

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

**CSIS PRESS BRIEFING: ANTHONY CORDESMAN ON  
OBAMA'S AFGHANISTAN STRATEGY**

**WELCOME/MODERATOR:  
H. ANDREW SCHWARTZ,  
VICE PRESIDENT OF EXTERNAL RELATIONS,  
CSIS**

**SPEAKER:  
ANTHONY CORDESMAN,  
ARLEIGH A. BURKE CHAIR IN STRATEGY,  
CSIS**

**WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2009  
11:30 A.M.  
WASHINGTON, D.C.**

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

H. ANDREW SCHWARTZ: Good morning. And welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies and welcome to those of you who are calling in for this call – for this conference. There’s a lot going on today, especially on the Hill and given the president’s speech last night.

I’m going to let you hear from Dr. Cordesman, who has, of course, extensive experience. You’ll recall that he spent a lot of the summer with Gen. McChrystal advising McChrystal on the strategy. And Tony has the greatest insight on this of anybody I know, and I’d like to turn it over to him.

ANTHONY CORDESMAN: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for coming. I’m not going to give a long, formal brief, but I will give you time to formulate questions. I think there are, however, some striking things which came out of the president’s speech last night which, perhaps, do need a little more clarification, where already, you do see officials briefing on background and where a lot of the key points are probably not really going to be clear until the kind of testimony that is going to take place over the next two weeks and the supporting white papers and briefing materials become available.

I think this is critical because very often, people try to parse out the words of a president’s speech to find the hidden meaning. And the fact is that in 40 minutes, you can’t provide the hidden meaning. This is an extremely complex war. It is the way that you actually execute concepts and strategy, the resources that you have, the way you manage the fight that is at least as critical as anything you can say in a speech.

And yet, the president did provide some very strong indicators. One is that you really are beginning to resource this war properly for the first time. We did not react in any meaningful way through at least 2005 to 2006. In fiscal 2005, the entire U.S. expenditure on the Afghan war was around \$20 billion. This year, in 2008, it’s more than doubled. It’s over \$52 billion.

With the plan that was going into the Congress before the president spoke, you were talking about figures in excess of \$72 billion for the coming year. Now, with the president’s speech, you’re talking about annual expenditure levels that will be well over \$100 billion. And I quote these dollar figures because so many people have focused on troop levels. But we are talking as much about aid, about civil programs as military. We’re talking as much about how we deal with Afghan forces and with Pakistani aid and Pakistani forces as U.S. or NATO ISAF forces.

I found it striking that, if you look at the numbers, the combination of U.S. and allied troops would be very close to what is generally reported as the McChrystal “middle option.” Now, people have said this is 40,000 troops, but in fact, in the real world, nobody plans for total troop numbers. Military people plan to allocate forces by function and by mission. Nobody sits down and tries to figure out what a round number of troops would do. This is strictly a sort of

fortune-cookie approach to simplification, which unfortunately gets translated in the media to the goal, rather than the capability.

And it is important to remember that Gen. McChrystal, in advancing a strategy, was advancing a NATO ISAF strategy, not a set of U.S.-only troop goals – a problem which has often been lost in interpreting this. The president touched on but did not explain that this will also include trying to accelerate the number of civilian aid workers, that it will have a refocus not only of the military effort, but of the aid effort.

We hear a lot about “population-centric.” Now, the president didn’t use the phrase, but the White House uses the phrase of “clear, hold, build and transfer.” Clear is, I think, fairly easy to understand. You want the Taliban, the extremists and the insurgents out. Hold means, however, you are shifting to a strategy where you only send in troops if you can continue to secure the area – if you basically are keeping the population safe.

And one of the lessons of the last 8 years in Afghanistan is that it is not having Americans in uniform or NATO ISAF troops in uniform that is unpopular; what is unpopular is going in, fighting the Taliban, leaving and leaving the Afghan people exposed without security, without improvements in governance, without aid to make their economy work. Where we have stayed and we’ve provided a follow-up improving the Afghan government, helping with aid, providing lasting security, the fact that people have on U.S. or European uniforms has not made them less popular; it has made them significantly more popular.

So this combination of civil and military action is critical. Now, the president touched on the fact that it isn’t just a U.S. effort that has to be reorganized. He mentioned UNAMA, and this is a critical problem. It doesn’t matter whether you are talking Oxfam or the World Bank. There’s a general consensus that the United Nations has failed, drastically, to manage the aid program, to keep it from being corrupt, to allocate it where the Afghan people need it and to relate the aid effort to the course of the war.

This has to change, as do the various national aid efforts. And this is a critical dimension, as well, because we often talk about the problems in ISAFs military efforts. Remember that in much of the country, the face of aid – the practical effort to conduct civil programs – comes from national provincial reconstruction teams – what are called PRTs. Up to now, there not only has not been effective coordination of the various elements of the NATO forces in combat – or the ISAF forces; there’s been no effective coordination of the provincial reconstruction teams.

And many have done what countries want in the capital of the country providing the aid, rather than providing the aid that’s needed to win, to provide security. The president talked, too, about a lasting partnership – and it’s very easy to misinterpret what he has said. And as some of you may know, there’s been a considerable effort to clarify what the president said last night.

When he talked about a transfer beginning in 2011, he was not talking about any predictable withdrawal of U.S. or ISAF forces; he was talking about capping the effort, beginning withdrawal, putting pressure on the Afghans and Pakistanis to take over the mission.

But there's no time schedule, no benchmarks, no artificial set of deadlines which are kept separate from the realities of combat.

Within that, too, is the concept of strategic partnership with both Pakistan and Afghanistan. And what that means in practice is continuing, large-scale aid, both to the military of Pakistan and Afghanistan and in terms of the kinds of civilian aid that can help both countries bring a degree of stability and make governments more popular and effective. I think, too, that perhaps the president only had a brief moment to talk about the pressures involved.

One clear element here is providing a structure of support in Afghanistan where we provide direct aid at the local level, where it's most needed, has the most impact on the counterinsurgency, where you also do not need contractors, you do not need intermediaries, there is no need for power brokers and corruption. And if you insist on making this transparent and working with a wide range of Afghans, you do not fall into the trap of backing a given village or a given tribe.

Similar techniques are to be used at the district level – there are 364 districts in Afghanistan – and at the higher provincial level – there are 34 districts there. Within the Karzai and the central government, the concept is essentially this: that you put the money where you have honest and capable ministers and ministries. You make it clear that you will finance those who actually use the aid effectively and you isolate the power brokers and the corrupt and you deny them resources – the tools they need, basically, to sustain their influence and power.

That will be harder in the case of Pakistan, both in terms of civil and military aid. But it is clear that Pakistan's conduct will determine the quality and the endurance of that strategic partnership. I think that there was one surprise that I would point out that I did not anticipate, I think, that came as a result of decisions over the last few weeks. When the president talked about boosting the Afghan national security forces, he did not talk about setting a goal of doubling them. He was very careful not to articulate this goal.

But the change is this: A look at what has been happening there has indicated that their level of capability and readiness was substantially lower than had been reported in many studies and briefings earlier. As a result, a great deal more effort will go into reaching the kind of goals we already have for the Afghan army, which is around 134,000 from a goal of around 99, 98 (thousand).

The problem here is simple: Quality is as important as quantity. There is too much attrition. There is too little attention to training quality into performance. To begin to expand this structure, you had to make it work. And you also had to make it clear to the Afghans there wouldn't be some sort of long-term goal where they could count on resources flowing into the system. They had to perform. They had to show each year that there really was a reason to provide added resources for the force.

The problem of the police is more complex. I've not heard shadow numbers, but I think one key element here is when we talk about this strategy of hold and build, you want the military moving out of Afghan population centers, whether it's in our uniform or Afghan uniform, as

clear as this is possible. To do that, you want an Afghan police you can trust, that's honest, that's capable. But you also need to build up courts and a justice system.

Police can't function without courts or jails or the basic structure of the rule of law. You need to have an Afghan government presence. You have to show the Afghans that this is not something in Kabul, which they vote on, but something present locally that gives them key services – security, but also education, public health and areas like water. These are critical tasks. And again, it is a civil-military strategy and not a military one.

A point, I guess, in conclusion about Pakistan: The president tended to focus on al-Qaida. He tended, perhaps, to exaggerate the risk, because this is politics, that Pakistani nuclear weapons could fall into the hands of al-Qaida. But it is equally clear that we have, essentially, two interactive wars – one in Afghanistan and one in Pakistan. There are different values involved. There are fundamentally different roles for the United States and the role for ISAF. This is an alliance war in Afghanistan, which still has the support of most Afghans.

It is a problem of Pakistani conflicts inside Pakistan, where there are still great tensions between the government and the military, where there are elements in the ISI and the military that still support the Taliban that are attacking in Afghanistan, where we cannot send troops in and the problems of economic aid are fundamentally different because it has to be administered, essentially, by Pakistan. This parallelism cannot disguise the fact that a nuclear-armed Pakistan is more of a threat, more of a risk and more of a strategic interest than Afghanistan, although they're both related.

But on the one hand, we have a flawed partner with problems in corruption and capacity inside Afghanistan and on the other hand, we have a semi-partner with divided goals and objectives that may change in Pakistan. And these are key risks in the war, but the risks in Pakistan are greater than those – than they are inside Afghanistan. Now, just one last point, if I can figure out how to make this actually advance.

There we are. Let me note something about what we do know about the intensity of the war. That light grey line there is the pattern of violence in Iraq. The dark line is the pattern of violence in Afghanistan. We often lose sight of the intensity of the conflict here. Note that it has only been this year for the first time that the level of conflict in Afghanistan has risen above the level of conflict in Iraq. But the level of violence and intensity in a much larger country with a much larger population is still a small fragment of the level of violence that occurred in Iraq.

These wars have to be kept separate. They're not being fought in the same way with the same intensity. And comparisons that don't look at numbers, but only at words, do not give you the right picture. That said, when you look at the patterns that you see developing – and here, excuse me for skipping ahead – what you also see is a rise, in 2009. This is a war we still are not winning. When the president talks about a crisis, this is not casual wording. We have seen a sharp acceleration in the level of violence in Afghanistan in the course of this year.

And it is shown in these charts, which are declassified U.S. intelligence data. The Taliban still, in spite of the fighting in Helmand and an increase in troops in Kandahar, is

expanding its areas of influence in Eastern Afghanistan and in the Northern and central parts of Afghanistan. We do face a war where we have, as the president pointed out, the challenge of reversing the momentum.

And here, I think the fact that speeding up the deployment of U.S. troops is part of his speech is not simply a way of trying to reach a point where you could help and move toward transfer to Afghan forces; it's being driven by the reality and the pace of this war. It is a war which we took years to resource.

One thing that I would note about some of the reporting I have seen is, this is not a war which is fought by both sides on the same terms. What we see in the case of the Taliban is a war to occupy space, win influence and control over the population and politically push the United States, NATO and other groups out of Afghanistan. It is a war of, essentially, political attrition.

And we need to recognize that they have gone from virtually zero base to a limited capacity in about 20 percent of the country in 2005 to, according to our intelligence estimates, a major presence in about 40 percent of the country today. That is a serious war in terms of space and influence that is more serious, in some ways, by that metric, than the metric of the levels of violence.

And that, again, is why this war has to be fought at a military and a civil level, and why changing the aid process, changing the way in which the Afghan government provides services is as critical as directly defeating the enemy. And I think with that brief overview, let me open things up for questions.

Q: Dr. Cordesman, my name is Fanifa Sharr (ph). I'm with ZDF German Television. And I would like to know, as you described all these challenges that President Obama faces by sending more and more troops to Afghanistan to a war that nobody really knows are we going to win it or not, how would you describe what is a victory for President Obama in Afghanistan?

MR. CORDESMAN: I think the victory isn't simply for President Obama. Let me note that at this point in time, there is at least the same threat to Europe that there is to the United States from what has been happening with al-Qaida and extremist terrorism in this region. But I think that the goals here in the real world are, you have lasting stability and security in Afghanistan and Pakistan that can be sustained by these countries. Those are long-term goals. They will probably take a decade to achieve.

In a military sense, you can achieve success much more quickly because what you need to do is to reverse the momentum of the Taliban in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, to disrupt it and eventually to destroy these violent extremist cells and, with them, the al-Qaida sanctuary in Pakistan. There will always be elements of extremism in terrorism but victory doesn't consist of perfection; it means there are no major sanctuaries that give these movements the ability to operate in either country.

Q: Raghbir Goyal from India Globe and Asia Today. So we're dealing basically with two corrupt governments – in Afghanistan and President Zardari in Pakistan – they're very well-

known. Do you think more money to Pakistan and more troops in Afghanistan will solve the problem?

MR. CORDESMAN: I think, first, when you talk about corruption, let me note that corruption is relative even in the United States. And there have been rumors on occasion there's even been corruption in India. (Laughter.) I think that in all honesty, what you are trying to do is to work around the most serious problems.

And if you look at the education ministry or the finance ministry or the public health ministry in Afghanistan, you'll find fundamentally different issues and much more capacity. You see it in the ministry of defense. The problem here, too, is in the past, often, we have seen as much of a problem in terms of foreign contractors or NGOs or within the inefficiency and national branding of international aid donors within Europe and the United States as we have seen problems within the case of the Afghan government.

And we've also found that within Pakistan, when you work with the elements of the government that are effective and that do distribute the money and move it into the field – and those elements exist – you can accomplish a great deal. I don't think that you can necessarily blame either country for what has been a chaotic, inefficient mess on the part of the United Nations and the international aid effort. We need to look in a mirror, not simply blame the other side.

Q: May I just have a quick follow-up, please? Britain's prime minister is saying that Osama bin Laden is in Pakistan in the North but they're not catching him. Do you think it's going to solve any problems whether we have Osama bin Laden or not? And, second, there's a fight between the president of Pakistan and the –

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, that's not a follow-up; that's two different questions. Let me be very simple: Are there tensions inside Pakistan? Of course there are. I've been trying to look at that world map behind you and figure out how many perfect governments are on the map, and if that's the criteria for peacekeeping, international aid and international intervention, I guess Greenland is up there – (laughter) – and reasonably functional.

The reality is that we deal with the fact – where do insurgencies catch hold? In divided states; in broken states. And if you are not prepared to face that reality, you give them a permanent sanctuary and you essentially accept defeat before you begin. In the back?

Q: (Off mike) – U.S. troops there probably longer than a decade. You've got a situation where you – you have a culture where the national government has largely not been accepted by – there doesn't seem to be a clear strategy as we had in Iraq, which seemed to work, at least to a certain extent, in bringing in the village elders as a force, an independent force, which were encouraged to come politically on our side rather than on the enemy's side.

And given the chaos in Afghanistan and the difficulty of the terrain, it seems to me that unless there is some kind of a strategy based on bringing these forces, which, today, are

somewhat ambiguous in the struggle, on our side as an active force, we're not going to succeed. And it's difficult, also, that the fact of doing that or the –

MR. CORDESMAN: Can you get to the question?

Q: Well the question is, can we do that without having the strategy of bringing in the village elders, and, secondly, can we bring in the village elders –

MR. CORDESMAN: Sorry, to interrupt – first, we never brought the village elders into Iraq. You had a spontaneous uprising. The spontaneous uprising often – it certainly had nothing to do with village elders; it was tribal leaders. We needed the tribal leaders actually involved or sons or junior tribal leaders because their fathers were actually out of the country and didn't come back until this uprising began.

What happened in Anbar and what became the Sons of Iraq was then funded after it broke out by the United States. It was important but so was basically clearing and securing Baghdad. So was the creation of effective Iraqi police and army forces, which became steadily more effective.

So as a process of aid and political negotiation which ensured that you did not have an outbreak between Kurd and Shiite, so, frankly, was the fortuitous reality that in the South, the Sadr movement, in many ways, became too weak and lacked cohesion and forced him into a ceasefire which was then followed by not village elders, but by an invasion led by the Iraqi prime minister with very limited actual coordination with MNFI.

Now, this term "village elder" is fine; I've heard it again and again in Somalia and so on. The only problem is in Afghanistan and inside, now, much of Baluchistan and Waziristan, we're talking about so-called village elders in tribal structures, not just villages, which have been at war since 1979 or caught up in movements of instability.

This is not a traditional structure. It doesn't exist in the classic way anymore. You can't have that much war, displacement and population relocation. We also – when we in the real world talk about Afghanistan – have to remember there are 31 million people there and much of it is in concentrated population areas which are highly urbanized.

These cut far across any village level; they are tribal, they are ethnic and they're sectarian. And talking about it as if this was, say, 1893, doesn't really explain what your options are. You have to have efforts which operate at the national level, the provincial and district, and above all, in population centers.

Now, you can sometimes reach out to individual villages or valleys. But let me note that many villages that are in truly rural areas inside Afghanistan are much more concerned with the hostility to the next village than they are with any national issue. And you cannot base a structure that picks one village over another.

This kind of what is sometimes called human-terrain mapping or sort of real-world look by region, area in a place like Afghanistan or Pakistan is critical. Just as understanding that your enemy is not the Quetta Taliban but a mixture of the Taliban in the South, the Taliban groups in the East, Hekmatyar and Haqqani, you have got to get sophisticated enough in current terms to deal with the realities on the ground.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Question.

Q: Well, I think if we – (inaudible, off mike) – the announcement, some people said it will be a test for Obama himself as people want to see the real substance in the wartime leader. So in your opinion, how did he do during that test?

MR. CORDESMAN: I think he gave a good speech. But we have a fascination throughout the world in the political speech and sometimes we pay very little attention to the fact that it's going to take months to even begin to implement the strategy with the resources required and then a year or so to find out how well it works. And that it isn't concepts that win wars; it's details. It's how well you actually implement and manage a given set of concepts.

So was this a good speech? Yes. Does a good speech win a war? Of course not. But that's scarcely a fair test of the president. And I think it is following up – where does the money go? Where do the forces go? How effective is the effort to deal with the Karzai and Pakistani governments? How good is the aid effort? How well can we reorganize NATO-ISAF? What additional resources can we get?

So the real test of this president's speech is probably going to be just about a year from now. It will be what did you accomplish and did you meet the test he set for himself, which is to reverse the momentum of the Taliban in Afghanistan and to see a more effective, more decisive set of actions on the part of Pakistan.

MR. SCHWARTZ: In the back.

Q: Hi, I'm John Mulligan from the Providence Journal.

MR. SCHWARTZ: John, could you just hit the mike? Thanks.

Q: And I'd like to ask you for a word about public and especially congressional support. We're moving today from the concept of some disappointment or even opposition to the plan to potentially down the line, the details of support for civilian aid, for the cost of the extra troops and perhaps even some resolutions of exhorting withdrawal schedules and the like. So how important is that kind of support in Congress and what do you foresee?

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, I think it's absolutely critical. We need to be careful when I say that. Essentially, the president almost certainly can get the votes and the money to implement this strategy and have the resources he wants in fiscal 2010. But he has to explain to the Congress and the American people and his administration to explain in far more detail.

We have not really had any meaningful update on what's happened in this war in terms of the classified data or metrics since last May. And the president has not yet provided any. Hopefully, Gen. McChrystal and Ambassador Eikenberry will. The metrics we have in this briefing will be up on the Web but I have to say that you should not be getting and the Congress should not be getting that information from the CSIS.

It should be getting it from the president and the administration and military. We have to see what really comes out of what Amb. Holbrooke and Secretary Clinton have done to get the support of NATO-ISAF. Gen. McChrystal will be speaking to Afghan leaders today. In fact, I think he already has. A lot will depend on how do they react as to the Pakistanis to these speeches. And their initial reaction could be very misleading.

These are cultures in which you often have to explain repeatedly before people can get through the problems of translation and the tensions in values. So I think that a little strategic patience here is going to be critical. But what will the Eikenberry-McChrystal testimony be as follow-up to the testimony from Cabinet officials? To me, that's really critical as we'll follow up on Pakistan.

It may not be right, but the fact is that the United States government has not demonstrated that you can run a war and manage a war from Washington. We saw in Iraq that the quality of the country team was absolutely critical – Amb. Crocker and Gen. Petraeus – as it is with Amb. Hill and with Gen. Odierno. Now, we are talking about empowering and resourcing the country team inside Afghanistan. And it will be Amb. Eikenberry. It will be Gen. McChrystal. Their counterparts in Pakistan and this official it is to try to coordinate the two which are going to determine whether this does or does not actually work.

Now, explaining that to the Congress, breaking it out in detail, showing how the money is used, providing measures of effectiveness is critical. What can the Congress do that is wrong? Well, it isn't necessarily pass another set of benchmark legislation. The first set in Iraq was ridiculous. Nobody ended up paying any attention to the output. We are still not meeting many of the benchmarks in that legislation and we are winning.

The problem is if the legislation becomes too binding, if it is taken too seriously by members of Congress, if rather than being a political gesture, somebody takes themselves seriously in passing these laws that would be dangerous and destructive. And a lot will depend on how well the administration can keep the Congress in a mode of operating where it keeps, or at least develops a sense of perspective.

Q: Greg Grant, "DoD Buzz." Prime Minister Gilani apparently told U.S. officials that he was concerned that any U.S. offensive may just drive Taliban across the border into Pakistan. Do you see that as a legitimate concern and what can we perhaps do to prevent that? And also, what are the chances of any real cooperation or coordination between our offensive and Pakistan?

MR. CORDESMAN: Greg, let me say first – do I see that as a legitimate? No, I do not see it as legitimate at all. We are supposed to worry about what? That we might potentially

drive Taliban that came from Pakistan back into Pakistan? It's a little hard to become terribly sensitive about that particular outcome. The fact is that the real issue here is will the Pakistanis stop all of the elements of support for those parts of the Taliban who they have been manipulating for years because of their influence and control over Pashtuns in Afghanistan.

Will they really see them as what they are? Part of what has become a threat to Pakistan, now, as well as to Afghanistan. Will they actually make good on claims to try to coordinate so that these are border areas and security problems that are honestly addressed? Rather than making claims, for example, that they put a blocking force to try to halt the pace of returning Taliban into Baluchistan during the Helmand campaign, where the force never appeared and they never made serious efforts to cut the lines of communication?

And that gets to the second part of your question. This is an ally, at this point, which is still undecided as to what its role really is. There are people who, at least up 'til this speech thought we were leaving, that they had to try to manipulate what would be the power vacuum after the United States withdrew.

They are the people created by Zia when he was commander, Islamist elements within the forces in the intelligence community, which as far as I'm concerned, are a threat to both countries, Pakistan and the United States. There is a level of tension here which is partly our fault because of inconsistency, a lack of long-term aid programs and support that convince the Pakistanis they had reason to trust us and actually make good on many of the words they said about this.

And above all, I think the key issue is in cooperation. And we've seen this build up. And I think it's now much more probable than it was this spring is whether on a broad level, Pakistanis see at the government and military level, the emergence of all elements of the Taliban and al-Qaida is becoming as much as a threat to their control over their country as it is to Afghanistan's control over Afghanistan. That's by no means a certainty but if you compare what happened at the beginning of this year to what's happening now, there've been some very major shifts.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Tony, I want to ask a final question if nobody else has any further questions.

MR. CORDESMAN: I think there's one down there.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Oh, is there one down there?

MR. CORDESMAN: Do you have a question? Yes.

Q: Robert Rebel (ph) with Voice of America. I just wanted to ask you a – there's, of course, been a lot of talk about the setting –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Could you speak into the microphone just so we can get it?

Q: Sure. There's been a lot of talk about the setting of the beginning of the withdrawal date and do you see that as some critics say, as helping either al-Qaida or the Taliban and does it send any sort of message to the Afghan or Pakistani people if we begin to actually leave by that date?

MR. CORDESMAN: I think the president, in 40 minutes, faced a real problem in making that announcement. Since that time and even before hand, on background, a number of things were made very clear. First, the 30,000 troops is not a fixed limit. The secretary of defense has the authority to put more manpower in if it is needed in selected areas. Now, he would have to go to the president for higher levels and for obvious reasons, they haven't announced the number.

Second, what that effectively is more than anything else is a cap. What you are saying is that in July, you plan to start reductions. You have not said anything about the rate. You have pledged that you will be providing continued aid and resources. You had said that you will be building up the Afghan forces and continue to support and do so.

Now, you can take this deadline and you can always make it into an artificial deadline and I think some of that was a misinterpretation of the president's remarks and some of it was just either a partisan or ideological criticism of the president because that's what one does after president speaks if you oppose the administration.

But the goal here was essentially not to send the message that we were somehow going to leave precipitously. It was to make it clear as many of the other aspects of the president's speech were intended to make it clear that Afghanistan cannot count on an indefinite American or European or ISAF presence.

It has to earn it. It has to show that it is effective; it is cooperating. It's using these resources effectively. And that was the reason for this deadline. It was also to make it clear, I think, to the world that this word "transfer" is not theoretical; that we will put the assets, the effort, the training and the resources into making it possible to transfer more and more of the military and civil responsibility to the Afghans.

But there's no deadline. There are no benchmarks. There's no rate of reduction involved here. And no matter what you did, had the president made an open-ended commitment, he would be criticized for that. Had he chosen any other deadline and no matter how he expressed it, would he have been criticized for that? In one sense, at least in terms of his opposition, it was a no-win situation. No matter what he said, the same critics would have criticized him.

MR. SCHWARTZ: That was my question. (Laughter.) And with that, thank you very much for coming to our briefing today. We'll have a transcript out later this afternoon and Dr. Cordesman's always reachable through me. That's [aschwartz@csis.org](mailto:aschwartz@csis.org). And we'll also be posting these materials and others from Dr. Cordesman up on our Web site today at [www.csis.org](http://www.csis.org). And I also urge you to visit our new Facebook page. Thanks very much.

MR. CORDESMAN: Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen.

(END)