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"ARE WE WINNING THE WAR ON TERRORISM?  
A REPORT FROM AFGHANISTAN"

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[TRANSCRIPT PREPARED FROM A TAPE RECORDING.]

P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. GORDON: Well, ladies and gentlemen, let me welcome you all here. It's nice to see you.

I'm Phil Gordon, a Senior Fellow here at Brookings and delighted to welcome you to this briefing on Afghanistan and the war on terrorism.

Before I introduce the panel before you, let me just give you a word of background on why we're all together and what the subject is.

The six of us spent our Christmas holidays in Afghanistan on a trip sponsored by NATO, looking at the ISAF mission, the NATO mission and what international forces in Afghanistan are doing.

We began in Washington with briefings from the State Department and Pentagon. We went to Brussels, NATO headquarters, received more briefings there; saw the Secretary General, various permanent representatives of the alliance; and then moved on via Dubai onto Kabul and Herat to take a look at the ISAF mission.

A couple of words of context before I turn to my colleagues to talk about different bits of the trip in Afghanistan and the war on terrorism. Just two bits of background that I thought I would stress to start off.

One is the issue of rising violence in Afghanistan. Afghanistan, for many of us who follow these issues, has been on the brighter side of the spectrum both in terms of trans-Atlantic cooperation

and in terms of success in the war on terror. There was broad international agreement to send forces into Afghanistan. There was political progress on the ground. Indeed, while we were there December 19th, the Afghan parliament, freely elected parliament, was inaugurated. And violence, at least compared to places like Iraq, was relatively low.

That doesn't seem to be the case any more. In just this year, which is only whatever—18 days old or a few weeks old—there have been 10 armed attacks in Afghanistan, 50 people killed. Last year was far worse than the previous years in terms of suicide bombings which were relatively unknown in Afghanistan previously since the beginning of the ISAF mission at the end of 2003. Of the suicide attacks that have taken place, two-thirds of them have taken place just since this past summer.

What seems to be happening—indeed, I'll turn to our expert colleagues to address this issue if they will—is copycatting of the methods used in Iraq in terms of suicide attacks, attacks on civilians, improvised explosive devices in order to deter the deployment of international forces in the peacekeeping mission; which is the second aspect of the context that I thought I would mention to begin with, which is this international mission and specifically the NATO mission.

NATO in August 2003 deployed to Afghanistan. If you remember after the initial political process and the Bonn Conference called for an International Security and Assistance Force in Afghanistan

that was lead by different nations—the British, the Turks. And then by 2003 the question was, who else would do it? NATO stepped into the breach, deployed 9,000 troops and has been doing the peacekeeping in Afghanistan ever since.

Just this past December the alliance agreed to deploy further 6,000 troops, bringing the total up to around 15,000, which if the Americans pull out 4,000 as planned, would leave NATO with more troops in Afghanistan than the United States.

So this expansion, or at least planned expansion of the NATO mission is taking place in a context where there's also rising violence in Afghanistan which gets you back to the question of, is NATO actually really going to do it? Because it requires not only more troops, the 6,000 that I mentioned, but also in the context of this expansion of ISAF and the NATO mission, those troops are supposed to go to the more dangerous southern part of the country.

Just next week the Dutch parliament is debating their government's commitment to this issue, and there's a serious question about whether that will indeed go through. And if it doesn't go through partly in response to the rise in violence, there will be major questions about this entire project.

That's the background that I wanted to provide you on this briefing. And with that, let me just introduce my colleagues and ask them to assess different aspects of it. It's nice to see them all again. We

spent countless hours together. This is our first gathering back since then. Glad to see everyone is still talking to each other and willing to work together, after I say countless hours, many of which were spent in airports and on airplanes.

I think we'll ask Gerard Baker to begin. Gery is the U.S. editor and columnist for the Times of London. He's also a contributing editor at the Week Standard. He has undertaken a number of these NATO trips in the past and written extensively on these issues, including about this last trip.

After Jerry, we'll turn to Peter Bergen, who is the terrorism analyst for CNN. I'm sure you're all familiar with Peter's work, including his books, the best selling "Holy War" on Osama bin Laden. And then more recently, a book just published called the "Osama bin Laden I Know: An Oral History of al Qaeda's Leader," which actually is based on extensive interviews Peter did with all sorts of people who know and knew Osama Bin Laden.

Peter, I should add, may have to slip out early. Part of his media commitments entail him being elsewhere to react to certain events, including not least, the purported tape that was released today. We'll ask maybe Peter to say a word about that.

Walt Slocombe was the Undersecretary of Defense for Policy in the Clinton administration from 1994 to 2001. After that he served in the Coalition Provisional Authority in Iraq as a senior defense advisor.

So Walt brought to this trip and this issue expertise not only on defense issues in Afghanistan, but actual on-the-ground experience in Iraq.

Reuel Marc Gerecht, also known to a lot of you from his extensive writing and media appearances and work on this as a resident fellow at the American Enterprise Institute. He's a contributing editor of the Weekly Standard. He also wrote a good piece on Iraq, Afghanistan in the wake of our trip. He's a former CIA specialist on the Middle East with over a decade of experience working on Afghanistan and other Muslim countries.

And then finally, last but not least, Steven Simon of the RAND Corporation, yet another very well known expert on terrorism in the Middle East. Worked for a number of years in the U.S. government in the State Department. Was senior director for counter-terrorism in the Clinton administration for a number of years. And is also an author, co-author of best selling books on these issues, including "The Age of Sacred Terror," which he wrote with our colleague, Dan Benjamin, and then their latest book called, "The Next Attack: The Failure on the War on Terror and a Strategy for Getting It Right."

With that, I am delighted to turn to the first of my colleagues, Gery Baker.

I think it's probably best if we just stay in our seats, do this informally. And then we'd be delighted to open it up for questions and discussion.

MR. BAKER: Thank you very much Phil. And thanks to Brookings for hosting this.

And indeed, as Phil said, it was an interesting and unusual way to spend the last part of December. A lot of it was spent in the air, including the final part of our trip. For some of us, for me, it was a 46 hour return journey from western Afghanistan, which I have to say—on commercial airlines—which I have to say, gave me a completely new perspective on torture.

[Laughter.]

MR. BAKER: Because, believe me, I would have told Lufthansa anything they wanted to know by the end of that trip.

[Laughter.]

MR. BAKER: But it was genuinely fascinating—my first trip to Afghanistan. I'm much less experienced than all of the others here who are much more familiar with that part of the world. But it was genuinely fascinating. And it was a tremendous privilege to be able to do it.

I'll confine my observations really because people here are much better equipped to talk about it than it, but to the specific issue of what NATO is doing and the effectiveness of NATO in this theater, in this very unusual and quite unique theater for NATO to be operating in and with some perspectives of my own about the British and European perspective on what's going on there.

And as Phil says, a little bit of detail, to fill in a bit of the details, the background that Phil gave you. We traveled—we were in Afghanistan the six of with some European commentators too. We were there for about two-and-a-half, three days altogether. And we were staying with—essentially, we traveled with the invitation of NATO. And we traveled around with NATO. We stayed at NATO and ISAF headquarters in Kabul and then flew and did some—spoke to all of the people at NATO headquarters and then also in the Afghan administration—and then flew on NATO transport plane to western Afghanistan to Herat, which as many of you know, is quite close to the Iranian border. It's a very large, teeming city of several million souls. And we spent—we were longer there than was actually initially planned. We had intended to just fly out there essentially for a day and fly back to Kabul that night.

As it turned out, when we got back to the air base, which is a Spanish-run air base at Herat, having traveled around, having seen the PRT, the Provincial Reconstruction Team, in Herat and having traveled around the city itself a bit. We got back to air base and we were told that our transport plane that had taken us out from Kabul had developed a problem and had to fly back to Kabul and there wasn't any means for us to get back to Kabul that night. So we ended up spending the night in the military base at Herat.

Tremendous, I have to say, hospitality of the Spanish and the Italians who are out in force there. I think it's fair to say most of us didn't quite expect to go to Afghanistan and have a culinary feast, but that's essentially what we had thanks to the tremendous hospitality of the Italians, in particular.

It emerged that the reason—and the reason I'm telling this story because it is rather germane to my general point about NATO—it emerged that the reason we couldn't back to Kabul that night was because there was some problem—as I said there was a problem, there was a mechanical problem with the plane that was due to fly us back. But there was—another plane had been due to come and collect us and fly us back to Kabul. But it turned out that that plane couldn't fly. Now there are conflicting stories about exactly what the explanation for that was, but it does seem that the most likely story—my journalistic instincts determined it was the most likely story because it was the one the officials were least happy with...

[Laughter.]

MR. BAKER: ... was that the—it was a German plane, a German transport plane, and that under the special rules under which German forces operate in Afghanistan, the German plane couldn't fly at night. And therefore, since it was 4:00 o'clock, 4:30 in the afternoon, it wouldn't be back in Kabul, having flown out to western Afghanistan, in time before the plane turned into a pumpkin or something like that.

[Laughter.]

MR. BAKER: So there was no way of getting back specifically because of this rule that the Germans applied to the operation of their forces in Afghanistan.

Now these rules are called caveats as many of you will know about. There are conditions that the various NATO member countries attach to the operation of their forces in Afghanistan.

And it's that I really want to say what I really want to talk about. That, to me, sums up in its very small and insignificant way—and I wouldn't suggest for one minute that as august as some of the people that I'm sitting with here—that flying a bunch of commentators back to Kabul from Herat was very high on anybody's list of priorities that night. But it does demonstrate, I mean both in terms of the shortage of material, the shortage of equipment, and the rules under which many of these NATO countries are operating in Afghanistan. It shows you, I think, the character of the problem that NATO is having.

As Phil said, the most important thing that can be said about it is that it's a remarkable achievement for NATO. First of all, it is an achievement for NATO to have agreed to take on this mission. And those who are familiar with NATO battles from years past and this whole debate about out of theater activity for NATO, it's a remarkable thing that 5,000 miles from Central Europe, there are 15,000 NATO forces—there will be about 15,000 NATO forces in Afghanistan fighting in many

areas in a hot war against terrorists, against insurgents, against people who are trying to kill them and trying to destroy the government.

They are doing—it is both significant in political terms and in think in many respects, in military terms—a remarkable feat. And we should not underestimate that. And I think from the point of view of the United States, where there has been so much debate about the relevance of NATO and the efficiency of NATO, it is a striking thing that where obviously in Iraq, the United States is largely going it alone, with the exception of the British and a few other forces. In NATO there is active support and active political support and active military support on the ground from a whole range of countries, who have grave misgivings about what the United States is doing around the world, about U.S. foreign policy.

So it is—so we should not belittle at all the scale of the achievement of NATO being there and nor, indeed, in any way, should we belittle the work that is actually being done on the ground. Many or much of the work of the Provincial Reconstruction Teams that are around the country and particularly in the north and west part of the country, they are doing tremendous—they are really doing, they are doing the work of angels in rebuilding schools and hospitals. In some parts of the country, they're actually fighting intense battles against insurgents, against terrorists.

So that's the good news, that you have a multi-national force which is working with the United States and which we will all have [inaudible] the same objectives and much progress has been made.

The bad news is, and this brings me back to my story about the German caveat, is that one I worry tremendously—and I think we should all be concerned—about the scale of political commitment that there is for many of those NATO countries to what's going on in Afghanistan.

Because the story about the German caveat or in other words—it's not just the Germans to be absolutely fair—all of the countries have, all the NATO countries have their own caveats, their own restrictions, their own, frankly, sometimes quite extreme prohibitions on what their forces can do as part of the NATO operation. But the danger with that, that's not, for the most part, some minor technical or legal issue, it reflects quite deep down some real political uncertainties themselves, in the capitals themselves, about what their forces are doing there and about the degree of popular support that those forces would have in fighting that war in Afghanistan.

And the truth is, I think, that if you hobble your military forces with these kind of constraints, you are making what is already a very difficult fight—Phil spelled out how much more difficult fight it has become in the last year—and it is quite striking. I was quite surprised being in Kabul. I had not expected to see the degree of security. I have

not been to Iraq. I've not been to Baghdad. And I'm sure obviously it's considerably larger there. I was going to talk about that more. But I was struck by it. I wasn't expecting there to be quite the degree of lock down, if you like, of the government buildings, of embassies. There was a strong sense that this was a city, to some extent, under siege. And I was genuinely surprised about that. So the state of this, the scale of this fight has clearly intensified. The degree of intensity has increased considerably in the last six months or so.

And the question is really, with NATO doing that and again, as Phil said, within the first six months of this year, NATO taking on a much more active and much more dangerous role. And there's big debate about this in my country as Phil said, in the Netherlands too. Britain is going to significantly expand its contribution to ISAF, to the International Security Assistance Force in NATO in Afghanistan in the course of the first half of this year. And there's considerable concern about that because they are going to be fighting in areas, in a particular area based around Kandahar, which is much more lively, which is much more dangerous where there are many more terrorists and remnants of the Taliban and al Qaeda to fight.

And so that is a big challenge. We've seen already the challenge has grown over the last year. The challenge for NATO specifically is going to grow significantly greater in the course of the

next six months. And the question is, do the NATO countries that are engaged there really have the political commitment?

And I have to say, frankly, I wonder. And I worry a lot whether or not they do. Because as I say, these are not just technical issues. These are issues about the willingness of countries to bear the sort of costs, human costs in particular, but to some extent obviously, financial costs associated with keeping their forces in Afghanistan.

And I just don't see at this point, strong political support in Europe, in most of Europe, for what is going on there. And if we, God forbid, if there were to be as NATO expands its operations into the southwest of the country, the more dangerous areas of the country, if there were to be serious assaults, serious attacks and serious casualties incurred by NATO, by the non-U.S. NATO forces, which I have so far have been relatively light, if that were to increase significantly as it could well do over the next six months or year or so, I have real questions, real grave concerns about whether or not the publics in Europe, in particular, would be prepared to support the kind of effort that would then be needed to really make this very delicate operation actually succeed.

So that's my observation. I think longer term, there are issues about Afghanistan, about nation building, about the narco-economy that Afghanistan essentially is and the problems that I think we're going to have even if we can overcome these immediate legal

problems that NATO has of securing those parts of the country where it's tasked.

There are bigger issues about simply the feasibility of making Afghanistan work as a political model as much success we've had in elections and that kind of thing.

But my own concern and my own perspective, the thing that most struck me was just how, despite the professionalism of the armed forces, despite the decisions that have already been made, political commitments that have already been made to be there, the restrictions, the constraints, the doubts, the concerns that there are clearly in Europe, that are limiting the maneuverability, the functionality of these forces, I think is a real challenge.

And I think as NATO expands its role, that, I think, is going to be the big question, frankly, as to the viability of the entire operation.

MR. GORDON: Gery, thanks very much. It's a great way of putting the question and the challenge. And we'll obviously have time to come back and pursue of those issues.

But maybe, Peter, you can jump in at this point.

MR. BERGEN: Thanks to Phil, thanks to Brookings and thanks to my colleagues for a very interesting and enjoyable trip to Afghanistan.

I started visiting Afghanistan in 1993 during the civil war. And this is maybe my 10th visit. So I have some perspective historically.

I think it's important to see, to give you a little bit of historical perspective in terms of the violence that's going on.

Frankly, I was actually surprised by the level of violence that we're seeing in the last six months in Afghanistan.

A colleague of mine, Paul Qikshank (ph) has put together the stuff on the public record. 2003 saw nine major attacks in Afghanistan. 2004 saw 24 major attacks. 2005 saw 81 major attacks. And 2006, we're already up to about 10 major attacks.

One very disturbing statistic that NATO gave us when we were there was that since June there's been 17 suicide operations in Afghanistan. I think that number is up to 21 now.

And of course, Afghans traditionally had not engaged in suicide operations. And so while I've been optimistic about many things in Afghanistan—3 million refugees have returned to Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban. We've had the very successful presidential election, in which Hamid Karzai got 52 percent of the vote against more than a dozen other candidates. And then, of course, the rather successful parliamentary elections.

This rise of violence is extremely disturbing. And I think—we asked the question to a lot of different people, who is conducting the violence? And the answer is, we don't really know. We don't really know if these are Afghans who are simply copycatting tactics they're seeing

from Iraq, the suicide attacks, the improvised explosive devices or are these foreign fighters coming in from outside?

And I think as we go forward, hopefully we'll begin to have more information about that. Certainly one way to—if I was investigating these attacks, I'd be looking at the jihadist Websites, looking for suicide rules of people involved in the attacks and trying to determine the nationality.

We've seen in Iraq that 60 percent of the suicide attackers are from Saudi Arabia by this process of looking at jihadist Websites. The same process should be conducted now in Afghanistan.

So the rise of violence is disturbing. When you've got 60 percent of GDP being the drug trade, you can make the argument that in some degree this is a Keynesian pump to the economy, which to some degree it is.

On the other hand, another question we really didn't get a good answer to is, who is profiting from this? I don't, you know, it would be natural that the Taliban would be profiting. I interviewed the Taliban foreign minister, Midelque (ph) back in 2000. We asked him directly, are you profiting from the drug trade? He said, of course we are. We take zakat—as you know, one of the five pillars of Islam, the 2.5 percent tax on goods.

And so the Taliban has certainly historically had profited. Why wouldn't they be profiting now? And if the Taliban are profiting, why wouldn't al Qaeda be profiting?

So I think the one thing that really surprised me was this deteriorating situation in Afghanistan. And NATO uses the words tense and unstable to describe Kabul now. And that again was surprising to me because I've been used to walking around Kabul and it being a rather safe city.

Just one final thing because of the news of day, we have had this tape bin Laden, which has been authenticated now by the CIA. The tape...

MR. : Is that supposed to make us feel better?

[Laughter.]

MR. BERGEN: Al-Jazeera authenticated it, so I guess it's the two source rule. So the tape, I think, is significant because we hadn't heard from bin Laden for more than a year. He talks about Afghanistan in the tape. He talks, of course, about Iraq in the tape.

As you know, al Qaeda took I think quite a serious hit on Friday with the attack on the Afghan-Pakistan border where they killed a number, it seems, of relatively senior members of al Qaeda, including the wonderfully named Abu Kabab (ph) who is in charge of the weapons of mass destruction program.

And so I think that this tape may have been on the shelf ready for a news event. They want to show they're still in the game. There is a time marker on the tape—very interesting. And it goes to Osama bin Laden's intense interest in the news. He's sort of a news junky.

He mentions in the full transcript of the tape that Al-Jazeera has now posted to its Website a story that appeared in the Daily Mirror in early December 2005, the allegation that President Bush said something to Tony Blair, Prime Minister Tony Blair about attacking Al-Jazeera's headquarters in Doha, Qatar. Leaving aside whether that story is true or not, of course the administration has denied it, this means that the tape from bin Laden is a very recent vintage. We're looking at something that's several weeks old.

I would say this is not particularly good news for Afghanistan or for Pakistan or for the war on terror, that bin Laden remains out there and remains able to produce these kind of major communications.

MR. GORDON: Great. Thank you, Peter.

Just on the anecdotal level—we're on that level—Peter talked about previously being able to walk around Kabul and go to cafes, whatever. Gery talked about lockdown. That certainly was our experience. We were locked down. The trend in attacks had already

started to happen before we got there. There were some Germans killed a couple of weeks before we got there.

And we met a couple of people on the base who went with us to the airport in order to fly to Herat for whom that was the first outing in three months, that just getting out of there, ironically because of us, was the first time. Because they were in such lock down mode, whereas, even the same ISAF forces in Kabul were themselves getting around and so on. So there's definitely that feeling that things are very different.

That said, I think it's also worth adding anecdotally—and again, one is always cautious about extrapolating too much from a short visit—when we did get out even driving around especially in Herat, the impression was a welcoming one, where people, children all across the town are waving, smiling, certainly giving the impression that far from being hostile to these forces, they were delighted to see them.

Again, that's just an anecdotal experience, but we're not talking about one or two waves. We're talking about an extensive drive throughout large parts of the city and consistently waves and smiles.

That said, and this is—you see all of the contradictory information—that sort of leads us to think now why are they making wear the flack jackets and the helmets and why can't we get around a bit. And we left, I think, at least personally, sort of feeling like they were a big exaggerating here, only to find out that the day that we were driven to the

airport by the Italians in Herat, those Italians were hit by a suicide attack, wounding three of them and killing three passersby.

So you have this contradictory stuff going on all of the time, welcoming in part, but the overall trend seeming to be that it's an increasingly dangerous place.

Walt Slocombe knows something about dangerous places, and we'll turn to him.

MR. SLOCOMBE: First of all, I think it's important to emphasize that was a NATO trip. Partly because of the problems with scheduling, we did not have an opportunity to talk to the leadership of the American military in country. We did talk to the American ambassador.

So our impressions are very much that of NATO's military effort in country, not those of the United States and the other countries that are in the coalition.

And there are two separate military operations being conducted in Afghanistan. Now divide the NATO one and coalition one, Operation Enduring Freedom, which is overwhelmingly U.S. The geographical differences today virtually a line drawn through that bisects Afghanistan from southwest and northeast.

The American coalition, the OEF force under General Eichenberry is in order of magnitude a division overwhelmingly American focused on the counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism

operation, but like the NATO force, it also runs these Provincial Reconstruction Teams. Indeed, as of now, probably a couple more than NATO does.

The NATO force is in order of magnitude 10,000. And at least in principle, every NATO country, every 26 of them, have some representation, including Iceland, which has presumably sent policemen since they don't have army. Some of that participation is quite nominal. But one of the PRTs, the Provincial Reconstruction Teams, is actually lead by the Lithuanians. And for those of us who spent a long time in our earlier years working on U.S.-Soviet relations, somehow the idea that there is a Lithuanian army in Afghanistan under a NATO flag shows that the world has changed.

The lead countries for the PRTs are Germany, the United Kingdom, Norway, Spain, as I said, Italy, Lithuanian, and the Dutch. And the United States also has one in the NATO operation. The United States is a part, a relatively small part of the NATO operation.

The missions differ quite substantially. As I said, the OEF force is heavily focused on the counter-insurgency, counter-terrorism, knock out the remnants of the Taliban, and try to find the remnants of al-Qaeda. And only, very secondarily on nation building and reconstruction.

The whole focus of the NATO mission is on, as they would put it, to assist the government of Afghanistan in reconstruction and

establishing stability and security in the country, and in particular, to provide security.

In parallel with this—and the reconstruction teams are a few hundred people out in a dozen or so places in the NATO area and about the same number in the OEF area—they do local projects. They build schools. They fix water systems, that sort of thing.

Almost all of that is actually done by civilian contractors or by their equivalents of our AID with the military in a support role. And most typically, there's about a company level of a few hundred soldiers who provide force protection for the base and provide force protection for the projects. And to some degree, provide security for the region.

On the other hand, as was explained to us, the people in the PRTs who are actually out in country are a few thousand. And this is a country—the area they're responsible for is half the size of Italy. By no stretch of the imagination are they going to provide massive security, have a massive impact on the security.

In parallel with this, there is an effort to build the Afghan security forces. And that's been divided on a lead nation system. It's a little bit like the joke that some of you have probably heard about the EU will either be heaven or hell if it ends up whether the cooks are British or the police are British and the lovers are German or the lovers are Italian. But the distribution now is the United States has the lead on training the Afghan national army. The Germans train the police. The Japanese do

the disarmament, the integration of the militias into the civil society and into some degree, into the security forces. The Italians are in charge of the judicial and justice system. The British take the lead on the counter-narcotics effort, which is huge.

Because of this—and then, of course, there is a very large NGO and civilian reconstruction aid program. I think it's important to say that we have a good many critical things to say in this discussion. All of the information we got, basically we got from NATO people. NATO was remarkably candid about—and indeed, the Afghans—were remarkably candid about their difficulties. And perhaps a symbol of that is the first briefing we got after Kabul was from a woman who was the chief coordinator for the organization of NGOs, Afghan and foreign, that work there. And she gave a devastatingly critical briefing. And the NATO generals all sat there and said there's a lot to that. You've raised some serious issues we've got to work on.

Some of the issues, some of the problems. The security situation is tough and pretty clearly deteriorating, although I have to say that compared to Iraq, it is not nearly as bad as it is in Iraq. And it's interesting, the United States ambassador, Ambassador Newman, had spent a year in Iraq. And he said—his information about Iraq is much more current than mine—he made the same point, that while there is a security problem and it may be getting worse, the measures that are taken and the degree is very substantially less.

The drug problem in the long run is overwhelmingly difficult, because the drug problem stands in the way of lots of other things that you want to have done. You can't have a country which is where the economy is essentially a criminal conspiracy and expect to have either very good security, very good general economic development, or honest government. And of course, to the degree the Taliban and al Qaeda are getting paid, that's an elective choice if they have other resources there. Principles may keep them from taking drug money, but they can get it whenever they want it because they control parts of the country.

The biggest issue is one which is in some sense one Gery Baker talked about and that is sustaining the effort. There were a lot of people—they were all very polite about it because our group although not entirely American, was heavily American—that this business of gradually expanding the NATO mission is a cover for the United States getting out. The United States officials strenuously say, that's not true, we're going to stay in Afghanistan until the job is done.

But there is a suspicion that the Americans are not interested in sustaining it. And for the European countries, sustainment is a problem because although the European militaries collectively are larger than the American, they find it very difficult to deploy forces for a sustained period of time into to do the rotations.

If you, a technical question of whether the PRTs, while they're doing good work—everybody says what they do is good—is it the right emphasis? Are they doing too much nation building and kind of do-goodism and not enough security? And NGOs in particular make the argument that military organizations are not ideal at building schools. And the people who build schools would like to be protected so they and their people are not as vulnerable.

There is a serious issue of the evolving NATO-U.S. relationship. The objective is that within a year or so in principle, NATO will have responsibility for the whole country, but there will still be a U.S. counter-terrorism force. At present, there is a dual system of command, which the lack of unity of command is a problem. But at least it's alleviated by the fact that there's a geographical distinction.

If you have a situation in which there is an American operation, which is out rounding up people and finding very bad people and getting rid of them, and you've got a NATO operation which is under all of these caveats, and in the same geographical area with a different mission, that's going to be a problem.

There is a serious resourcing problem. Some of it is political. The Dutch are having a difficulty, having agreed to take over the lead in moving into the southwest region, they're having difficulty getting political approval for doing so, for sending the troops to do it.

NATO has a very curious financing system in which basically, with a minor qualification for some common funding, the people who volunteer to risk their lives also volunteer to pay the bill. And the price of not volunteering is you don't have to pay the bill. That is probably not a sustainable arrangement to get people to volunteer.

And also, there are some inherently limited capabilities. I mean, one of the most striking just at a retail level, one of the most striking differences between watching the American Army, and indeed, to a considerable degree, the European armies, the coalition armies in Iraq and the NATO operation, is this is a shoestring operation. There are exactly two C-130s available to fly around the country, which is very mountainous. It's 1,500 kilometers from one corner to the other. That is not a robust capability for deployment in to a difficult theater.

On the point about caveats, I think it's a combination of two factors. One is a material factor. If the airplanes aren't safe to fly at night, you're going to have to say, I'm sorry, I can't fly at night. That's not a sign of wimpishness. That's a sign of not being stupid.

On the other hand, there are also political considerations. One of the reasons the PRTs don't go out and provide security is precisely that there is a political sense that they're there to do a limited humanitarian, at best, a peacekeeping mission.

With that, that said, it's also important to say I was struck by the degree, which not only—the worst thing you could say about this

dinner we were forced to eat in Herat was that the chianti was not vintage.

[Laughter.]

MR. SLOCOMBE: But I think having said that, it's important—these are good troops. They are—the bases are well-maintained. They're properly secured. They are out on the streets every day doing stuff. They're going out into difficult areas.

There are limitations on what NATO is doing, but they are not limitations that arise either from lack of military professionalism, or certainly not from lack of courage on the part of the European and other NATO soldiers who are there.

MR. GORDON: Thank you, Walt.

Reuel?

MR. GERECHT: I would just like to say at the beginning, I want to thank Phil and Brookings for the opportunity for all of us getting back together again and to talk, especially under circumstances where we're not wondering whether the plane will ever leave Afghanistan.

[Laughter.]

MR. GERECHT: I would also like to actually take the opportunity to thank Walt. Because, the truth be told, I mean after we learned that the propeller had fallen off of our plane, and we started on our 45 hour non-sleep journey after about hour 30 to 35, I mean Steve,

Phil, myself, we were going catonic. Gery was beginning to speak in tongues.

[Laughter.]

MR. GERECHT: And Peter, we were all convinced, had come down with the bird flue.

[Laughter.]

MR. GERECHT: And we were not doing very well, and I think all of us were on the verge of going into tears. And the only thing that kept us, or at least me from doing that, was that I would look over at Walt, who as you can tell is somewhat older than us, and he seemed to actually be enjoying himself.

[Laughter.]

MR. GERECHT: So I couldn't actually start crying because I would feel terribly ashamed, and I would be able to talk to my daughters. So I want to thank Walt for being such an inspirational role model on this trip.

The first thing I should probably say is I am not a Europeanist. I'm mean, some of you perhaps if you've seen my writings—or Phil could certainly testify to that. So even though my one day I firmly intend to die in Normandy drinking excessive quantities of Calvados, I think it is often a very big problem for the United States—and this administration is not exempted from that—of sort of defining

Middle Eastern affairs, Middle Eastern foreign policy by whether it helps our trans-Atlantic relationship.

Now and this could be a problem in Afghanistan. I actually think it's, though in all probability, it's going to be the opposite of that. And I'm a firm believer and supporter of NATO in Afghanistan because first and foremost I think NATO being there is going to guarantee under all circumstances the Americans are going to see this through.

I mean, I think it's highly probable that we would see it through anyway. But having NATO there, and that NATO's commitment there is really do or die for that institution, will guarantee that we will stay there because the trans-Atlantic community here in Washington is still the bedrock of foreign policy establishment. And I don't think we're going to let NATO die and by deduction we will ensure that we will do whatever is necessary in Afghanistan.

The other thing I might note on that is that when we were there and we would have conversations with various Europeans who were the component parts of this, it seemed pretty clear that for the troops in the ground, for the soldiers involved, even the senior officers, they were actually pretty committed to the project. And they were pretty committed to the idea of fighting fanaticism and helping democracy grow in Afghanistan.

The possible exception to that might be the French soldiers. But since the French displayed a particular acumen and even zeal for

fighting in Afghanistan, while other Europeans do not, I would grant them the small peccadillo, perhaps not being the most enthusiastic supporters of the expansion of democracy in Afghanistan.

But by-in-large, I think the soldiers involved were committed, probably more committed than many of their political leaders back leaders back home, which just goes to show when you get involved in these projects, you actually start to believe in them.

And you know, on that, I'd also add that as a general rule, I think the people involved there, the Americans and the Europeans, are not terribly nonplused, anxious about the difficulty, of the ethnic and religious difficulty of bringing democracy to Afghanistan.

They were not particularly paralyzed by the fact that a lot of the people who are involved in the process in Afghanistan are highly religious, sincerely so, religiously [inaudible] and not particularly reformed, yet, nevertheless, still appear to be quite committed to the projects.

I mention that because I think a little bit of that attitude would be appropriate and sensible if you had it in Iraq where we tend to be much more paralyzed by the fact of ethnic division and religious division. And I would argue that in Afghanistan actually—the divisions between the Afghans—and let's—I could not pinpoint a national culture that was more polarized than the Afghans since the mid-1970s. I mean, it was literally like the rest of the country, completely deconstructed

whereby people, Afghans, were starting to identify themselves by the end of the Taliban's rule, by villages, let alone valleys.

That is changing, and you can feel sort of a congealing of a new national identity. And in fact, the ethnic divisions and religious divisions actually are points of refuge.

And I would just suggest to you that [inaudible] with all of the problems in Iraq also, something similar to that is probably taking there, and we should be a little bit more cautious in saying it's all going to hell in a hand basket because of ethnic and religious divisions.

I think in both countries, though these things can go too far and eventually you have to have some congealing and cooperation and compromises between the component parts, that some of the religious division, ethnic division, is actually a good thing. It gives people a comfort zone after the fact being polarized and brutalized for so very, very long.

And the other—maybe a little more on that—I would agree completely and this is on the pessimistic side, I mean agree completely with Peter on the spread of holy warriorism and suicide bombings. I mean, it is a big problem. It is very disconcerting to talk to American and NATO officials and for them to have no idea who these people are. I mean, part of that is understandable when you're blown to bits, that the DNA doesn't identify necessarily where you come from.

I suspect, and I fear, that these individuals are not all foreign. They're not just Pakistani, that in fact, they're probably Afghan Pashtuns, which means the disease has hooked itself into Pashtun culture. I actually don't think that's at all surprising. It makes sense. We should have anticipated that happening.

If that grows, if it is fueled once again by the madrasas culture in the northwest frontier province in Balujistan (ph). And I don't think, contrary to what might be said in Islamabad, I don't think that culture has changed much since 9/11 at all.

Then we may have a real big problem, and we all be tested, particularly the Europeans will be tested in this fact I think pretty sorely. So, I'll stop there.

MR. GORDON: Great, Reuel. Another provocative set of issues that we'll want to come back to.

Steve, I think we billed this session as not only Afghanistan, but the question, are we winning the war on terrorism? I'm going to go out on a limb and guess that since your latest book is called, "The Next Attack" and the first sentence is, "we are losing,"...

[Laughter.]

MR. GORDON: ... that you're probably on the negative side of that spectrum. But maybe you'll have a word to say about that in this context.

And then we'll open it up for discussion.

MR. SIMON: Well, thinks could be better.

[Laughter.]

MR. SIMON: You know, Peter Bergen's reference to Ahmed Motowachio (ph) brought me back to the good old days of the high water mark of U.S.-Taliban relations, which was reached in the form of a letter transmitted by Motowachio to us, presumably to give to President Clinton from Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban and the head of the Afghan state during this period, which said, Mr. President, you're the leader of a Christian country, I'm the leader of an Islamic country. We have a common enemy, the Jews. I see no reason why our two great countries should continue to squabble when we should be mobilizing together to attack our common enemy.

It was one of those letters that just doesn't get much farther and doesn't get a response. But that was as good as it got. And I appreciate Peter bringing me back to that, to that enchanting moment.

Just a few observations on Afghanistan and the context of the war on terrorism. One is that there is a trend in this conflict, in the jihad, towards—well, it's been observed that it has globalized, but the trend has been towards the expression of local or proximate grievances in jihadist terms.

So individuals who are disgruntled, individual Muslims who are disgruntled in various places from Indonesia to Thailand to East

Africa to the Netherlands see their problems through the lens of a kind of [inaudible], through the lens of a religious conflict.

And this is of course the most disturbing feature of the evolution of the jihad because it means that local conflicts which are always with us will continue now to supply a stream of recruits for a global jihad, and that whoever the near enemies are of these disgruntled individuals, they're going to have the far enemy in their gun sights, and that's us.

Now I raise this because it's interesting to view Afghanistan in this context. And I think Reuel has been very helpful in kind of moving the discussion in this direction with his observations on the internalization of the jihad ethnic among the indigenous Pashtun population of Afghanistan.

This is, indeed, a disturbing development and it tracks well with what's been going on elsewhere in the world.

And the more such alienated individuals there are who view their proximate concerns through this global lens, the worse for us.

The other kind of interesting thing is that for the most part the jihad has become largely de-territorialized. It's a conflict of the imagination as well as a conflict in the streets. And it's de-territorialized in the sense that the Dutch or the German or the Spanish jihadists, the Spanish Muslim insurgent isn't fighting to create necessarily on that spot a new Saudi Arabia. It's a lot more complex than that.

And it's the de-territorialization that makes the combating of the jihad so fraught, it seems to me. But there are a few exceptions to this overall trend. Saudi Arabia is one. The jihad in Saudi Arabia, which flourished from 2003 to 2004 and has since died down, at least for the time being. There there were real territorial aspirations.

The other major exception, it seems to me, is Afghanistan. And you know, here the teachings of some prominent jihadist theoreticians, and I'm thinking in particular of a gentleman named Abu Bakah Anagi (ph), very important. He talks about the need to hold territory, perhaps not to hold territory in perpetuity, not to hold large swaths of territory in perpetuity, but to grab pieces of territory and shift around in a way that causes the adversary to expend his resources and become exhausted and inclined to give in.

Now Afghanistan is a key battlefield for this kind of jihad, for this territorialized jihad, or perhaps re-territorialized jihad. And it's not surprising that Afghanistan would be such a local because in part it was after all an emirate. For a brief glorious moment, it was an authentically Islamic state.

And the leader was the Emir al-Alumeni (ph), the leader of the faithful. He wore allegedly Mohammed's cloak. So it's the place from which the global jihad was launched. So it's hugely important.

So it wouldn't surprise me that if there were still a residual al Qaeda, it would mesh well, its plans would mesh well with atavistic

desires to recreate the state that existed for a short period of time in the 1990s.

Now it's all the more likely, of course, that this might be the case because of the way in which Pakistan serves as a vital constituency for these very objectives.

The situation in Pakistan is obviously very turbulent. And Musharraf is riding a tiger. And there are elements of Pakistani public opinion as well as the Pakistani government that are unreconciled to the current turn of events and would like to see Afghanistan revert to its position as Pakistan's strategic depth, in essence. And for that program to be implemented, it's important to maintain ties and to buck up the kinds of groups who had been friendly in the past and would be capable of challenging the American and NATO presence.

The other factor here is Iraq. Now there isn't a lot of evidence, at least insofar as I'm aware, of Iraqis or graduates of Iraq, so-called bleedout, reaching Afghanistan and Pakistan. But that doesn't mean that you don't get the kind of copy cat behavior that I think we're seeing.

And the signs are distressingly clear. The prevalence of beheadings, these have become a feature of the jihad in Afghanistan. Vehicle born improvised explosive devices, otherwise known as car bombs, to the uninitiated, are also a feature. And the other feature is the expanded target deck, which is to say that the insurgents in Afghanistan

are attacking a wider array of targets than they had before in a particularly Toqueferi (ph) mode, which is to say that they're going after other Muslims who are not seen as being with the program. It's a very kind of Algerian impulse if you think back to the civil war in that country.

So all of this doesn't mean that the sky is falling. It just means that the seams are loosening a bit. Now in a situation like this, it's obviously essential that the insurgents be defeated while at the same time their narrative is undermined by us and our friends doing really good things in Afghanistan.

But what we learned in Afghanistan in our trip—or, I'll speak for myself—didn't especially bode well. You know the Europeans that we met and we got a bit of a taste of this while we were in Brussels for briefings before departing for Afghanistan have a very Woody Allen-like approach to things.

Woody Allen, you will recall, is the genius who observed that 90 percent of life is just showing up. Well, this is more or less the governing or the regulating feature of NATO's presence in Afghanistan. When we were briefed by our hosts out in the field, whenever we brought up a particularly difficult or challenging mission, the response was, well we, in quotes, "we are not asked to do that, or we have not been asked to do that." And I can well believe they weren't.

That's a problem as the United States draws down, and in fact, the U.S. drawn down is a problem, particularly for the sharper edged dimension of the work that needs to be done in Afghanistan to prevent the adversary's territorial objectives from being achieved.

Thank you.

MR. GORDON: Great, Steven, thank you very much. And thanks to all of you for listening to such a range of presentations.

I think what I'd like to do now is open it up to your questions, comments.

I know Peter may have to slip out in a minute, so particularly those who want to direct something to Peter Bergen, but otherwise a microphone is in the room. I'll ask you to tell us who you are, and what I'll do is gather a couple of questions and then give people a chance to respond to them.

We can start in the front row right here.

QUESTION: Hi, my name is Carol Moore (ph). I'm a graduate student at American University in the School of International Service. And I'm interested, Peter, in what your take on the meaning of this recently released al Qaeda tape is.

MR. BERGEN: Well, the most obvious meaning is that bin Laden is alive. You know, there was some debate about whether he was alive or dead. There's a lot of ill-informed speculation about whether he was with us or not.

You know, if bin Laden was dead, there would be all sorts of people who would want to announce that fact, not least of which would be al Qaeda itself. They would say at last our great leader has been martyred. He's got his wish to go to heaven.

Well, we didn't hear that. And now we have evidence that he's in fact alive. So the main message is he's alive and well in an effort to sort of pump up the base of his supporters with the fact that al Qaeda's leadership is still in some way out there.

There are other messages. Some of them relate directly to Iraq and some of them relate directly to Afghanistan. He's saying and very relevant to the discussion, European countries, you pull out of Afghanistan. We're offering you a truce. He did this before. You may remember in April of 2004, he offered a truce to European nations to pull out of Iraq. That truce expired July 2004. Exactly a year later there was the attack in London, of course, the United Kingdom being a key member of the coalition in Iraq.

MR. GORDON: Anyone else on the take or we'll—are there questions. In the middle of the back, there are two there. And tell us who you are.

QUESTION: My name Lisa Dumish (ph) and I work for Army International Affairs in [inaudible] Middle East region.

My question is about the truce. Do you see that his offer of a truce is evidence that he feels that he's losing the war on terror? I

mean, we've listed substantive evidence that we feel as though we're losing. But is that truce is just a ploy or do you think that that's some kind of evidence that he thinks he's losing?

MR. BERGEN: Islamic jurisprudence before you attack people, you're supposed to warn them that you're going to attack them. And rarely have our enemies warned us so often about what they're going to do. I mean, bin Laden went on CNN in '97 to say that he was going to attack us.

Imagine if the Japanese in 1937 started saying publicly about their plans to attack the United States, how Pearl Harbor might have played out differently.

So I don't think that this truce is either a ruse or—I mean, it's kind of typical behavior by bin Laden. I think it's hyper-ventilating. He's talking about attacks being planned in the United States. I don't see that as something they're really capable of now. Clearly, they're capable of the kinds of 3/11 type of attacks we saw in Madrid, which happened on March 11th. I think we'll see a lot more 3/11s. I don't think we'll be seeing 9/11s from al Qaeda the organization, which obviously has been very interfered with the war in Afghanistan and losing their base in Afghanistan.

Of course the war, as Steven as so eloquently pointed out, the Iraq war has really re-energized this group and we're seeing something which somebody has described as the globalization of

martyrdom. I was very interested in the fact that we saw a Belgium female suicide bomber in Iraq for the first time in November. Obviously she had never been to Iraq before.

And so this is quite worrying phenomenon.

MR. GORDON: Peter and others, several talked about what looks like copy cat methods being used in Afghanistan. They hadn't been using it all before, but suddenly and Steve gave a few examples of them, is it your sense, if there evidence—and this is for whoever...

[End Side A, Begin Side Bank]

MR. GORDON: .... what we're seeing here is an al Qaeda phenomenon of a global organization doing things to make Afghanistan more like Iraq, or rather a local phenomenon where people see what's going on in the world, and they start doing what is effective in other places?

Anyone?

MR. GERECHT (?): Well, I'd be careful of pinpointing one particular play. I mean, there's a long history to Islamic radicalism. And as Steve mentioned, I mean Algeria was a laboratory of just about every form slaughter than you can think of. And so I mean, it's quite possible for these things to be spontaneous generation by curious people.

MR. SIMON: Well, I would just add to that this is a curious thing. The Dutch kid who killed the provocative Dutch [inaudible] feasted on beheading videos from Iraq, which are of course commonly

available. Stacks of them were found in his flat after he was arrested. Of course, after trying to cut [inaudible]'s head off, after shooting him on the street in Amsterdam.

So you have a kind of interesting reciprocal dynamic where al Qaeda and its theoreticians have unleashed something that now reverberates in kind of interesting ways. It ricochets and in part in the form of these videos, which first emerged from Algeria in the 1980s.

MR. GORDON: Thanks, Steve.

Back here from the previous round, the gentleman in the white shirt on the side.

QUESTION; Thank you. My name is Michael McManus (ph). I'm with CNN. And this question is for Mr. Simon and Mr. Slocombe.

Do you believe that Osama bin Laden is in operational control of his assets? Can he order an attack on the U.S.? Can he actually make it happen or is it now that he's more in an inspirational role, figurehead who can ask for attack but not necessarily order one?

MR. SLOCOMBE: I think if I knew the answer to that, I wouldn't be telling you.

[Laughter.]

MR. SLOCOMBE: First of all, he can order anything. I mean there is the great line from King Lear, I mean from Henry IV, Part I, where Glendower says I can call spirits out of the vastly deep. And

Hotspur says, so can I and so can any man, but will the call come when you call?

He can issue orders. There is no question that he is an inspirational force. I think there is a real—and I should be clear, I don't have any access to anything other than CNN..

[Laughter.]

MR. SLOCOMBE: ... we polarize. I think there is a real issue of the degree to which this is coordinated.

Al Qaeda, as I understand it, was never—it was always kind of a franchise operation. It had organizations and links in different countries. And it had also a sort of central command, a central body that provided technical assistance.

We actually once captured their manual. And it actually had rules about accounting and how you're supposed to make sure that you didn't pay too much and sent your receipts in if you wanted to get reimbursed and all of that stuff.

I think there's a real question of—we actually by coincidence, Steve and I, had a brief of this a little earlier today—for example, the degree to which you can cull the kind of technical information you need to make one of these attacks work just technically off the Web. To what degree do you need to sort off and they'll send out somebody who knows how to do it.

One of the things that I think is important to underscore is it's very important that there is a very broad support in the Islamic world, an emotional support, a sympathy, but it doesn't have to be very many people to run a hugely difficult terrorist operation.

According to the British people that I've talked to about this, the IRA probably never had more than a few hundred actual shooters, actual killers in Northern Ireland. And they kept the provinces in a state of chaos for what, 20 years, partly of course because they were supported—there was a sea to swim in. But the number of people who actually have to be prepared to kill themselves, who have to be prepared to do it, doesn't have to be very large to be a terrible problem.

MR. GORDON: Steve, do you want to add anything?

MR. SIMON: Well, I would just embellish on what Walt said by point out that it's not an either or proposition. In other words, it's not that either there's a centralized al Qaeda or there is a this other thing.

They're probably both existing simultaneously. It's my own view that there's something of a transition going on, but you know, that means that both of these phenomenon are co-existing. You know that you have this broader racemic thing, like roots going out and spreading or as one intelligence official told me at one point, that this was like a deadly mold.

While at the same time you can have the remnants of a centralized leadership of a coherent, a cohesive unitary organization that in fact is taking quite a beating. But you know, if you've got guys like Abu Khabab still roaming around in Pakistan, assuming that he wasn't killed the other day, some many years after 9/11, I mean that suggests that something centralized still exists.

MR. GORDON: Thanks. I want to give a lot of people a chance, so let's gather a couple. We'll come to a couple on the front row here. And sort of gentlemen, hold your fire. And we'll take maybe three or four.

QUESTION: Pete Gently (ph) from Brookings.

Some of you mentioned the rising level of violence, but I don't think any of you gave us a big picture bottom line. Did the people you dealt with, the NATO forces, the U.S. forces, think there's light ahead of the tunnel? Given a little bit more time, a little more effort, are we going to win and the Taliban be defeated or not?

MR. GORDON: That's a good question. Let's take a couple of more from the front.

MR. AZIZ: Masud Aziz [ph], thank you for bringing the focus back on Afghanistan and the root of terrorism. I believe that Afghanistan is one of these countries that is lost from focus from time to time and then suddenly it comes back to the top of the list whether it's Russian's invasion or the Taliban or 9/11. So the issue is are we in the

period of time where we have lost focus on Afghanistan? Let's face it, the U.S. is starting to pull out, NATO is just beginning to have their baby steps out of their realm and proving themselves there. They're largely ineffective and I agree they're a shoe-string operation.

By the way, Afghanistan is one of the post-conflict countries that has received the least amount of per capital aid, the least amount of security forces. So are the ingredients in place now for you to consider the following scenario, that perhaps the money generated from the narco trade and trafficking actually is going to establish a new force that we don't really know about that will be a morphing of Taliban, al Qaeda and other indigent forces that could actually use this money to go across the border, by the way, just in Pakistan to acquire through the old AQ Khan network the kind of thing that we don't want them to acquire?

So have we lost the focus on Afghanistan, and what I don't hear from the panel is a sense of urgency as to what the next step is if we have lost the focus to help prevent a 9/11 because of loss of focus?

QUESTION: I'm a Fulbright student from Afghanistan. You talked about the increasing violence especially in the Pashtun areas. If you don't know, during the Taliban time, the rule of the northwestern province in Balujistan and there are breeding houses there. How much has been done in Pakistan? In relation to that, in the past 4 years how much effort has been put by the Afghan government and by the ISAR forces to build the border security forces? Is there any plan of doing

that? You all know that inside of Afghanistan they don't have neither the capacity nor any other means to operate, so that's my question.

MR. GORDON: We'll take one more here and then we'll come back to the panel.

QUESTION: Scott Herald [ph], Brookings. In light of significant suicide bombings in many of the countries across the Middle East where you've seen a marked decline in the popularity of the jihadi cause in the aftermath of those bombings, has the recent rise in suicide bombings inside Afghanistan led to a similar decline in Afghanistan for support for jihadi causes? I mention this in the context of the recent suicide bombing in southwest Afghanistan where you saw in the aftermath of that bombing Afghans marching and carrying posters saying Death to Pakistan. Comments?

MR. GORDON: A lot of these are related. Let me take a crack at the first one, and then whoever wants to jump in they can. Peter asked the question about rising violence, will we win, bottom line. It's a good question because I don't think we know. I don't know. I don't think you can go there as we did without coming away with at least some positive and optimistic sense when you see the Afghan Parliament being inaugurated for the first time in 30 years, 60 women are represented in the Parliament, 37 countries working on the ground building schools, being waved at and smiled at by the population. Even people like the gentleman to my left who are sometimes skeptical about transatlantic

cooperation and international organizations and even peacekeeping, I think it's impossible as Reuel said to look at that and not think some really important things are being done. And compared to Afghanistan's past, anytime in the past 30 years, even if the current situation is difficult, violence, opium, ethnic issues, lack of development, compared to the previous 30 years, the broader trend is spectacular. In that sense, we're winning.

At the same time, I also don't think you can go there and look at this issue without coming away with grave concerns some of which Jerry expressed about our willingness to see it through. And guess what, the people on the ground, that is to say, the violent people on the ground, have noticed that, too. And they noticed questions about our staying power in Iraq, and it doesn't take them long to figure out if we can only kill a few people every once in a while, those grave doubts are going to get even graver. They're not unaware that the Dutch Parliament is going to debate this next week and that a couple of beheadings between now and then will influence that debate. And if that debate leads to the Dutch Parliament pulling out the 1,000 further troops that it proposed which might lead the British to have real questions about the 4,000 they proposed which might undermine the entire operation, maybe we all leave and they can have this country back to themselves. That leads to the question about walking away from Afghanistan because that is presumably what they want. If our staying power isn't what is necessary

and there's, frankly, reason to doubt it, then they get what they want, we walk away from Afghanistan again and that movie replays.

My own view is that all of this suggests why it is important that we don't lose our will and staying power. It's going to be costly and, yes, to the Europeans who are debating this right now, there will be people killed and it will cost money. But the alternative to that is a return to Afghanistan when we did walk away, and we all saw what that led to which in a way comes back to 9/11, bin Laden and everything that we're talking about up here. So one worries about this, but it is important that we move ahead.

MR. BAKER: Can I just quickly amplify that point in answering your question, Peter? I was surprised, and I can't speak for everybody on the panel, at the somberness of the briefings that we got actually. There was very, very little happy talk about this is going incredibly well and we're winning the war on terrorism here and this is a great success. Walter has already talked about the very blunt assessment we got from the NGO representative, but we got a very blunt assessment I thought from the American Ambassador who actually said success is not guaranteed here. We're at an absolutely critical moment. The violence is rising and the question of political will is a really serious one.

We got very somber briefings both from the street for military briefings about the state, again as Peter described, Kabul and several of the other major cities is tense and unstable, very somber, quite

generally dark assessments about the state of affairs at the moment. And from the senior military commanders, again, while absolutely echoing what Phil said at the beginning about what remarkable progress has been made, again, a very strong and very powerful sense that we were at a very pivotal moment here, a literally critical moment, where things could go either way. Again that surprised me to get quite such a sober kind of assessment like that.

MR. SLOCOMBE: The question also was not just is there a chance of success, but is there a chance of success with a little more effort. The unanimous answer we got on that was, no, there is a chance of success but not with just a little more effort. You go to one of these things and you get deluged with phrases, but one that I was struck by was the British General who said what we need is strategic patience. That is, this country has taken a long time to go down as low as it got. We tend to forget that it was not just the immediate coalition invasion and the 5 years of Taliban before that, but there was the very difficult period of warlordism after the Soviets left, there was the period before that. Something like a million Afghans have been killed in this series of wars, maybe more, and terrible destruction.

This is not going to get fixed quickly and if we're serious about fighting the war on terror, about bringing stability to this part of the world and to anticipate a little bit, I agree with you, we have probably underinvested in Afghanistan particularly, to Steve and I and I

guess Phil as well, I think the United States government made mistakes during the Clinton Administration in thinking that the United States has gotten along very well for 225 years without really giving much of a damn about who governs in Afghanistan, and it caused problems for us. And if we don't understand how important this is, we will cause problems in the future.

MR. GERECHT : I'd make just a slightly optimistic note. I have a very, very hard time imagining a President Hillary Clinton or President Biden withdrawing from Afghanistan. I have even a harder time imagining a President McCain or Giuliani doing it.

Will the United States, will this administration, the next one, focus on Afghanistan as much as they should? Absolutely not. Will they spend as much money as they should? Absolutely not. Will they continue to muddle through on this to guarantee that it goes as well as it can and it's probably sufficient to keep the Afghan experiment going and rebuilding the country? I bet in all probability yes.

MR. GORDON: I know there are a lot more questions. We'll take as many as we can before another round. I promised to go to the back there.

MS. BRADLEY: Barbara Bradley, AT&T Government Solutions. I have a question for Mr. Slocombe. Given that one of the main issues is sustaining NATO in Afghanistan, what kinds of things

have the U.S. government done recently to promote greater burden sharing with NATO?

QUESTION: [Inaudible] ANTV Television. Mr. Gerecht partly answered my question, but I'd like to ask the other people on the panel, given the present situation that you have observed in Afghanistan, should the United States continue with the plans to withdraw those 4,000 troops or should it reconsider its position to even increase its military position, military forces there?

Also, do you see a feasible way to prevent Afghanistan from fully transforming or ending up as a narco state? Is there any economic alternative to that?

QUESTION: [Inaudible.] Now Iraq and Afghanistan, they are definitely now for the time being two separate battlefields. I would like to ask the panel if they remain two separate battlefields or there might be some condition when they become one battlefield and maybe not in direct connection.

Another question is, do you see Iran somehow comes into the picture? If you do, which way does it? Thank you.

MR. GORDON: Thank you very much. Just the last two from the front here and then we'll give the panel a chance to wrap up. The gentleman in the second row first, and then we'll come to the front row.

MR. WATTS: Steven Watts, Cornell University, resident for the year here at Brookings. My question is actually a follow-up to a couple of the ones that have been asked before, and particularly the question about a light at the end of the tunnel.

Where there particular operations or actions by specific national contingents that you saw that looked as if they were getting us closer to that light at the end of the tunnel? That is, were there success stories that you would point to in terms of expanding security on the ground?

MR. GORDON: Finally in the front.

MR. BROWN: Michael Brown with the Hudson Institute. I was wondering what role the drug trade is involved in or causing the violence? And are Islamic fundamentalists involved in any activities besides—

MR. GORDON: Let me take a quick stab on the 4,000 troops and then everyone can have their 2 minutes to wrap up.

I think anyone with any experience in the Balkans, and Walt will probably with me on this, would come away with the view that we shouldn't in advance put limits on artificial announcements about when troops will go in or out of anywhere.

MR. SLOCOMBE: I don't think that about Iraq.

MR. GORDON: And, therefore, the 4,000 troops is an intention, it would obviously be useful. Those troops could be deployed

elsewhere. But if the situation doesn't allow for it, it would be crazy to pull them out. If NATO isn't able to go and replace them, that's the premise here, that NATO goes into the southwest so that the Americans can leave, then they got to stay for all the reasons we were saying and the reasons we all think we will stay. So that's an aspiration, but because of the doubts about the European forces, I think it would be a big mistake to just say that we're getting out no matter what.

Very briefly on the narco which we didn't talk very much about, that was one of the things when Steven said when we brought some issues and the military would tend to say nobody has asked us to do that, that was usually very high on the list of the that's not my job. There were two parts. It was one part was it's not my job because it's too hard and it's hard enough for me to do what I'm doing and don't ask me to tackle drug lords. But the further element of it was almost we don't want to do that because narco trafficking is actually 50 percent of this country's GDP and a major basis for whatever development there is. So if you suddenly took it away, you would have a different issue.

You could debate whether that is a sustainable argument, that we should be allowing them to export opium so that they have some export at all, but in any case, it wasn't close to near the top of the list of what these people actually are intending to tackle.

In whatever order we want to go. Reuel, do you want to start and then everyone will get their wrap-up?

MR. GERECHT: I just mentioned this thing on the drugs, Afghanistan is going to either fail or succeed and the drug issue is going to be with it. There is no way on God's earth that you are going to be able to develop a competitive product in a place like Afghanistan for years if not decades because it's going to take you that long to build the infrastructure that allows you to have trucks to move some other product that is at least conceivably in the wildest notion competitive. Opium is just too damn good. It stays forever in primitive societies, mule transportation, you can't dream of a better product that has a great deal of profitability and allows you to sustain a family. I think people just have to get over the drug issue. Is it good? No. Is it corrupting? Absolutely. But can you continue to move forward with all of those factors? I think the answer to that is probably yes.

MR. GORDON: Jerry?

MR. BAKER: On the drug issue, picking up on what Reuel said on the economics of the drug question, I think that one of the things that was very striking, again, when you read about this and when you see it actually there when you see the topography of this place, is that without massive infrastructural investment, as Reuel says, because of the nature of the movement of drugs, that was one of the most striking things somebody said to me was that if you don't have roads, you don't have any prospect for getting any kind of what we would recognize as legitimate economic activity going, roads or rails or some sign of serious transport

infrastructure. That's part of why the drug trade is so effective. The value of the amount that you can move by mule across mountains in terms of drugs is much higher than the amount that you can move in potatoes or whatever mining products there may be or whatever there may be there. So without really serious infrastructure investment, I think that it is very hard to see how you can overcome that.

Without wishing to end on an overly pessimistic note, I think going to my point about the Europeans, there is a puzzle to some people that the Europeans remember after 9/11 were very positive in supporting the United States in what it did in Afghanistan. There were doubts about whether it was the right thing to do, but basically people accepted the United States had been attacked by al Qaeda which was nurtured and supported and given strength by the Taliban and it was right to attack the Taliban and to remove the Taliban and that's why the Europeans supported it and in the end that's why the Europeans supported the NATO operation that is there, too.

I do think, however, that two things have really eaten into that political support in Europe for the operation there. The first is obviously general dissatisfaction, hostility, disgust at U.S. policies. I think there's just no question that what the U.S. is doing in Afghanistan and what the U.S. is doing around the world is regarded less favorably than it was immediately after 9/11 and I think that is seriously sapping political support for being associated with the United States in

Afghanistan even though, as I say, the Europeans may have supported the task in the first place.

The second thing is, quite frankly, there is this deep cynicism about whether or not this project in the end can really work. I had a very long conversation with a real senior British authority on the subject just after we came back from Afghanistan and he said Afghanistan is a country that for a thousand years has had a fantastic route and it is essentially a country that's been founded on brigandage. How is that going to change? With a few thousand troops, with a bit of political will from the United States, and a little bit of political will from the Europeans? It's just not there. There is profound cynicism in Europe about whether or not you can create a successful, thriving, remotely democratic, stable system in a place like Afghanistan, and the idea that European troops should fight and die for what many Europeans regard as an absolutely impossible objective I think is going to be a serious challenge for European governments over the course of the next couple of years.

MR.SLOCOMBE: On the issue of the infrastructure, just one last anecdote. When we were told that the plane couldn't pick up us up in Harat, it's only maybe 600 miles from Harat to Kabul, we were asked how long it would take to drive. The soldier I asked said, well, sir, at this time of the year it would be until April.

[Laughter.]

MR. SLOCOMBE: On NATO burden sharing, the United States and Afghanistan at least with a good deal of support and agreement at least in principle from the Allies, is trying to put the burden more on the Europeans. One of the things which we are trying to do collectively with the NATO Allies is improve the physical capability through the so-called NATO Response Force. I personally believe that the way we will show that that enterprise needs to be taken seriously is if the Defense Department gets off its fix that we are not going to contribute ground troops to it. We went through this in Bosnia. If the United States wants our NATO Allies to do something hard and serious, we have got to say we will be fully a part of this, not we will stand behind—of the counterrevolution.

On the business of whether or not the Allies will stay with it, I think many of the concerns that Jerry raised are right. There is one countervailing factor. At least so far to some degree there's been a tendency to say we proved both our loyalty to the alliance and our realization that terrorism is a big problem, but the more we dislike Iraq, the more we're prepared to do in Afghanistan so that the French and the Spanish make a very substantial contribution in Afghanistan, and the Germans make a very substantial contribution in Afghanistan, whereas, as they don't in respect of Iraq.

On Iran, I can only quote the American Ambassador who said, again, in contrast to the situation in Iraq, here the Iranians are not a

serious problem. I think the term he used was they are not as bumptious as they are in Iraq. Personally, I don't think there's a big a problem in Iraq as a lot of people do, but that was his answer with respect to Afghanistan.

Finally, on the drug trade, it's important to make the point that not all the caveats of these stupid, wobbly, wimpish Europeans—the United States military has made a decision that we don't do drugs. I agree with it, but it is essentially like the story about Machiavelli, he was on his death bed and the priest who was giving him his last rites said, do you denounce the devil and all his work? And Machiavelli said, Father, at a time like this I do not want to make more enemies.

[Laughter.]

MR. SIMON: I thought he asked to convert to Islam, and when they asked him why he wanted to do that on his death bed he said, better one of them than one of us. I just made that up.

[Laughter.]

MR. SIMON: A couple of things. On the drug trade, I just think it's important to bear in mind that the country has become cartelized and in this context, the cartel consists of the principals who are essential to Hamid Karzai's continuing political status. So quite apart from the economics of it which are very important as Reuel and others have pointed out, there's a political imperative at work here where if the cartel is dismantled let's say in the way that we cooperated in doing with

the Colombians via the kingpin strategy, the kingpins we would be taking down would be the underpinnings of Karzai's governance and that would be a price too high at this point.

On draw-down, Iraq has been an infinite dynamic sink for exactly those assets that are crucial if not uniquely essential to dealing with the threat of a resurgent Taliban or a derivative insurgency in Afghanistan. You can't create those assets out of thin air or multiply them at will. They are at use elsewhere now, and they're not going to find their way to Afghanistan.

Lastly, on the suicide bombing thing, that's a good question. I assume what you meant by that was not so much suicide bombing, but attacks that kill Muslims. I would say among Muslims there is at best an ambivalence about such attacks.

MR. SLOCOMBE: It occurs to me that one question we didn't answer at all was, are Afghanistan and Iraq going to become a single front? My view is no. Afghanistan and Iraq have some similarities. Curiously enough, they are about the same land area and have about the same population which happens to be about the same land area and about the same population as California. They are big countries. They're Muslim countries with an American Army and some degree of foreign participation in the occupation.

Other than that, they have very few similarities. They are topographically very different. Iraq is Silicon Valley compared to

Afghanistan in terms of its development. The divisions within Afghanistan go back and are much deeper in many ways than the ethnic, or whatever you want to call them, divisions in Iraq. And while there are certainly some links of the jihadis and foreigners, I personally believe that there is a tendency to exaggerate in both countries the significance of foreigners as factors in the operation not least because it is very convenient for everybody. It's convenient for the administration because it makes it all one undifferentiated war on terrorism. For all I know, they think reducing taxes on rich people is important for the war on terrorism.

MR. GERECHT: I do.

[Laughter.]

MR. SLOCOMBE: I know The Weekly Standard does. And it's convenient for some of the people inside because it's not their responsibility, it's the Americans who should seal the border. When we figure out how to seal the 1,500 mile border between Afghanistan and Pakistan, I want to send the Afghan and the Iraqi border police to the Rio Grande and see if they can do it right.

MR. GORDON: Let me thank you all for coming and just ask you to thank me in joining the panel, and we appreciate you being here.

[Applause.]

[END OF INTERVIEW.]

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