces because we go in, create a military clash, civilians and property get damaged or people get killed, and then we leave.

Now, the whole shift in U.S. tactics – and it follows tactics which countries like the Netherlands and Britain and others have also advocated, to shape, clear, hold and build – would do a lot more. It means you go in and you stay. You come in with aid workers. You bring in Afghan police and Afghan forces to provide local security in human intelligence. You're not fighting and refighting. You're not abandoning. You're securing population centers and even though you can't provide the civilian aid workers in time, you are providing aid through the military in critical areas.

And this is not an area of high demand. Often, a very little help in terms of electric power or money to build a local road or dealing with critical water problems can change attitudes very quickly. Bringing in police, at least at the level so people feel secure and they see an Afghan face, can have a major impact. Getting away from the disaster of trying to institute a formal Western justice system from the top down and working to empower local courts and local justice systems is one of the highest priorities for ordinary Afghans. And that's part of this change in tactics.

Q: Adam Levine with CNN. Is, in your mind, the Helmand effort that's ongoing now – which is the clear, hold and build – is it sustainable given the presence the U.S. has? And is it growable beyond Helmand to other areas? And just a second question is, what kind of timeframe do you see for the U.S. actually having an effect in Afghanistan and being able to leave with some true progress?

MR. CORDESMAN: Understand that Helmand preceded the shift in the U.S. Embassy. It preceded the shift in the command of NATO-ISAF. It is an operator, however, which, I think deals with a critical problem. It is the key area in terms of narcotics and fundraising for at least part of the Taliban.

The reason I say it preceded the change in command and leadership on the U.S. side is that part of what has become shape, clear, hold and build is something which requires civilian and military resources, which are going to have to be rushed into an operation which was planned and ongoing before the basic change in strategy took place, and was resourced at the local level.

And that raises serious questions about how effective we can be in staying. In the way that really should take place, we should have large numbers of Afghan partners, we should have civilian aid teams, we should have people go in immediately to sort of provide a clear indication of lasting security and some of the aid necessary for stability.

I believe that we can work around that. But we simply weren't ready to implement the strategy when we began this operation. And that may have problems. I think that there is still a question at every level about when we get some kind of integrated civil-military plans that are translated into actual operations. That has never existed in Afghanistan. This stovepiping has occurred within the military, but it has been much worse within the civilian agencies and there is not, to this point, been coordinated planning and use of resources in the field in effective ways.

I think that this means, probably, Helmand will have to be more improvised than it should. It will be a learning operation – it certainly won't be definitive. Real progress isn't going to come in a few months because of this particular case. And that gets to your second question. I don't think anyone looking at the history of counterinsurgency believes that we can definitively turn this around during the term of President Obama.

We can make a lot of progress. We can probably get to the edge of turning it around if it's properly resourced. But in a recent RAND study, it pointed out that the average duration of an insurgency where the government won was 14 years, and in most of those cases, you resource the insurgency to start with. We wasted half a decade and empowered the enemy for that many years. It's not something you're suddenly going to turn around.

MR. SCHWARTZ: We'll keep going. Mary?

Q: I'm Mary Walsh from CBS News. This is a bleak picture that you are putting forth today. And maybe it's an honest look in the mirror, as you say, but it's not pretty what you're seeing. My question is, is this doable? And is it doable politically, is it doable militarily and with the civil support, as well? And if not, what do you see – what are the consequences of that?

MR. CORDESMAN: I've already said it's doable. "Will it be done?" is a different kind of question. But I think one of the problems we have here – and it is in many ways a shift, I think, that is taking place – is this war has been fought without resources, but above all, without realism. I would invite any of you just at random to look at any national Web page for a country in NATO-ISAF and see how people are describing the war and how much data is actually available on the threat.

This report just came out of the Department of Defense. If any of you look at it and believe that this provides a meaningful description of the pattern of the insurgency, please call me or write a report indicating why you think this is a remotely adequate picture of the insurgency. We have to have transparency and honesty to win conflicts. We have to stop overpromising and underperforming and start overperforming and underpromising.

If we are locked into a climate where we say to our ambassador or our commander in the field in Afghanistan, you can't come in and provide an honest assessment; you can't come in and ask for the resources you need; you can't honestly state the risks – yeah, we'll lose. If they're allowed to do that, and given the resources, if we are willing to work in a systematic way to honestly recognize the weaknesses in the Afghan central government; if we really address the problems in the aid effort and work with our allies, I think we can win this.

But those are important preconditions and, of course, there is the outside risk of Pakistan and Iran. There are wild cards here which we can't easily control.

Q: Mohammed (sp) from the VOA Dari section, Afghanistan section. Talking of expanding the Afghan forces in Afghanistan, in number, actually, while they don't have the modern equipment and weapons and they are complaining every time about using old, kind of, Russian weapons, will they be able to secure the area?

Like, the areas have already been secured by the NATO and ISAF forces; will the Afghan forces be able to sustain their – or stabilize their security in those areas? And the second question is for the NATO-ISAF and U.S. forces to win this war, spending more resources is more effective or having the people of Afghanistan on their side?

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, first, when it comes down to the actual equipment of the Afghan National Army, there are very significant deliveries of the kind of weapons which are actually needed for counterinsurgency. They don't necessarily include jet fighters and main battle tanks.

I think that there also is a real question here: the whole idea that there is a desperate need to replace a functioning AK-47 with a U.S. weapon is one which really doesn't bear much reality in terms of military requirements. A lot of the Soviet-era equipment is perfectly effective for these purposes. And to create local security, you're not going to create Afghan forces in the foreseeable future which are going to operate large numbers of armored vehicles and artillery weapons and sustain them in the field.

Lots of people want lots of things, and my experience after half a century of dealing with the military is they're no different from anybody else: They want everything and they want it to be the best and they want it now. But that isn't really the kind of force development that the Afghan army needs. The Afghan police does need to be equipped. It needs to have survivable facilities. It needs to have enough mobility. But again, that is not the equivalent of the equipment that Western armies have.

And this equipment is not equipment which, at least for the foreseeable future, Afghan forces can sustain. A lot of the details are in a report we put out which describes in some detail what equipment is in delivery, and I'd invite you to look at the numbers. But the key principle here is that we don't need a mirror image; we need effective police that can serve in a counterinsurgency and infantry role in a paramilitary sense. We need an army equipped to fight counterinsurgency, not to deal with a foreign enemy that doesn't exist.

And when it comes down to more military resources, more military resources are not a substitute for providing additional civilian aid and services in the field. The unfortunate reality, however, is that for at least the next year or so, most of the civilian aid work that is actually done in the field is going to have to be done by people in the military, because there is no way to get more civilian aid workers and it's going to take time to develop Afghan capacity, particularly in the field. And that's where this is fought. It isn't fought in a ministry; it isn't fought in Kabul; it isn't fought in a secure compound or embassy.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Question?

Q: All right, we'll have back-to-back from VOA. I'm Al Pessen (sp) from the central news division. Stepping back to what you said earlier, if we set impossible goals and timeframes then we won't be able to meet them; we need achievable goals. Do you feel that – I mean, I

thought President Obama's Af-Pak strategy was supposed to be a pulling back of goals and a limiting of goals – do you feel that didn't go far enough?

MR. CORDESMAN: I think we have to remember that the United States doesn't set the goals here. The goals come from UNAMA, they come from the U.N., they come from things like the Afghan national compact, which basically says that the whole goal of the aid process is to create a long-term development process, which would create a far more developed country that will ever actually exist, at least within the time of that compact, and do so in a sort of environment of post-conflict reconstruction as if the country wasn't at war.

Now, that's a fundamental lack of realism on practically every level possible, and it dominates, really, the bulk of the aid expenditure. I mean, I would invite you all to look at the Oxfam report on what's been happening out there, but you hear it from Afghans as well. You have a situation where some 40 percent of the aid money, in the surge for long-term development, goes back to the donor countries without having any impact on Afghanistan. You have a situation where something like half of the aid is tied to national objectives and goals which aren't necessarily the ones that meet the needs of the Afghan people.

You have a system where the combination of contractors, power brokers creates a process of waste, corruption and non-completion, which is an almost incredible proportion of the money that actually goes out there. I have heard people talk about various Afghan government organizations being effective and honest. It is very interesting to go out there and talk to the people, who find that they actually, time and again, have to complete the project because this honest and effective organization doesn't finish what it starts.

Now, these are problems that President Obama cannot be held responsible for. They're a legacy of the past; they're a legacy of illusions that created the structure that is today's central government, today's aid process. When it comes down to UNAMA, it would be nice to have a head of UNAMA that spent most of his time actually in Afghanistan and who, instead of complaining, actually administered. These are the kinds of goals and things you need to change.

Q: And on the question of timelines – you say there are unrealistic timelines – I know Admiral Mullen and Secretary Gates have said we need to at least begin to turn the situation in 12 to 18 months; is that what you would consider an unrealistic timeline?

MR. CORDESMAN: Again, I think the unrealistic timelines are things like the Afghan national compact, which calls for a process of development that can't possibly occur within the timeframe. Can we make a significant level of progress in Afghanistan in the next 12 to 18 month? Yes, we can. It is going to require an effective, concerted effort, but after all, we don't need to win in the entire country.

A good part of it has seen significant Taliban and other jihadist increase – in the North, in the West – but even in most of those areas, there still is a relatively high degree of security. You've been actually able to improve security significantly in Kabul, where you did put resources into the effort.

We may not have the perfect approach to shape clear, hold and build in Helmand, but it is a major initiative against a very real enemy where we will hold and we will eventually build. We may not have the phasing right this time around, but at least there is a clear effort to get it right and a clear intention to fix it. And that means Helmand may become a model in six to eight months of what we are trying to do.

And at worst, it will be a learning experience, which we can fix over time and use in other areas. I think, again, the issue here is reality. It is becoming operational. If we meet those needs and we provide the resources, that timeframe of 12 to 18 months to make real progress is very realistic.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Chloe.

Q: Chloe Lent (sp) from Le Monde. Since you say the issue is reality, I feel like asking you what your real assessment of the contribution of France since Obama's taken office.

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, I think you've certainly seen a significant improvement, but one reason I have not gone through the list of various national problems – and there are plenty in the U.S. effort – the sheer disconnection of the civil effort on the part of the U.S. from the military effort – the stovepiping at every level in the U.S. effort – is scarcely a model to anyone else.

But does France need to make further changes? Does Germany? Does Britain? Does everyone? Do we need real unity of effort and an integrated civil-military operation? Yes. Is there any country today that serves as a model for the others? No.

MR. SCHWARTZ: John.

Q: All right. Hi, Tony. John Ward, Washington Times. You said that – well, you talked about the security contractor and power broker complex that produces a lot of waste. That's a huge problem – wondered if you have any thoughts on if there's any way to fix or alleviate that? Also, you talked about the average length of the counterinsurgency being about 14 years; can you put that in context of Iraq? It doesn't seem that we're on track for it to last that long there.

MR. CORDESMAN: I said it was a RAND study. I didn't – you know, my skills as a prophet – (laughter) – CSIS allows us to do analysis. When it comes down to prophecy, it tends to be actively discouraged. (Laughter.)

MR. SCHWARTZ: Tony is the closest thing we have to a prophet, though.

MR. CORDESMAN: I think I thank you. (Laughter.) No, seriously, I think that the real issue in any of these wars is, what is the timeframe, what are the conditions that suit that particular conflict? Any effort to generalize across insurgencies – I mean, all of you, if you paid any attention to this, have probably heard about the British experience in Malaysia. Exactly what that has to do with anything today, and particularly Afghanistan and Iraq, escapes me almost as much as why we should treat Afghanistan as if it was Northern Ireland or El Salvador.

I don't believe – these are warnings. Wars take time; they take strategic patience; they take, basically, as long as they take; they are not things with predictable timeframes in moments where you can apply an exit strategy. In terms of your broader question with contracts, it's important to note a lot is being done, depending on the country. One way to solve the problem is basically to only give people discretionary money in the Afghan government if it's tied very clearly to transparency and to measures of effectiveness.

That shows people that, over time, they get more aid if they actually perform and meet basic tests. One just key test would be if all of the countries in NATO-ISAF actually complied with the ministry of finance requirement in Afghanistan to report on their aid activities. You know, you can complain about the Afghan government with, I think, great justice, but I can see no honest reason why any country providing aid from the outside is not complying with the basic financial requirements that the Afghan government has set up for transparency.

When we provide aid at the provincial or the district or the local level, particularly at the local and the district level, we can be certain that it goes to Afghans for Afghan projects. We don't need to use contractors; we can use the Afghans themselves. There are blacklists of contractors – by name, not by organization. There is a sort of musical contracting process in Afghanistan where you keep changing the name of your firm and the power broker hides behind a different corporate name, as do the people in the corporation.

And they go out and, again, repeat the process of corruption. Basically, identifying individuals openly and blacklisting them would have very clear impact, and you don't have to go through the problems of prosecution or creating an impossible legal set of requirements. And there are a whole list of these measures, which people have been examining and which they're beginning to introduce.

The fact it's taken more than half a decade to get to elementary financial and fiscal responsibility is, I think, a pretty common indictment of the U.N., the international community and every country that's an aid donor. And let me note that the need for measures of effectiveness, just to show that you needed to project in the first place, that it's completed and it has lasting impact – is something which should be required of everyone.

This is not simply a matter of governments. The fact you're a non-governmental organization doesn't mean you're honest or effective. I would say that probably, there are twice as many non-governmental organizations in Afghanistan as there would be if there was any honesty and transparency as to the performance of many of these groups.

Q: And you said the blacklists are beginning to be implemented in Afghanistan?

MR. CORDESMAN: No, I said that the – some of them are – but the fact is that while it would seem that UNAMA has them, it's not clear UNAMA is using them.

Q: Ravi Khan. I'm from VOA TV (ph). Considering all that you said, what steps do you think the Obama administration should take to make it possible?

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, I thought I'd outlined those in some depth, and certainly, I've outlined them in the report we issued. But again, you have to resource this or you have to press within the United States for a unified, integrated civil-military effort that is operational – not merely a matter of plans. You need to deal with the reality of Afghan governance – work around the problems in the central government until they can be fixed, deal with Afghan needs in the field.

You need to put pressure on your allies not for impossible demands but simply for a concerted effort to break down the stovepipes, barriers, national caveats and restrictions, which make a lot of the current effort ineffective or wasteful. You need an honest assessment of the threat; people need to know what's actually happened there. You can't really continue with the kind of reporting we've had in the past.

I think you need to honestly say to the American people, as does everyone who is involved in this, this won't be over quickly or easily. The military phase may be something you can reduce fairly sharply in a matter of years, but if you're not prepared to provide sustained aid to one of the poorest countries in the world – and that does cost money and it does take effort, even once security and stability are achieved – then all of those military gains are going to be wasted.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Arnaud?

Q: Tony, it's generally accepted that the war's unwinnable as long as the enemy has safe havens in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan; what is your view on the prospects of this happening?

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, first, I don't think that's true; I think that it is unwinnable as long as you don't have anything like the Afghan forces to provide local security. It is unwinnable as long as they can cross the border into a vacuum in terms of government services and aid. But these are not vastly popular movements. They are often, increasingly dependent on foreign volunteers. At the local level, even in the Pashtun areas, the number of people who seem to actively share the Taliban's ideology is still very limited.

So I think that it would be far more desirable if Pakistan took an active role if it acted on its occasional words, as distinguished from simply issued rhetoric when it comes under pressure. But can you create a relatively stable Afghanistan against what are actually relatively small Taliban Hekmatyar-Haqqani movements? Yes, you can. The problem is, you can't do it unless you can win the population centers, unless you actually can achieve hold and build.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Great. Thank you very much for coming to our briefing today with Dr. Anthony Cordesman at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. A video and a transcript of this will be available at [www.csis.org](http://www.csis.org). Thanks very much.

MR. CORDESMAN: Thanks very much. Thank you.

(END)