

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

**CONGRESS AND AFGHANISTAN: COMMITTING TO A STRATEGY  
FOR SUCCESS IN UNCERTAIN TIMES**

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**SPEAKERS:  
REP. ADAM SMITH (D-WA),  
CHAIRMAN, HOUSE ARMED SERVICES SUBCOMMITTEE  
ON TERRORISM, UNCONVENTIONAL THREATS, AND CAPABILITIES**

**TUESDAY, OCTOBER 6, 2009  
5:30 – 6:30 PM**

*Transcript by  
Federal News Service  
Washington, D.C.*

ANTHONY CORDESMAN: Ladies and gentleman, the Congressman does have votes coming up, so if I could ask you to take your seats. I think it is scarcely necessary to point out how important this issue is and how timely it is. And I think even though Congressman Smith has asked me to keep the introduction as short as possible, we're particularly fortunate this evening. We have someone who is a member of the Intelligence Committee, who chairs the subcommittee on terrorism and – let me get it straight – unconventional threats and capabilities, and someone who has extensive experience and travel to Afghanistan and to the area and who I think can also look at strategy in a broad way, tie it to resources, which is something the current debate often omits.

So I think I've reached the suitable point in the introduction, Congressman, and ladies and gentlemen, let me introduce Congressman Smith.

(Applause.)

REPRESENTATIVE ADAM SMITH (D-WA): Thank you very much. I really appreciate the opportunity to come to speak about this very important topic. I appreciate CSIS's work on this issue, helping to drive debate that many folks are having. It's an interesting time in Congress because so much of our focus is on the domestic challenges that we have. The first part really wasn't that good anyway, so I wouldn't worry about it. (Laughter.)

The focus in Washington, D.C. right now is so much on the domestic issues. We have significant economic challenges, as you're all aware, certainly starting with the financial services industry, high unemployment, many transitions going on throughout our economy and the ongoing battle over health care. That's where the bulk of the public's focus is. But every little bit as important as those issues is our ongoing struggle against al-Qaida, and in particular our efforts in Afghanistan and in Pakistan. This is a critical issue.

I represent Fort Lewis army base in my district. We have lost over a dozen soldiers in the last month from Ft. Lewis in Afghanistan, and it's certainly coming home there, and the threat from that region is very, very real. It is something that we need to focus on. The biggest point I want to make is how far away we were in January of 2009 from having a cohesive strategy in Afghanistan, whether it was the focus shifting to Iraq, a belief that after the Taliban fell so quickly in 2001, whatever it was, we did not give the attention, the resources, or the planning that was truly necessary to be successful in Afghanistan and in that region for too long, and it put us behind the eight ball in a very, very important part of the world.

Now efforts are ongoing to fix that. At the top of that list is General Stanley McChrystal, who is in charge now in Afghanistan. I have enormous confidence in General McChrystal. I was just over there recently and have met with him many times and he has an unvarnished way of looking at things, which is exactly what we need. We need to understand exactly what is happening over there, what the challenges are, what we've done wrong, and what we need to do

better. So we're undergoing that process and I think that's perfectly appropriate to have a very wide-ranging debate about how to put a plan in place.

I want to hit upon just four quick points. I say that at the outset. It may wind up being more than that but we'll try to keep it to four, and then take your questions. The first thing is just how important this region is. As folks are talking about the difficulties in Afghanistan and hoping that there is a way to reduce our commitment, it is often said that if we are fighting al-Qaida – that is, the mission that President Obama stated at the end of March when he announced a new strategy in this region – well, al-Qaida's in a lot of places, and most specifically you can argue that al-Qaida isn't really in Afghanistan right now, and that's naturally no longer true but certainly a few months ago it was.

So why all this obsessive focus on Afghanistan? The reason is because of the unique challenge in that region. The relationship between the Taliban and the senior leadership of al-Qaida is unique in the world. There is no other region in the world that is better suited to giving al-Qaida a safe haven from which to plan attacks in the Western world than Afghanistan and the border region right next to it in Pakistan. Not Somalia, not Yemen, not anywhere in Africa, Southeast Asia, or the Middle East.

There are troubles in those places. Certainly we've read about them. In Somalia and Yemen in particular al-Qaida is trying to get started up again, but the unique set of circumstances in Afghanistan gives them their best and safest home, and that unique set of circumstances is not hard to discern. They've been there for 30 years. They have built relationships with the local population. They have intermarried, built alliances with tribal war leaders there, and given themselves as close to a home as they've ever had.

This is the place that is best suited to them. We cannot afford to ignore it. We cannot afford to imagine that it is but one of many and should not take priority for us. It has to take priority for us. That doesn't mean that these other places are unimportant, that we don't need a strategy in North Africa, that we don't need a strategy in Yemen and Somalia and elsewhere, but it is to say that the senior leadership is in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region and that is where we need to pay attention.

If you unwind the thread from any of the attacks from 9/11 forward, ones that have been successful and ones that have been stopped, they all lead back to that region of the world and there's a reason for that. It is the place where al-Qaida has their leadership. It's where they plan their attacks and it's where we have to be very mindful of the challenges there. Now that doesn't make it any easier but it is a reality that I think we need to be aware of as we go forward and put together our plans. And be aware of the fact of how important both Afghanistan and Pakistan are.

The second point is the size of the challenge in Afghanistan because in essence, if you're fighting a counterinsurgency strategy, the first thing that you need is an at least somewhat reliable local partner. One way of thinking about this is we are in fact competing for the allegiance of the Afghan people. In every village and every town, no matter the size, we are competing to show them that they don't need to follow the Taliban, that there is a better

alternative. We have to have that alternative. And right now I feel that's the greatest challenge we have in Afghanistan.

It is a wide open question whether or not we can develop that reliable partner, and I guess I'll rely on an old campaign saying. This is something that often gives comfort to a candidate who's not doing particularly well in an election, that you can't beat a horse with no horse, is the old saying. Basically, no matter how bad your candidate is, if he's better than the other one, you're in okay shape. Life in this instance is in fact graded on a curve and the fact of the matter is you have to have something of an alternative, even as bad as the candidate you're running against may be.

In this case, the Taliban are not popular in Afghanistan. The Afghan people remember what it was like under the Taliban. They don't remember it fondly. They have many, many issues with Taliban leadership and they don't want to go down that path again, but they have to have an alternative. The Taliban do have some advantages. They bring a certain order to places most of the time. As brutal and vicious and unfair as that order may be, they do offer it. So when you look out and say, okay, with the Taliban gone, what is day-to-day life like for people in Afghanistan? Who is making sure the society runs?

Here I think we tend to focus a little bit too much on sort of elevated Western conventions of what civilization and government should look like – whether or not the elections are perfect, free and fair, you know, whether or not you have this development strategy for a region. From what I can glean from talking to people in Afghanistan, it's a lot more basic. They want the rule of law. They want to be able to get up in the morning and know that they have a fairly dependable day in front of them, and right now in too many parts of Afghanistan they don't. The Afghan government is corrupt and incompetent, starting in the national part of their government. They're not able to provide basic resources.

But the corruption creates problems that are even worse than that. If you're going to have to pay a bribe, you at least want to get what you paid the bribe for in the most basic sense of it. And the problem they have in Afghanistan now is you pay a bribe in one area, and you think, okay, I've got security, or I'm going to be able to drive down that road, or I'm going to be able to sell my goods in this market. And then somebody else shows up the next day saying they want their payment if you're going to be able to do that. There is no structure.

It was described to me by one person over there that when you have the traditional local Afghan government in charge, you go down the road, you've got seven different checkpoints. The Taliban show up and they still demand a bribe but you've got one checkpoint, you know where it is, you know what the cost is going to be, and it is consistent and dependable. That's not even being provided.

So we have got to work to build a reliable Afghan partner because in doing counterinsurgency, the mantra that I have heard from my friends from Special Operations Command in the Philippines and in a variety of different other places where they've worked, is by, through, and with. Counterinsurgency doesn't work if you as an outside force, be it civilian or military, are driving the ship. You have to be there to assist local leaders who are leading that

effort – leading the security effort, leading the development effort, leading the basic rule of law effort and governance effort in a given community. We have a lot of work ahead of us if we are going to develop that.

Now I believe that General McChrystal, again, has looked at this. He understands this problem and understands the importance of dealing with it and knows that this is not primarily a military campaign. You've got to build the trust and be able to bring the rule of law on a day-in and day-out basis to these villages and work to do that, and that is what the focus is going to be.

I'll make one little sub-point on this. There's been a lot of focus on General McChrystal's initial findings, which have sort of filtered out in different pieces, and sort of the harsh nature of the assessment. "Serious and deteriorating" I believe was the favorite quote. He goes through step by step a lot of other examples on the development side.

We are not doing development intelligently. One of the best stats I heard on that was Greg Mortenson, the "Three Cups of Tea" guy who builds schools in that part of the world, primarily in Pakistan, builds a school for \$29,000. Same school, USAID-led, \$600,000. That is enormously frustrating and irritating to think of how much more we could accomplish with the same resources, but we have the lack of structure, the lack of organization there.

But underlying General McChrystal's report in my conversations with him is the firm belief that in a certain sense how bad we've been doing everything for the last eight years is an opportunity because that means we can do it better. That means the situation that we're in right now, as frustrating as it is, as further behind than we should be as we are, you can clearly look at it and see how you can fix it.

I guess I could draw that analogy to my favorite college football team, University of Washington Huskies. They were 0 and 12 last year. They got a new coach. So he didn't have any trouble going, you know what? I think I can do this better. There was a lot of room for improvement, a lot of areas that could be worked on, and that certainly is the case in Afghanistan. I believe we can make those changes and move forward.

Third point is the importance of Pakistan and that relationship. This is not an easy situation because they don't trust us and they don't like us. There's a lot of historical reasons for that that I won't get into, but it simply is a fact. They believe that we are meddling in their part of the world for our own interests and too often are not interested in what they're concerned about.

As concerned as we all are about what happened on 9/11 and about the possibility that it could happen again if the Taliban and al-Qaida are able to reconstitute a safe haven in that region, most Pakistani people don't care about that. They have problems day in and day out. They have had terrorist attacks. They have massive poverty and many challenges and they are not focused on what is important to the United States of America. In building that relationship we're going to have to work very, very hard to find those areas where we can genuinely help them.

Recently we have had a success in this area using our Special Forces to train the Pakistani military in counterinsurgency. They have not had a lot of military successes over the years in Pakistan but they did recently. Their success in the Swat valley has really improved their outlook and they are mindful of the fact that our training of them in counterinsurgency tactics helped.

Furthermore, the Special Operations forces that we have participating in that training are culturally aware. They are trained, being special operators, in the notion that you need to work with local populations and understand different cultures, and they're building a relationship there, the type of relationships that we lost after the Pressler amendment sort of cut off Pakistan from the U.S. There used to be a lot of the Pakistani military were trained in the U.S. but that stopped happening after 1990 because of the whole nuclear issue. Whatever the wisdom of doing that, it has really created a divide between us and the critical leadership within the Pakistani government.

We need to find ways to rebuild this because this problem is interrelated. Afghanistan and Pakistan are interrelated. But in saying that, one other thing I want to say is, no one should ever say Af-Pak. If those words leave your mouth, there should be a fine because it is incredibly insulting to that part of the world. They do not think of themselves as some amalgamation thrown together by the Western media or the Western leaders. They are two very distinct countries.

Yes, they are a region that we need to work together with, but they are two distinct countries and distinct cultures. One of the biases that they have, one of the reasons they don't like the United States is they think we don't understand them and don't really care about them. When you take two separate countries and lump them into five letters, you are showing that you don't really care about the distinctions between the two of them and that is not helpful. Connected, yes. Put together like that, no, and we need to respect that.

The final point I'll make before closing with some comments about where I think we need to go, we also need to be mindful of the cost involved in the strategy. You know, why in fact this is such a critically important region to our national security, everybody knows the Taliban have their alliance with al-Qaida. Everybody knows that al-Qaida trained and planned the attacks on 9/11 in Afghanistan.

Why then are the American public so anxious to leave, so concerned about our strategy over there? Very simply, because of the cost in money and in lives. It is something that is an incredible burden on a number of Americans. But we're certainly worried about the expense at a time when we are so far in debt and struggling to find ways to pay for more health care for Americans. But also people are touched by the fact that they know families, in many instances soldiers who are over there, who are putting their life on the line every day and many of them aren't coming back.

As you know, this has been a particularly difficult couple of months. As I mentioned, it touches very closely to the community that I represent and they want to know that if their lives are put at stake, if they are going to have to face those threats and those challenges, that they're

doing it with a clear plan and a clear strategy that gives them a chance to be successful. So we have to be mindful of the cost and mindful of the impact that it has on a military that we have asked to do more than any of us could have possibly imagined prior to 9/11.

The number of rotations, Guard, Reserve, active duty, every branch of the service, they have performed magnificently and every time they have, they've gotten out of bed and they've been asked to do it again. That has placed a stress on our military and it is something that we need to be concerned about as we put that strategy together.

But I guess I would conclude by saying that we do need to be present in that region. It is too simple to say that we could pull out and deal with the counterterrorism from a safe distance. We could not be terribly effective if we did not have a presence in Afghanistan. If we pull back too many of our troops, we lose the intelligence that comes with being there, building relationships with the local community. We lose the logistical support that is necessary to carry out these counterterrorism raids.

The Predator strikes that happen right now in the FATA region of Pakistan don't just happen with the Predator firing a missile. There is intelligence that is developed; there are relationships that are built on the ground; there are all kinds of logistics that are necessary before that happens. Certainly that is also true in Afghanistan, and as we have begun to see, as the Taliban has taken over more territory, gained control of more territory in Afghanistan, reports are now that al-Qaida elements are back in Afghanistan because they have a safe place to be. The threat is very real and we need to be present.

As we figure out what resources we need to commit and how, we need to be smart about it, but we can't comfort ourselves by thinking, well, al-Qaida's in a bunch of places. This one's a little bit too costly, a little bit too expensive. We're just going to pull back. The threat is greater there than it is any place else. We need to come up with a strategy and we need to give our troops over there the support that they need in carrying out that strategy.

There's a lot of specifics below that, certainly, but I want to give the opportunity to ask questions, so I will step down and answer any questions that you have. And again, I want to thank CSIS for giving us this opportunity to have this discussion this afternoon. Thank you.

MR. CORDESMAN: Thank you very much, Congressman. (Applause.) I want to open things up for questions in just a moment. I would ask a favor of the audience. If you look around there are a fair number of people. The Congressman has votes so he has to leave at 6:25, so if I could ask you to keep it to one straightforward question rather than a short speech. And let me try to set the example.

Congressman, what will it take from the president to get the largest amount of congressional support for his choice?

REP. SMITH: A clear plan. A clear plan that shows how we can begin to improve the situation. As I said, I think the two greatest challenges right now are a war-weary American public that certainly, you know, has seen the difficult struggle we had in Iraq and the difficult

struggle that we continue to have in Afghanistan, and are concerned about that cost in terms of lives and in terms of money. And second, the general perception that we are failing. The general perception that whatever plan there is in place there is not well thought out; it is not well organized; and it is not working. So that cost is being borne for no clear purpose.

The president has to have a clear strategy in which he says, here's what we've been doing wrong, here's how we're going to start doing it right. And I think he has begun, and General McChrystal had begun, to outline some of that, that, you know, it's not about a body count. It's not about killing X number of insurgents. It's about winning over a population. It's about training the Afghan – not just the Afghan military but the Afghan governing structure so that they can provide for their people, that we have not done that as efficiently as we should have.

There are a number of different areas where you can clearly look at it and say, that was not money well spent, that we've got to work with the local populations. There's countless examples in General McChrystal's speech in London that I read, made this point as well I can think. He was talking about how, well, what do you want to provide for the local population? Well, you want to make sure you do it right.

Well, drill a well. And drilling a well, that ought to be a positive thing, no matter what. Well, no, if you drill it in the wrong place, you totally shift the balance of power within a village, and if you don't know that and simply go in and do it, which has happened – you have the same problem in terms of building schools – if you're not working with the local population on a bottom-up approach on the most basic level, you won't succeed. We haven't done that; now we need to. The president needs to lay out that clear plan. I think people understand the threat. I think people want to know that there is a plan that is going to move us forward towards reducing that threat.

One final thing, and I don't want to go on too long. I don't want to turn this into, instead of Q&A, Q&S, as I heard on a campaign one time that I won't name. Question and speech as opposed to question and answer.

But I think the other, you know, critically important issue is to make it clear that we're not trying to build some perfect nation, all right? That we don't have this vision that we're going to go in and develop a society and we're going to nation-build and it's going to wind up looking, you know, like a Western modern civilized democracy. Set a reasonable goal and say, we can get here and that's where we need to get. It doesn't have to be some perfect, perfect outcome.

MR. CORDESMAN: Okay. Ladies and gentlemen, just one other favor. Please wait for the microphone after I recognize you, and when it comes please indicate who you are and your organization. Let me take the gentleman in the front row.

Q: Congressman, Arnaud de Borchgrave, CSIS. Mr. Hakani was telling us last week that for the offensive that we'd like to see them launch in the Federally Administered Tribal Area, specifically the two Waziristans, they desperately need helicopters. We've apparently given them ten Russian-made, and four of them do not work. And we lost about 2,500 helicopters in Vietnam, and I'm just wondering why we can't do better.

REP. SMITH: Why we can't do better in terms of providing resources to the Pakistani military?

Q: Helicopters.

REP. SMITH: Yes, and helicopters in particular. I think part of that right now is the struggle in that relationship and the lack of trust, and I hope what happened in the Swat valley in the push-back has begun to build some of this trust. But I think we all here understand the history of the relationship between the Pakistani government and the Taliban. They to some extent were allied. They were used as sort of a sword against India, in Kashmir and elsewhere, and they built that relationship up and there is still considerable concern about relationships within the ISI and the Taliban and whether or not we can truly trust them to carry that out.

If we given them helicopters, if we give them military equipment, is it going to be used to fight the Taliban insurgency, or is it simply going to be added to their protection against India. So it's a matter of building up that relationship. Here I see a great deal of hope in the relationship that has begun to be developed between the Pakistani military in particular.

We visited a training unit for the Pakistani special forces. There's a real strong relationship that's being built and they're beginning to see the wisdom and the importance of counterinsurgency. As that develops, I think more helicopters are something we can certainly provide, in addition to night capability, night vision for those helicopters, and a number of other tools that are important to counterinsurgency.

But the Pakistani military is primarily not trained in counterinsurgency and was very reluctant to embrace the mission for a while. I think they're there now and I think we need to build on that, and that certainly would be one way to do that.

MR. CORDESMAN: The gentleman on the front row there.

Q: Thank you. Raghbir Goyal, from India Globe. Congressman, you are already on the Intelligence Committee, you know better than I say something. Part of my question you have already answered. General Mosha (ph) recently said that most of the aid given to Pakistan in the last eight years, billions of dollars, most of it was used against India to build up the Pakistani military rather than fighting a global war against terrorism. Now many think tanks –

MR. CORDESMAN: Can we keep this to a question, please?

Q: Yes, sir. Many think tanks are saying that ISI cannot be trusted like in the last eight years, and also they are saying that epicenter of terrorism is Pakistan. So then why don't you go into Pakistan to fight terrorism rather than fighting in Afghanistan? That's what they believe, that most of the terrorists are there.

REP. SMITH: Two quick points on that. First of all, trust is not a black and white thing, at least not in my experience. You have relationships that have certain levels of trust and those

levels of trust vary. And certainly we have different interests and we should respect that. As I said in my opening remarks, part of the problem is we can't show up in Pakistan and say, here's what you have to do because this is what the U.S. wants. It's unbelievably offensive. I mean, imagine if people showed up in the U.S. and said we had to adopt, you know, these 10, 12 different policies because it's what – I don't know – Brazil wants. It's like oak, fascinating.

We here in the U.S. are kind of focused on our interests and the people in Pakistan are focused on their interests as well and those interests are varied and we have to respect that. That trust will slowly be built up. We have some things in common, we have some things that we don't have in common and we have to be mindful of that as we move that relationship forward.

As far as where the terrorists are, I think it is fair to say that the FATA and that area has a fair number. Certainly some of the plans that have been revealed, attacks that have been planned, both carried out and some thwarted, have come out of that region. But Pakistan is a sovereign state. We cannot simply show up there with our military without their permission, and they don't want to give it, for understandable reasons.

What we have to do is we have to work with them, and while it's true, as I said, that some of the stuff is diverted for their conflict with India, recently they have begun to mount a counterinsurgency strategy. And if we want them to continue with that counterinsurgency strategy, it's critical that we show concern for their interests as well.

Final point, I mentioned Afghanistan and Pakistan. Really you can't look at that region without including India. We have to work towards at least something of a calming down of the relationship between Pakistan and India so that Pakistan does not feel threat, and we need India as a partner in that effort and that is going to be difficult but necessary.

MR. CORDESMAN: The gentleman in the third row there.

Q: Rick Nelson from CSIS. The Army's own counterterrorism manual says that successful counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan, a country of that size, will take about 670,000 troops. General McChrystal has asked for 40,000 with the NATO allies, and then maybe 100,000 of the Afghan. That leaves us far short. Do you think that General McChrystal's request for 40,000 is sufficient?

REP. SMITH: Well, I think the counterinsurgency manual – and we had this discussion in Iraq and a bunch of other places – I don't think that there is this magical number of troops, that you have to have this perfect level and if you don't have that level, you can't succeed, and if you do have that level, you will succeed. I think there has been way too much focus on the sheer size of the military force in counterinsurgency. I forget, but it's like a 20-to-1, 30-to-1 ratio, something that has to be achieved.

I think it's vastly more important what type of relationships you have with the local community, how well you understand the culture and how well you work with them. That's why when I focus on counterinsurgency I focus on the by, through, and with language. It always has to be driven from that locality. When you're talking about the number of troops, you can protect

an area with a lot fewer troops if you have a local population that you're working well with. So I wouldn't become obsessed with the number of troops. No, I do not think that you have to meet that 20 to 30-to-1 ratio. In a lot of places in Afghanistan at the moment you don't really have an insurgency, so just sort of taking the Afghan population and extrapolating out the number of troops that you need to fight it misses that key point. I don't think necessarily the troop levels are the key point here. The key point here is building that reliable local partner.

The final thing I'll say about that, though. That said, security is step one in getting there. And in those areas where you have lost security we're going to have to make one of two choices. Either, A, we pour in the necessary number of troops, trying to get as many local Afghan police and army as possible to lead the way, but getting enough troops to provide security. Or, B, we're going to step back from that village for a while. We're going to admit the fact that we cannot control it and we're going to let the local population deal with it as best they can. We may have to do that in some places. That may be the wisest course of action going forward.

I don't imagine a situation where we're ever going to completely wipe the Taliban out of Afghanistan, or the FATA, for that region. We have to contain and control them, not eliminate them, because I don't think that's going to be possible. So I don't think we should be too taken down the road of if you don't have X number of troops it can't possibly work. It really depends on what those troops are doing. It depends on what the civilian side is doing. It depends on what the local population is doing far more, in my opinion.

MR. CORDESMAN: The gentleman in the second row there.

Q: Congressman, Dave Stafford from Northrup Grumman. How can we get the opium trade out of the hands of the Taliban who are financing it, and why can't we use more of our ISR to break up that trafficking network?

REP. SMITH: Well, if I knew the answer to that question I think I would be in line for a promotion because that is the vexing, vexing question. I don't have the answer for that. I can tell you that the delicate balance that you're walking is, you know, if you break up the opium trade you likely make enemies and, you know, you have to walk very, very carefully.

The answer is you have to give them alternatives. You have to give them alternatives and you have to bring security to those regions to just not allow the Taliban, you know, free rein to conduct the trafficking, but that is far, far easier said than done. I think also I heard from a lot of folks over in Afghanistan that while a lot of money comes in from the drug trade, a lot of money comes in from other places too.

Now we're going to focus on blocking financing for the terrorists as best we can but the general feeling is, they're going to get some money, whether it's from, you know, sympathetic folks in the Mideast, whether it's from various criminal enterprises worldwide. The idea that we're going to be able to cut off their money, if we could just cut off the opium trade they wouldn't have the resources they need, they're going to have some resources. We're going to have to confront those resources, and simply walking in there and blocking the opium trade, going to be difficult.

There was about a 10-percent reduction year over year. I think we need to keep working on that, keep working on offering alternatives and providing better security down there, but that is going to be tough. I just don't think that our mission by definition fails if we're unable to completely stop that.

MR. CORDESMAN: The gentleman in the third row there.

Q: Congressman, Steve Donnelly. I was senior planning advisor in Iraq during the civilian surge, 2007-08. One of the things we heard at a U.N. brief about two weeks ago was a litany of the Afghan reconstruction problems, and what they sounded like was the same omelet we were trying to unscramble in 2007. As this issue becomes more critical, today we had a – it's planners day on the Hill so planners from the American Planning Association were all over the Hill meeting with different congressmen. But we also had briefs from the U.N. habitat undersecretary on the urban issues. They laid out a map of the areas of severe urban problems and informal urban settlements, and the map looks like a map of AFRICOM and CENTCOM.

So with that particularly in mind, I was wondering if you could comment any steps we could take to improve reconstruction as a critical element of the overall solution. Thank you.

REP. SMITH: I'm going to go macro on you here. The number one biggest problem that we have is we have a massively screwed up development policy in the U.S. government, just in general. Forget Iraq or Afghanistan for the moment. We show up in a place like Iraq and Afghanistan where all of a sudden it becomes very, very important to get development and governance right. Who the hell knows how to do that?

The structure of our development policy in the U.S. government is spread out amongst 35 or more different agencies that have a tiny little piece of it, that are utterly uncoordinated in any way. USAID at this point is a glorified contracting agency, okay. They don't do development. They go into an area and they go, okay, we need to do this project. Okay, let's get some bids and see who might be able to do it. They contract it out. I mean, and that's just in the U.S. When you look at Afghanistan in particular, you've got scores if not hundreds of NGOs in different countries that are doing some piece of development. They're not working together. They're stepping over the top of each other in a totally uncoordinated fashion.

If you can't tell this is an enormous sort of frustration for me – because there's a way to do this, and this is something – I worked early on in President Obama's campaign and was very focused on national security, and global poverty is another issue that is very important to me. It's sort of, to my mind, counterinsurgency writ large, has the military component of the SOCOM stuff that I work on in my subcommittee. But more important than anything it has the development, global poverty element to it. The lack of opportunity is what leads people to be willing to follow insurgencies.

And there's a very clear model. The Department for International Development in Great Britain, I forget how long ago now, they went back and they pulled it together and they actually coordinated the bulk of their development strategy in one place, in a cabinet-level position,

responding directly to the prime minister in that case, and they gave him the money too, which is really the important part. Because we've done this before, well, we're going to coordinate it here, but we kept everybody else in all these other 35 places with the money. We've been very slow to do this.

Now I know the president is committed to this. There are working groups; the National Security Council, Gail Smith is heading it up. It's fabulous, understands this stuff really well. We need to consolidate our development authority as much of it as possible – I'm under no illusion we're going to get all of it – but as much of it as possible in one position and have that position responding directly to the president and have the money there so that they have the authority to put together a strategy.

Right now it is just a nightmare of a flow chart of people who have a tiny little piece of it that is utterly and completely uncoordinated. The sooner we do this the better. I know the State Department is reluctant to give up this authority. As much as they totally agree with everything that I just said about the need to coordinate it, the one part they disagree with is they want to be the ones who coordinate it. I get that, and they're probably good at it, but the problem is the State Department has got some other things to do – diplomacy writ large, peace in the Middle East, dealing with Russia, dealing with China, dealing with all these other things.

It is my view that one department cannot do both, all the diplomacy for the U.S. and all the development. We need to give that power to somebody who day in and day out is focused on development, who has the ear of the president and is able to coordinate it. Now that's great. That's not going to happen in the time frame that we need to deal with the challenges that you had to deal with in Iraq and that we have to deal with in Afghanistan.

And I guess in the short term what we have to rely on is Richard Holbrooke, Eikenberry, and McChrystal. These are three very strong-willed people who know how to pull things together about as well as anybody I've seen. They can do the bureaucratic infighting and get interagency cooperation where you would not have thought it possible. In the short term we've got to empower them to start doing some of that coordination on the ground in Afghanistan.

MR. CORDESMAN: The gentleman on the third row there, center.

Q: Thank you. Congressman, for that. Certainly the last point is extremely important. Mehsoud Aziz from Afghanistan. I've seen –

MR. CORDESMAN: Excuse me, identify yourself, please.

Q: Mehsoud Aziz, from Afghanistan. I couldn't agree more with you in regards to the development and coordination issue. I saw that first-hand, having worked at it in regards to Afghanistan, and in fact the lack of development in the earlier years is the reason why we are where we are. So it is extremely important, certainly a critically important tool for the United States' foreign policy that needs to be fixed. You brilliantly described it, but it's also important to Afghanistan.

My question relates to the three pillars of the challenges for Afghanistan, one being security, the other one being development that you described and where we are, and the third one is diplomacy. We don't hear as much about diplomacy, which is part of the strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. If you could relate to that.

REP. SMITH: That's an excellent point. I think that is – I read an article, I think Fareed Zakaria wrote an article about this. The success that we had in Iraq was primarily driven by the Sons of Iraq movement, to my mind, which basically took – I've heard it counted as high as 100,000 Iraqis, Sunni Iraqis, who were part of the insurgency and flipped them over to being part of fighting the insurgency. When you think about, getting back to how big does the force need to be, I mean, that was a 200,000 force multiplier, by finding people who were fighting against us and getting them to fight with us.

I don't see any way we succeed in Afghanistan if we are not able to have at least some of that kind of success, if we are not able to go to people currently allied with the Taliban and get them to flip. Because keep in mind, the huge chunk of people in Afghanistan are not really loyal to one camp or the other. The Taliban is a very definitive ideology, but they have a relatively small percentage of people who adhere to that ideology. Others are simply making the classic practical Afghanistan decision – who's going to win, okay? Who should I be with here? Who's making me the best deal? And they're going with the Taliban as a result. Can't buy anybody in Afghanistan but you can rent them. They go back and forth of both sides of that.

We have got to be able to go into the different pieces of that network. There is some thought that Hekmatyar and his group is interested in being part of the government if the right set of circumstances came about. There are others in that category. And the Sons of Iraq strategy, which was developed in part by the Marine Corps – I don't want to give them too much credit because I'm sure there's someone in the room here who says, wait a second, State Department had something to do with it too. They probably did. But the Marine Corps was very instrumental in Anbar in seeing that opportunity and seeing what would drive apart the insurgency and then working with those people.

We have got to do the same thing in Afghanistan because I firmly believe that there are people right now who are fighting with the Taliban who could be converted to fighting against them if we approached it with the right diplomacy, made the right offer, built the right relationships.

MR. CORDESMAN: The lady in the second row there.

Q: Kristin Cairns with IRC. I was wondering if you could talk a little bit about the strategy, the discussion on the Hill in terms of the Afghan strategy seems to be centering towards the middle of the ground, civ-mil kind of approach. And I was wondering what your recommendations, based on your experience, are towards bettering U.S. military and U.S. civilian relationships with Afghan civilians.

REP. SMITH: I think there has been some positive work done in this area. Not enough, and it's all about cultural awareness and it's all about a bottom-up approach, and by, through,

and with, and a lot of things that I said before. You have got to work with and empower the local population and respect them as the leading element and that is extraordinarily difficult.

You take, whether it's a State Department person. U.S. Army, Marine, whoever, plop them down in some village in Kandahar and say, go get to know the locals. I mean, I'm from Seattle, Washington. If you plop me down in Mobile, Alabama, it would take me a little while, you know, because there's cultural differences. What's the right way to do it; what are the main issues around here, let alone if you don't speak the language and it's all the way on the other side of the world. So there are certainly limitations and challenges.

But on the other hand, within the military and within the State Department we have a lot of very, very talented people who know how to do that. I have a personal bias in favor of the Special Operations Command. I've been working with them as a result of my subcommittee, but they're really good. They really get that you can't just walk in the door and say, okay, you guys don't know what you're doing. We're going to tell you what to do and you're going to do it. You have to work with them bottom up.

SOCOM has had this experience in Iraq, they've had the experience in the Philippines, they've had this experience throughout Africa. As mentioned, in Pakistan they're the one group that seems to have successfully built a relationship based on training. They know how to do it and they know how to show respect for the local culture. I think they are going to be absolutely critical to succeeding in building those relationships.

That to my mind is the entire measure of whether or not we succeed: are we able to get the local population in the lead, trusting us, and we're there helping them instead of in there ordering them around and kicking down doors. That's what has to happen. I'll tell you again, nobody understands that better than General McChrystal because he's been through it in a bunch of different places.

MR. CORDESMAN: Let me try the lady in back there.

Q: Sahar Khan, CSIS. Afghanistan has been compared to Vietnam on numerous occasions. In your view, how accurate or inaccurate is that assessment?

REP. SMITH: I don't do those comparisons because they're in two entirely different places, in two entirely different decades. You learn lessons from a whole bunch of different situations. You know, I once got dragged into sort of making a comment about that and then people started arguing with me about, well, you don't really know what happened in Vietnam, and they're right. I don't, so I'm not going to draw that comparison.

I think we need to figure out and learn from a lot of experiences in counterinsurgency, in development, with the local population and go forward, not get into a battle over which analogy works best. Really focus on the specifics. By definition, as I said, they are different and we need to understand what's going on now in the particular place that we're fighting, first and foremost.

MR. CORDESMAN: Congressman, I think your staff indicated 6:25. Do we have time for one more question, or should –

REP. SMITH: I'll take two more. First vote's usually held open for a half hour.

MR. CORDESMAN: All right. Let me try the lady in back then.

Q: Congressman, Viola Ginger from Bloomberg News. I wanted to ask you what effect you think this period of deliberation is going to have on the potential support from the public and from Congress, from the military, et cetera, will have on a final decision. What effect will this period of deliberation – does it make things worse, does it widen the divisions, or would that – do you think this would actually help build support in the end?

REP. SMITH: I believe this helps. I believe this is the exact right place to go. I read an editorial by David Seratta (sp) who I don't often agree with, to be honest. But I think on this point he was spot on. We are talking about a major commitment of money and U.S. lives, and to think that we have to rush into it, that, you know, if the rumor is that military commanders want this and that that we simply have to salute, give it to them, and not ask any questions is dead wrong. This is a critically important decision.

As has been mentioned by many, mistakes have been made in trying to implement this policy over the course of the last eight years, numerous mistakes. Taking the time to listen to people, to listen to a diverse set of voices, to try and get it right makes absolutely sense – absolutely makes sense. Now we can't be doing this two years from now obviously. At some point decisions have to be made, but I have no doubt that the president will make those decisions and will make them in a timely manner, and when he does, he will be able to say to people, yes, I did consider that. Yes, I did listen to that person. There will be strength behind the plan, and it will not appear to be simply a rushed decision based on pressure.

I don't think there's anything wrong with being deliberate about really, really important decisions, and I think right now that's what the White House is doing. I think that's one of the biggest things that General McChrystal discovered when he got there. There were a lot of things wrong. There was a lot to learn. We're going to take a little bit of time to try to get it right, and I think that will help in terms of whatever the ultimate plan is, getting people to buy into it.

MR. CORDESMAN: Let me take the gentleman there in the second row. And this does have to be the last question.

Q: Congressman, thank you for being here. My name is Juan Paron from DRC. You've done a wonderful job describing the conditions of the environment in which this war is taking place. First Persian Gulf war, war termination end-state was eject Iraqi forces from Kuwait.

Can you tell me what you would submit to the president as an end-state for this war?

REP. SMITH: A contained al-Qaida. That is the end-state. An al-Qaida that we feel is contained sufficiently that we can stop them from attacking targets outside that area, Western targets across – containment I think is the ultimate end-state.

Now obviously the one piece of confusion there is the Taliban. The Taliban is many, many, many different things. That's why I say contained al-Qaida other than contained Taliban. There are some Taliban who would just as soon al-Qaida went away. They're only concerned about their village, their community – (inaudible). There's others that have grander ambitions to launch terrorist attacks across the world. But a contained al-Qaida is the ultimate end-state that we want to achieve in Afghanistan and also in Pakistan. That's what we have to be focused on.

MR. CORDESMAN: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for coming, and can we thank the congressman in the usual way.

(Applause.)

(END)