THE CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND INTERNATIONAL STUDIES

PRESS BRIEFING ON AFGHANISTAN

SPEAKER:

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ANDREW SCHWARTZ: Good morning and welcome to CSIS. Thank you all for coming today. I know it's a bit of a drag with the rain and the traffic, but you came to the right place if you want to learn something about Afghanistan. Fortunately we have Tony Cordesman here with us, who just returned from a trip to Afghanistan, and he's going to do a PowerPoint presentation and brief and take some questions from you following his PowerPoint. In addition, I'd like to alert you to an op-ed in the New York Times published today by Dr. Cordesman on the same subject. And without further ado, I'll present Dr. Anthony Cordesman.

ANTHONY CORDESMAN: Thank you very much, Andrew. And, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for coming. I'm not going to take you through the whole PowerPoint brief that you've been given. What I tried to do in that briefing was, frankly, to lay out data on the threat, on the problems in our forces and NATO forces in Pakistan that I heard from people when I was in Afghanistan. A great deal of that material, frankly, is taken directly from command briefs and briefs that were provided to me. It also outlines suggestions of course of action. And I should stress here that this is not my set of suggestions in general. It is a set of suggestions which were provided by the country team, by NATO people there, by Afghans that I talked to.

I think, too, that there is, to some extent, a matter of urgency here. And it sounds strange to say that, but the message I got very clearly is we are winning tactically and we are winning strategically. And I will explain what I mean by that in more depth as we go along. But what is truly urgent is that at a minimum, the country team is asking for more forces. It is asking for at least a two- to three-fold increase in aid. If it does not get it, it is almost certain that the Taliban and hostile elements in Afghanistan will have a much more successful 2000 (sic) offensive than they had in 2006.

The reality is, to the extent I understand this from the White House, there is great resistance to providing this money in OMB. The issue is one which is surfacing, I believe, this week. And what you have to remember is the realities of actual developments here. If we do get the supplemental request through OMB, it then has to go to Congress. Once Congress approves it, even under a rush cycle, the earliest money actually is spent is towards the end of the 2007 offensive in the spring. And we really, to put it bluntly, cannot afford to lose two wars. And I think that is the path that we are headed on without urgent action.

If you look at the reaction here – these are all points I've made to you, but I should stress, we are winning tactically. The problem with that is we won tactically in Vietnam. We are winning tactically in Iraq. The problems are not tactical victory; the problems are, are you actually gaining control of the countryside? Are you actually winning political support? Are you reducing Taliban influence or are you watching it expand? Are you developing effective NATO forces or are you keeping what people in

Afghanistan call stand-aside forces? Do you have enough U.S. forces? Can you take an aid mission, which now is limited by finance and manpower to what, in some ways, are projects, which, while important, are more showpiece than projects that reach into the field, and substitute for the lack of Afghan governance in the field until you can develop that Afghan governance?

And what we are talking about is a figure in terms of a total aid request of about $6 billion. Now, that is roughly three times higher than what we are spending. And depending on how you define this, this is either half of a month in Iraq, or it is a month in Iraq, depending on how you are doing the counting.

Now, if we look at the key trends – and these, I think, are critical – one point I would make to you – and it is a point that is equally important in Iraq – if you try to do this is two to three years, you will lose. If what you want is an excuse to withdraw, you can talk 18 to 24 months. But building a successful Afghan government, particularly because we have done so little since 2001 to do that, takes time. When you visit the government in Kabul, you find very quickly ministries are sometimes two to three people deep. There are six or seven technicians – technocrats who are really, truly competent. You don't have pay systems. You can't manage things. You can't get to the districts. You can't deal with the areas and the provinces effectively.

It is absolutely critical to develop governance at every level – at local, district and provincial, and in the capital, and that is not something that happens quickly in a war-torn, failed state that has dealt with decades of conflict. It is also not something which is decided by elections. One reality in Afghanistan, as in Iraq, is the fundamental failure in the past of the administration to understand that important as elections may be, political legitimacy has nothing to do, for most people, with how governments are chosen. Political legitimacy consists of how well you govern in the field. And just as General Chiarelli pointed out yesterday, we have failed to provide effective governance in the field in Iraq. The Afghans had no capability to do this without much more aid than people counted on and provided.

One of the other really critical issues here – and I won't go into it in depth, but I'm happy to deal with your questions – is the emphasis: What do we really need to accomplish? It is not the eradication of drugs. When you go into the countryside, you see people without water, without power, who do not have roads to get to an area where they can function, where it will take time to get them basic clinics and schools. You are talking about a society in which people have drug loans to start the year – essentially a sharecropping type system. To put eradication before survival is a disastrous aid to the Taliban. And we have to have a program which links this to an overall development program and to a counterinsurgency campaign.

Now, in the briefing that I give you, there is a great deal of recently declassified data on the threat. There are maps – and those maps don't come across well in black and white, but they're on the Web and they're in color and they go by movement. The key problem we have here is that the Taliban has reemerged in the south and the east. The

estimates in the theater is there are more competent fighters in the Taliban today than there were in 2001. They are essentially Taliban 2.0. They have a real sanctuary in Pakistan. And any success really has to depend on an honest admission: This is not a war in one country; it is a war in two countries. And what is happening in the tribal agencies in Pakistan is to give al Qaeda a partial sanctuary and a real sanctuary to three other very serious movements.

As I pointed out, we have too many stand-aside forces, and let me name them. France has a battalion. It's responsible for the security of Kabul. It is not meeting its responsibility. Its one combat element – its special forces – will be withdrawn in January. Germany stands aside. Spain, Turkey and Italy stand aside. And this is compounded by failures on the part of these allies, particularly Germany, to develop effective Afghan forces. One of the real problems we face is the total failure of the German program to develop an effective police force. As in Iraq, the year of the police in Afghanistan begins in 2007. We have been able to reconstitute something approaching a proper training program for police in 2007, but that is all.

In terms of the Afghan force development, I visited one of the more experienced units in the southeast. It had 27 percent of its authorized manning. It was coming up to its three-year retention point. The advisor told me retention could be about 20 percent. Twenty percent of 27 percent does not add up to an effective force. And like Iraq, one of our problems is we are reporting not the people who are there or who are capable, but the people trained and equipped. This is, I think, one of the most chronic problems in reporting by the governments. What we need to know is who is actually there; what we are told is the people who should be there.

When we look at threat activity, these figures I think speak for themselves, and I'll give you a graphic in a moment, but let me raise a fundamental reality about counterinsurgency.

First, it isn't the people killed that count. It isn't the people killed and wounded that count. It is, are you taking over the area? Who controls the countryside at night? Who has influence? Who can intimidate? Who actually dominates in the field? One of the worst aspects of the coverage of counterinsurgency in both countries is a focus on the number of people killed. Even if that number was remotely accurate – and it isn't because what you tend to do is count the people killed that are visible in urban areas like Baghdad, and the figures on killed in Iraq are a fraction of the reality. In a country like this, the problem is much more often intimidation and control. And I can remember a similar exchange years ago in Vietnam where General Abrams said you haven't pacified any area where you can't go at night. That's the reality. That's counterinsurgency, not the number of people killed in daily bombings.

Now, this shows you what we are talking about in terms of violent incidents. In a way I'm contradicting myself, but in reality, we all know that one measure everybody does use is the level of violence. One thing you have to understand about this graph: It shows that the primary targets Afghan security forces and coalition forces. Part of the

reason for that is if they attack Afghan forces or coalition forces, we know about it. We're not counting – we can't count what happens in tribal areas, in remote areas, in the countryside. Just as one of the few, I think, redeeming virtues of the Iraq study group was to point out that the actual count of violent incidents in Iraq was probably 10 times in some areas what the MNFI was reporting, here understand what these numbers mean. This is the tip of the iceberg, not the reality.

If you look at this, you also see that the areas under control or influence by hostile elements increase more than four times in one year. These aren't my counts. They all come from intelligence sources in the region.

One of the other things is, look at the map and look at the north and the west because this isn't simply the south or the east anymore. And that becomes clearer with this next chart.

I know that these colors are complex. They are in the briefings. We do have it up on the Web. But what I want to point out to you is look at the yellow areas. Almost all of the urban areas in Afghanistan now face a significant problem, according to the estimates of U.S. intelligence in the theater. Look at the map across the Pakistani border. This shows you very clearly how serious the problems are in Pakistan. And you do not go to Afghanistan and hear people talk in half measures in the intelligence community in NATO, or in the U.S. command. Pakistan basically is a sanctuary. It will, under pressure, act against al Qaeda. But there are elements in Pakistan who do directly support Taliban activities. The 11th Division, the VI Corps, and part of the ISI are not active against them. And if you look at these large areas in the south, around the area near Bagram and on the edge of Kabul. And if you look at what is happening in the east, you see what I mean by the fact it isn't the areas of violence that count; it is the areas of influence as well.

One of the problems we face here is a weak government. I think one of the great instant demands like Iraq is, let's all put pressure on the government and it will instantly succeed. Why? Who in the government will succeed? Why does threatening to leave or putting pressure on the government work? If you can't govern, you can't govern. If you don't have an administrative structure in the districts and the provinces, threatening the central government is pointless. We've spent years without creating local effectiveness, without funding effective efforts in the districts and the provinces. We have wasted nearly half a decade since 911.

To make this work is going to take aid money; it's going to take time, persistence and patience. And no other approach can work. The most critical points down here are corruption. As one minister, deputy minister, said to me, we are all corrupt, and if you want to understand why, ask what we are paid and how often we are paid. And when you go into the field, don't ask about the money people should get; ask about the money they do get. And in one police unit where I was present, they were supposed to be paid quarterly and they had not been paid for four months. In an army unit, because of ethnic differences, the pay clerk was not filling out the pay forms.

These are realities in most of the country. This is why the system doesn't easily work, and for most Afghans, something that those of you who have been in Afghanistan know but those of you have not may not understand. In far too much of the country, the irrigation system has broken down. The old qinat (ph) system has failed. There has been no presence as yet of dams or catchment areas to provide water. Roads don't allow people to move crops. There isn't power. Clinics and schools probably will have to wait because there aren't enough teachers or people with medical experience, but from the practical viewpoint, if you did a map of where does the government provide the five most critical services from day to day, in most of the country, most of those services would not be available to most people in most villages. That's a reality where if you're talking hearts and minds and you look at religious and other issues, you have to bear reality clearly in mind.

Best practices are not going to walk through this slide. The point is, we do have ways to deal with this if we can get the resources. This is a winnable war. There will be problems with Pakistan. There will be problems with our allies. We do need probably a doubling of our infantry presence for U.S. forces, and more Special Forces. But these aren't brigades; these are battalions. We need to bring our allies fully into the fight, and at least in the south with the British, there needs to be reinforcement. But these are very limited numbers of people. When you look at the list here, what you see too is the problem is not the way NATO is organized; it is the way member countries fail to participate in that organization fully and effectively. We don't have a problem with NATO; we have a problem with member countries, and that is a very important distinction to remember.

I've already talked to you about the urgency. The fact is that we will go into the 2007 offensive in the spring unready to really make a difference. The most we could do is to put pressure on our allies, Pakistan, and try to move our own troops in. There will be Polish reinforcements. That will help. But one problem is airlift, heavy equipment. The Canadians, for example, are having to introduce main battle tanks into Afghanistan for the first time.

One of the keys here is simply to focus on pay, privileges, basic security for the military. One of the things I always find fascinating is the idea that young men are somehow motivated out of patriotism to fight. They may well be. But if they're not paid, if there are no medical services, if there is no death and disability payment, if there isn't proper housing and facilities, if you don't have the weapons you need, and no one does anything for your families, surprisingly enough, you don't carry out the mission. And if, as is the case in Iraq, you take newly trained people and throw them into combat before they are ready, they don't hold together.

Blaming the Iraqis or the Afghanis for this rather than saying, it's going to take adequate resources and time, is the recipe to lose. We already made the mistake in Iraq. It is recoverable at least in Afghanistan. Pakistan – let me be blunt again. One of the

problems is this is a two-country war. Denying that because it is politically correct or diplomatically tactful ignores the realities necessary to win.

The steps toward victory I've already outlined. They are probably about two more U.S. infantry battalions and more Special Forces. British reinforcements are needed. The problem – the bargain they made in the south is the Taliban influence we can't afford. We need to have the stand-aside forces come online. We need a major increase not only in our own aid program, but we need our allies to join in that aid program, and it has to move into the field and not in dealing with capitals. And above all, we need to patiently work with the Afghan government to develop the capability so it can become effective over time.

Let me just make one quick point. If you're wondering what the importance of stand-aside forces is, take a look at the map. The French are supposed to be providing security in Kabul. They are only reactive, not proactive. Look where the German and Spanish forces are. Look at the limited areas we control as U. S. forces, and look at the importance of the British, Canadian and Dutch contribution. This cannot be won through American action, and it cannot be won unless NATO countries allow NATO to be effective.

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is a summary. This is a very complex issue. I would make the point to you that one of the problems we have often is we focus on one loosely described option. To make things work and to win, you have to have a strategy that deals with the military side and the police side. You have to have criminal justice. That is one key element of governance. You have to have effective governance. You have to have incentives for national unity. If you fail in any given dimension, you tend to lose in counterinsurgency. This has been a message every since Malaysia, but it was also in the handbooks the U.S. issued after our campaign in the Philippines nearly a century ago – in fact, more than a century ago. These aren't new lessons, but they're lessons we have to learn.

And let me open it for questions.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Tony, thank you very much for a thorough and thoroughly interesting briefing that we wouldn't see anywhere else.

We'll take some questions. Demetri.

Q: Dr. Cordesman, could you talk a little bit more about Pakistan? I recently heard that while the Pakistanis – the armed forces, the ISI – have helped kill and capture and contain some of al Qaeda forces, that since 2001 they haven't helped do that for any mid- or senior-level Taliban. And at what point does the U.S. have to decide to switch the balance from, yes, Pakistan is helping capture the al Qaeda people, but if the whole of Afghanistan becomes another safe haven for al Qaeda, then capturing 10 or 15 people or 100 people – (inaudible) – really doesn't make any difference.

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, that's a very good question. I think one of the – again, one of the key aspects of a successful strategy is to understand, this is a two-country war. It's not a one-country war. I think in fairness to Pakistan, we have to understand the scale of the problems there. For Musharraf, he doesn't face a problem just with tribal agencies. There is the problem of Kashmir and controlling what happens there. He has his own Islamists and he has very serious problems with Baluchis.

During the periods long before this, the Pakistanis made the mistake of turning to the Islamists in the army as a counterbalance under Zia to the secular political parties. The heritage of that is coming home to roost, and it is something that is very difficult to turn away from. We have to, on the one hand, I think, put a great deal more pressure on Pakistan, but we also have to consider what kinds of aid, if any, may help. But certainly just killing cadres, even if you can find the cadre, doesn't by itself solve the problem. It's too easy to train and recruit new groups.

And you have to be very careful about how you do this because we're talking hundreds or thousands of people – not tens of thousands or hundreds of thousands. There always are more. These are very cheap wars to fight. People keep talking about external financing. The fact is when you talk to people there, almost all of this is probably locally financed, a great deal through narcotics, a great deal through taxes or fees. Much of it, when it does come from the outside, is private contributions, which can't be controlled by checks on money laundering. And, frankly, many people think the ISI is funneling money into the agencies and Taliban to keep them under control, that it will only strike against al Qaeda when there is real pressure to do it.

Now, one problem we have here that I didn't show on these charts but is very clear in the detailed briefing I've given you – we wouldn't have had tactical victory in 2006 if we hadn't flown at least as many strike sorties in support of forces in Afghanistan as we did in Iraq, and during peak periods of the offensives, we often flew far more sorties. Here is the practical problem: Without adequate troops on the ground, even with what are amazing advances in intelligence and surveillance, you are going to have repeated incidents where you hit civilians and you cause collateral damage. The reality is no matter what you do, you cannot attack insurgents and hostile groups without attacking women and children because you cannot separate them.

And that means the more dependent you are on air and missile power in Pakistan or Afghanistan, the less HUMINT you have. The less troops you have in the field, the more collateral damage and civilian casualties you have. This is not a reflection on carelessness in rules of engagement, of failure in intelligence, problems in the way the U.S. conducts air operations. This is war and this is the real world.

MR. SCHWARTZ: We'll take some more questions, but before we do, could I ask you all to grab a microphone and identify yourselves and your news organization?

We'll go to Phil over here.

Q: Phil Dine, St. Louis Post-Dispatch. I'd like to draw you out a little more about narcotics. Phil Dine, St. Louis Post-Dispatch. I'd like to draw you out a little bit more about the issue of narcotics. It seems like a small room – (chuckles) – for a microphone. You know, you say that eradicating drives poorer poppy farms into the arms of the Taliban, as it does. On the other hand, as you also said, proceeds from narcotics are helping fuel and fund the insurgency. And then you say that these are people without clinics and roads and so on and we need to attack that problem. But of course it's hard to build a legitimate economy when now narcotics are equal to half the licit economy – the legitimate economy. And it seems like we're stuck in a catch-22 –

MR. CORDESMAN: We're not stuck in a catch-22. We're back to a reality. First, eradication simply doesn't work. So you have something that simply can't function. What it does, basically, is it simply keeps pushing the crop growing around. You're not cutting the production. You haven't had any successes in dealing with the total problem.

One of the histories of this – and I worked on this on the war on drugs in Latin America when I was in the congressional staff – what's the history? Aside from fights between cartels, we've had a steady improvement in the quality of drugs, the diversity of drugs, and a steady drop in the real street price, and we've done it in the U.S. and Europe for more than 30 years. We have no victories anywhere for this policy.

What you can do is potentially reduce the impact of this by focusing on the economic needs of the Afghans first. Are they suddenly going to turn away from narcotics? Of course not. Current estimates put about a third of the per capita income of Afghanistan as narcotics related. What you can do is offer alternatives, give people a reason to be loyal to the government, gradually bring them into a tribal society which isn't fully dependent on narcotics.

You will have to go into the field. Over time you have very hard issues to ask yourself: Can you really make a meaningful reduction in opium production out of Afghanistan ever? I don't know. I do know that if you go on with an eradication strategy that doesn't eradicate, that doesn't affect the supply of drugs, it is obviously pointless if in the process you alienate large numbers of people in the south an the east and you create a criminal class tied to the Taliban in a large part of the country, or warlords where it's not. There is absolutely nothing to be gained. And these are realities that we have to come to grips with.

What we have a series of almost decades of slogans about we'll solve the problem through supply. Since we haven't done it anywhere with any effectiveness in affecting global traffic, it is about time to sort of focus on the real world.

Q: And what are you specifically suggesting we do to address this problem? And just in the last year there were a number of Afghans involved in the poppy trade. It went from $2 million to –

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, look, first, nobody knows what those numbers are anymore than there is a meaningful way of doing crop estimates. If you ask rather than what the punch line number is what the methodology is in deriving that figure, it is a guesstimate.

Q: (Off mike.)

MR. CORDESMAN: Yes, it doesn't matter if it is written on a tablet on a wall. Let's be honest about this. This is part of the problem – making up numbers because you need to make up a number isn't an answer. What you can do here – what you have to do is, first, tie your eradication to a clear picture. If you don't have economic aid and assistance first, you make things worse and you fail at eradication. If you are going to focus on eradication, focus on the areas where the money conspicuously aids warlords, the Taliban and other groups first. Will it work? I doubt it. But pursuing a failed strategy be reinforcing it doesn't have to have a contribution.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Paul?

Q: Paul Courson from CNN. We have a story coming out today from the Iraqi national security advisor that they're planning on taking control, with Iraqi forces, the city of Baghdad and pushing coalition forces out to the outskirts. What is your opinion of the viability of such a plan and what sort of hurdles might that face?

MR. CORDESMAN: One of the problems we face – and this was true with the Hakim visit; it is part of the Maliki strategy; it is a broad problem – is that Shi'ite elements of the government in Iraq are pushing essentially for what would be a strategy of having the U.S. support a Shi'ite-dominated approach to security. Now, I think all of you have seen the maps of Baghdad. You know that basically the eastern part of the city is already fundamentally under Shi'ite control. You know that the Sunni areas in the west are under constant pressure, and you can see by the week a level of intimidation and action by the Shi'ites, this kind of soft sectarian cleansing, which is pushing Sunnis further west, basically acting to control the city.

If you simply turn this over to the present government and pull U.S. forces out without some constraint, what you are really doing is strengthening the Shi'ites at the expense of the Sunnis, and the result is to increase the drift toward civil violence and civil war rather than produce conciliation. And this is what is really happening on the ground. Operation Together Forward, by every measure I can think of, has been a failure. But it has been a failure which has systematically favored the expansion of control by Shi'ite militias, except in the densest, most solidly Sunni areas.

Q: Looking longer term, is there any way the Shi'ites and the Sunnis can create a force around Baghdad to take that as a bipartisan sort of approach and prevent that from happening?

MR. CORDESMAN: I think one great problem is can we, at this point, really strengthen the Iraqi army? I mean, Tom Ricks of the Post says that out of 121 army battalions there are 10 effective. I would put it at 20 to 30. It certainly isn't anything like the reports of the units in the lead that are in the press.

There was a time where a combination of the best army units and the U.S. could control Baghdad and limit the Mahdi army. I don't know if that's still possible. It will not be possible with the police. The fact is the police are going to take at least three to four years to build, and Baghdad is as much of a problem as the countryside. It is a very uncertain issue now. We are – because we deny there is a civil conflict, we have failed to come to grips with it, General Chiarelli pointed out quite, I thought, well. Part of the problem too is you've got to solve the economic dimensions. There have to be jobs. There have to be alternatives to civil violence. You have to find ways of limiting this problem of ethnic and sectarian cleansing.

Let me put it in terms I think every American can understand. Suppose you had to abandon your house tomorrow without selling it, and most of the things in it. Suppose you worked near where you live and by being forced away from your home, you had to give up your business or your job, and you then had to find a relative or a friend or someplace to go with no capital and no savings. That's what's happening in large parts of Baghdad and Iraq. And if we turn this over to the government without adequate constraints and controls, what we are doing is licensing the Shi'ites to try to dominate Baghdad. That will not be peaceful. It will lead to a much more intense civil conflict. And we need to be honest and face these issues.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Over here.

Q: Jaap van Wesel, the Jerusalem Report and Dutch Radio. I have three questions. One is –

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, I'm a little old. One question at a time.

Q: My question –

MR. SCHWARTZ: Jaap, could you bring the microphone closer?

Q: Is it correct that if you compare Iraq and Afghanistan that the situation in Afghanistan is better because the Taliban has no support of the local population in most areas of Afghanistan?

MR. CORDESMAN: No. That type of generalization is simply ridiculous. What the Taliban is is a movement which is unpopular in areas which are not Pashtun and where depending on the region it is in, there is considerable tribal backlash by tribe. But in much of southern and eastern Afghanistan, the Taliban does have considerable support, particularly among the areas which are more conservative and more religious. And to go around and label a country as if there was this sort of clear demarcation is simply absurd.

Q: Can I ask another question? Is it correct that the brother of President Karzai is a drug dealer in – I think in Kandahar? And if that's correct, to what extent is that relevant for the –

MR. CORDESMAN: I'm happy to deal with broad questions, but frankly, A, I don't know, and, B, this kind of personal attack certainly doesn't help anybody anywhere.

Q: Last question: Can you say something about how the Dutch forces in Afghanistan are performing?

MR. CORDESMAN: I think the general reaction is very favorable. Obviously they are not, at this point in time, fully engaged to the same extent as the British, but they have fought well. Question of whether they have enough tactical airlift. How they will up-armor over time is a question. But when you talk to people, I think the admiration for the Canadians, the British and the Netherlands is very high.

Q: Christoph Marschall from the German daily, Der Tagesspiegel. I would like you to elaborate a little bit more on the German role in Afghanistan. You were obviously very critical about it, and I have no reason to defend the policy of my government. I just want to stress what they say at similar occasions; that is, it's no help – we have a relatively peaceful north; it would be no help to take German troops from a peaceful north to a south where they already fight because it would just mean that the north will get also insecure. So you shouldn't solve the problems in the south by making the German success unsuccessful. What would you answer to that?

MR. CORDESMAN: I think that there are a great many people who talk about peacemaking and peacekeeping by trying to seize the high moral ground and hide there in safety.

The truth is that if you're going to win in Afghanistan, it has to be a unified effort. Standing aside may meet domestic political goals, but this has to – given the total number of troops in there, cannot be an effort where a large number of people simply stand and wait until the threat expands to reach them. And the problem is if you look at the maps of areas of influence where you see opposition to the government – narcotics and the rest – it is in the north and the west already. So standing aside and waiting simply means the threat will eventually come to you. It also means in a coherent nation, NATO action is impossible.

I think effectively what the German government is saying is that if these same people were in Belgium during the Cold War, they would abandon Germany because basically the Russians are coming into an area where the only people who really have to fight are the Germans, and as long as you're in Belgium you can hide there in safety. I'm not really impressed by the analogies.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Demetri.

Q: Just to understand, why do you classify what the Germans are doing in the north as standing aside? It's –

MR. CORDESMAN: Because they are not actively involved. What are they doing?

Q: They are keeping security in the north.

MR. CORDESMAN: They're sitting there in bases. Keeping security is roughly the same as having a bunch of high school kids as theater ushers waiting in the lobby because there isn't any problem when people are watching the movie. That's not doing something. They failed dismally in dealing with their responsibility for the police training. They aren't providing significant levels of aid relative to the requirement, and the issue is the requirement, not the amount of money. You can always make the money seem impressive if you don't bother with the requirement.

So unless the German government can demonstrate that it's actually doing something useful rather than committing troops to doing nothing, it would be, shall we say, somewhat ingenuous to go on with the arguments. And it is not exactly as if Germany, Spain and France are not hearing criticism from allies other than the United States.

Q: I have a follow up to that. Daniel Scheschkewitz, Deutsche Welle, Germany's international broadcaster.

Mr. Cordesman, would you say the lack of sufficient police training is due to a lack of competence among the German troops, a lack of will, or just –

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, first, they're not doing it anymore. Second, it wasn't done by the German troops. Third, what they did was they trained people to be German policemen, and the problem is that they did it at a very limited scale with formal training facilities. They didn't get involved in the problems of governance or what is happening in the field. This is not Germany. You need paramilitary forces. You need to worry about what happens after people leave the training period. I went through pay, facilities, and equipment.

So essentially what you had is a program which was never tailored to the country and where you wasted three years. But it wasn't the German military that did it.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Demetri.

Q: Sorry – Demetri Sevastapoulo, Financial Times. I've heard U.S. commanders say that for Afghanistan you really need a commitment of something like 10 to 15 years

to have a possibility of victory, yet the American people – (inaudible) – back to a debate about Afghanistan, or has it become the forgotten and possibly completely forgotten war?

MR. CORDESMAN: I think the honest answer to your question is we may be able to lose two wars for the price of one. What it honestly takes is a firm commitment by the administration – as it would in Iraq. These are not certainties. We are not winning. Nation building in general, but particularly in a counterinsurgency environment, is a high-risk operation. It is an experiment. Stability operations in general take five to 15 years, and usually they take more than a decade. They take a sustained mix of economic, military, and governance resources. If we are to win in Afghanistan, there is going to have to be clear leadership and a clear administration commitment to doing this. You're going to have to tell the American people what the command briefings show you because you have timelines to 2013, and that's not a magic number; it's simply the last year in the five year defense plan. It doesn't mean things come to an end.

But what we have to stop telling ourselves is that you can win a long war – this is the Department of Defense's phrase, not mine – in a hurry. And leadership consists of communicating risk and cost, not simply making promises for instant success.

Q: And may I just quickly follow up? Do you think that the administration does – (inaudible) – among the American people and in Congress to put the resources behind Afghanistan?

MR. CORDESMAN: I think that there is a very clear commitment in the Congress to try to make this work. I think there has often been a series of questions asked by key congressional committees where the answers have often not been very forthcoming. I think that's been a source of major tension between the Congress and, for example, Secretary Rumsfeld and others. I would hope that will change with Secretary Gates.

As for the American people, I can't speak for them. There seem to be more than the people in the room, but in reality, what we do know from public opinion polls and political science is public opinion support really doesn't depend so much on the cost or the casualties. It depends on whether they believe there is a workable plan, there is real progress, and people are being told the truth.

Now, these are sort of basic elements of leadership, and I think if you have the right leadership, you already have a congressional commitment and willingness to act. As for the American people, they tend to be, over time, remarkably practical, and I think they can see that bad as the situation in Iraq may be, the threat posed by a rebirth of al Qaeda, of the Taliban, of a defeat in the place we went to war after 911 is going to spill over into the entire world, and eventually into the United States.

MR. SCHWARTZ: The gentleman in the back.

Q: Andrew Schneider from the Kiplinger Letter. Given the repeated deployments of so many units to Iraq and the level of stress on the armed forces as a result of those repeated deployments, what do you see as the likelihood of the armed forces being able to come up with the additional troops that you said are needed to reinforce Afghanistan?

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, I think the odds are really very good because, frankly, you are talking battalions. Now, understand, compared to 15 brigades rotating in and out of Iraq, these reinforcements are easily ones you can provide within the troop limits we face. I think there may be more of a problem with Special Forces. We have tended to over-commit them in Iraq. But the truth is we are also here talking about very dedicated career professionals, and your rotation cycles are not under as much stress as you are with people who are in the reserves, the National Guard, and the regular active forces. And the numbers, again, compared to Iraq in the total force size, are small.

But there is no question: We do not have the troop strength in the Army or the Marine Corps to meet the commitments we have for even one regional contingency. One of, I think, the catastrophic failures of force transformation over the last six years is we have constantly cut active strength, tried to rely on contractors to fund the procurement of advanced weapons systems which won't even start extensive delivery into the force until after 2010. I would hope that Secretary Gates will begin to address this. There is no question that the next president is going to have to transform transformation.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Greg.

Q: Greg Rand (sp), National Journal Group. Two comments I heard among American commanders regarding the Taliban offensive this past year was, one, it provided them an opportunity to hit them out in the open with airpower. In other words, they favored – they welcomed the attacks. Also, there was an underlying fear that they were going to lose one of the lightly manned outposts that are along the border.

Did you detect – what kind of sentiment did you detect among American commanders? Are they looking forward to this spring offensive? Is there a fear of the numbers that are being reported building up across the border in Pakistan?

MR. CORDESMAN: I think it's different. I don't know which commanders you talked to, and of course one of the problems is that you have to cut through the "can do" to the "what is real." I think the fact is that you did have a lot of badly structured Taliban offensives. That's pretty typical of what happens. You did kill a lot of low-level fighters. But the problem is there are so many and they're so easy to recruit, and you can rebuild. And when people see this kind of battle, and you're dealing with the ideological movements we have, martyrs breed more martyrs. They don't discourage them.

The problem with airpower is when it was in the open and you could get there in time, you could score significant casualties, but against very replaceable people. The minute it was in built-up area, you had a serious problem. Now, given the ability to use

something like the Predator and the recent deployment of 250-pound bombs, it is amazing what you can do even in a built-up area. But no matter what happens, you do get some civilian casualties and collateral damage.

Also, it is almost impossible to win the information operation if you don't have Afghanis in the area. They can always claim they were civilians. They can always exaggerate the casualties. So you're up against a propaganda problem even when you're doing this. I don't think anybody looks forward to the 2000 offensive. The most you can do is kill a lot of ideologically motivated young men without getting to the core structure, the cadres that are critical to the operations of these groups, which don't rush out to right, which are trained, which don't make these mistakes, and many of which shelter in Pakistan

MR. SCHWARTZ: Phil. Then we'll take a couple more after that.

Q: Hi, if I could ask one more question about narcotics. President Karzai says that unless the poppies are destroyed, they'll destroy Afghanistan. General Jones of NATO and the U.S. commanders in Afghanistan say that no matter what they do in the field, unless poppies are gotten under control, they can't succeed in building – Afghanistan can't succeed in building a society that's not corrupt, with a legal system and an economic system that functions. Are they overestimating the problem or – you say that you're not sure that we can do anything about that, but you do think that this is winnable. So I'm wondering if you can square that.

MR. CORDESMAN: Well, I think, first, one of the problems we have is once you have an official policy, you have an official policy, whether anybody can make it work or not. And I think part of the problem with the narcotics policy is it's very, very difficult to say, openly and honestly, that you have a policy which, however desirable it may be politically, is totally unworkable. It will be interesting to see what General Jones says after his retirement. It will be interesting to see what President Karzai says in his memoirs about the pressure to deal with the narcotics issue before you can deal with it.

But I think there is a broader problem here too. Over time, you really can't have Afghanistan rely for a third of its gross domestic product on narcotics. If you do approach this fully, with economic recovery and economic aid – if you can get governance, security and police forces out into the field; if you can control the traffickers, buy the crop where you can't eradicate it, provide subsidies and aid, then over time you can wean people away from this structure.

But, again, we're not talking one year or two years or three years. We're talking a very uncertain effort that will play out over five to 10 years. And you look back at Peru and Colombia, Burma, the other places where narcotics have become crops; you look at the resurgence of actual growth in Mexico as well as the traffic, and you have to ask yourself quite seriously, do you really have to live with the problem or can you solve it? And the only way to find out is to make a sound start and see what you can do over time. But to begin with failure is to fail.

MR. SCHWARTZ: Great. Dr. Marschall?

Q: I would like to ask you a more general question about the structure of the conflicts in Afghanistan and in Iraq. One of your – you underlined that it's very important to have strong incentives for the people there to support a unity government. Isn't this really the key question: Does a multi-religious, multi-ethnical society which has loyality with their own tribe, with their own religious group – there is really no coming support – nor in Afghanistan, nor in Iraq – for the unity government. So can the West at all win the conflict, win the war at the side of the unity government when there is no loyality coming from the tribes and religious groups to this unity government? How do you do that? How do you provide the strong support incentive?

MR. CORDESMAN: First, I think there is a strange Western fascination with central governments. It's like our strange fascination with constitutions. As far as I know, there is one country in the world that's had a successful written constitution, and unfortunately that may have biased us towards repeating the experiment. You saw what happened in Iraq. The constitution is one of the key factors dividing the country.

You have to look at this in a very different way. You have to say a lot of this is showing people that there are services and a government presence in the field. They don't particularly care whether it's central. What they want are roads and water, alternatives that meet the needs of their daily lives. There isn't an Afghan capability to do that in the field now. We need to train it. It will take time – particularly to have a presence in the field, and honest and capable of acting. In the interim, you have to have aid go into the most threatened areas, like the SERP aid program in Iraq. It has to provide incentives for people to be loyal locally. You need to build up district leaders who can work with the various tribes.

Where we have had good district leaders, they made very significant progress, at least in the south and the east. The problems in the north and the west require you to deal with different ethnic minorities, less tribal groups, more urbanized societies. But again, it's a matter not so much of building up strong unified governments, but a pattern of governance where often you will build up a competent local government that can deal with one of the ethnic groups, which will cut across provincial lines to the north and the west.

This is something which you have to see as a broad effort that takes time and which initially requires you to focus significant aid resources in the field. The good part of it is that what we're talking about is often unpaved, simple roads which can be easily maintained. We're talking about local generators, not a power grid. We're talking about catchment damns to replace the collapsed qinot (sp) system in a good part of the south.

These are easy, simple, quick projects once you put the money and the effort in. It means strengthening, in many cases, the role the military plays in protecting people, but to do it you have to have the money and the experienced cadres in the first place.

And looking at what has happened in road building and water projects to date, I think this is very feasible. This is not the kind of expectations or structure you see in Iraq. It is a radically different economy, it is a radically different set of needs, and it is much easier to deal with.

MR. SCHWARTZ: All right, thank you all very much for coming today. Dr. Cordesman, thank you. This briefing is available at www.csis.org, as well as a transcript will be up later today. Thanks again.

(END)