

CARNEGIE EUROPE

CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE

WASHINGTON DC ■ MOSCOW ■ BEIJING ■ BEIRUT ■ BRUSSELS

EVENT TRANSCRIPT

Afghanistan after the Election: What Next?

Thursday, 3rd September, 2009

FABRICE POTHIER: Welcome, everybody. Thank you very much for coming to this Carnegie Europe presentation on Afghanistan with our visiting scholar, Gilles Dorronsoro, who is just returning from Afghanistan. We are also returning from vacations ourselves; we were mostly, I guess, in southern Europe; you were in southern Afghanistan, so it's a slightly different ambience; but I think you will have some interesting facts and impressions to share with us. Those who had less of a nice summer were probably the Afghan people.

When we started the summer, back in May/June, there was, I would say, a lot of hope, both in the international community and within the Afghan community itself, about the new US strategy, or the upcoming elections, so there was a sense that that was the summer of all hopes. In fact, what we have seen over the last few weeks is that, in fact, it was the summer of intimidations and the summer of lost illusions on many parts.

I think Gilles is going to share his perspectives, after having spent four weeks in Kandahar, in Mazar-e Sharif, in Herat, in Kabul, obviously, looking at the situation on the ground. I hope Gilles will also share his thoughts, on what is the way forward, because it's one thing, as a think-tank, to criticise what is happening, or to give a negative picture, but it's also an important duty to come up with some alternative vision.

Before I turn to Gilles, I will say that a think-tank is always trying to be ahead of the curve, and they are rarely ahead of the curve. But I have to say that Gilles, since he has been at Carnegie in Washington, you have published two reports: your last report, called *The Winning Strategy of the Taliban*. If you read the report, and, for example, the statement by General McChrystal, actually there are not many gaps. Your report was ahead of the curve about how organised tactically the Taliban are, and that we have underestimated them, and we have to start having a much more sophisticated strategy - not to be confrontational with them, but more to try to secure the population centre.

I'm now turning to you, Gilles, you have ten, 15 minutes, and then obviously we'll open for discussion.

GILLES DORRONSORO: Thank you. My last trip was in April, and since April the situation deteriorated, obviously, in Afghanistan. Right now I think most of the experts on Afghanistan agree on the main points: we are no longer in the situation – there are still disaccordings views about what we should do in Afghanistan or at least what the situation is.

I was very surprised at the Special Representative on Afghanistan in Paris, and people we saw today, out of the record, or even very officially, agreed that the “clear, hold, and build” strategy failed in Afghanistan. It means that this new strategy on the menu was the product of this strategic review launched in November, last November/December. For months and months, the experts around McChrystal and the others, of course, discussed about what we should do in Afghanistan. There were even good suggestions. The main suggestion was we should focus on population and not on the control of territory.

To my surprise, in last spring, the US military and the British one decided to launch a big operation in Helmand; and it was obviously a bad idea. It failed, and now we have no solution, I can say. We are back to the point where we have to discuss a new strategy. It’s important to understand why it failed and what was critical about it that was going to fail.

The first thing is that, as usual, we underestimated the Taliban. We thought the Taliban was some kind of local group with no coordination and with no tactical ability; and what we have seen in Helmand is exactly the contrary: the Taliban have a strategy, they are coherent enough, and actually they were clever enough to avoid frontal combat with the US Marines, to go to the north of the province and basically to fight where the terrain was much more favourable against the British.

The second point is that it’s no longer possible, at least in the Pashtun Belt, south and east of Afghanistan, to have the discourse about, on the one hand, you have the Taliban; on the other hand, you have the population. It’s much more mixed than that. Most of the Taliban fighting in Helmand are local people; probably more than 80% of the Taliban are local people. It’s extremely difficult to distinguish Taliban and the rest of the population. So the Clear phase of the strategy never worked in Helmand and it’s not going to work anywhere.

Here we have a problem: how do you want to secure a village in Afghanistan when 20%, 30%, 40% are at least passively supporting the Taliban? We don’t know how to do that. We don’t know how to do that; we’ve never succeeded in that. Clearly, the failure of this strategy is not an accident; it’s because the strategy is not going to work anywhere in Afghanistan, where the fight, and the level of the fight is important to the south and the east. That was the first important thing about Afghanistan we should think about.

The second point is that the situation in the north is becoming very bad, in the northeast especially. My last trip in Kunduz was in April, and then the Taliban were operating in small groups of ten to 15 people; now it’s more 50, 80. They are extremely aggressive, very motivated, and they are winning, actually.

You have three districts in the Kunduz, Taloqan area, which are totally under the control of the Taliban; they are cutting the road from Kunduz to Kabul almost every day. They are, at night at least, very close to the financial capital of Kunduz - 500 metres, 1 kilometre, doing checkpoint. Of course, people inside those are extremely demoralised, totally, now. I have to say that what has been done on the Coalition side, on the German security forces, has been so far totally useless. First, because there are just 1,000 policemen in Kunduz for 1 million people, 500 military in the country; and so altogether it’s 1,500, probably less than the number of the Taliban; and the Germans are not very keen, really, against insurgency; they are mostly preoccupied about themselves, protecting themselves.

Here we have something that is not special to the Germans; it’s merely that they’re worried about politics, about not losing men in Afghanistan, because of the public opinion; but it’s impossible to be effective if you are not ready to take the risk. You are in this very strange position: German government, but also French government, all the governments are trying to work with a zero casualty strategy; but this strategy is totally inefficient in the long run.

A lot of things were bad in Helmand, but at least the British and the US troops were taking risks and they were very ready to pay the price.

What we are seeing, especially in the north, is exactly the contrast, and that's why basically you have 4,000 Germans, a little more than 4,000 Germans, in the north; you could cut that to 1,000 and the security situation will not be worse, or will not make a difference actually.

The last thing I'd like to say, but maybe we'll speak about that in the Questions and Answers, is about the election – obviously it's a mess. We don't even have the money for the second round. Well, don't worry, there is not going to be a second round. It means that the organisation of the election was not that good. You don't have foreign or neutral observers, representatives of NGOs. In most of the places - the countryside is Taliban-land - or it's out of control because you have a local strongmen or whatever. The fraud is huge, and the turnout is extremely low: probably 5% to 10% in Kandahar, a little more in some places.

Altogether, this election, if Karzai wins, and probably he's going to win, this election is going to weaken Karzai and to weaken the Coalition. It's going to be extremely difficult to explain to Western public opinion that we're supporting democracy in Afghanistan; it's going to be a kind of joke, you know, considering the way the election was done there.

The second point is that, of course, a new Karzai government means, most probably, that something is going to change, and we need a real change quickly in Afghanistan, if we're not going to lose in the next few years. So, for us, it's a total loss, actually.

FABRICE POTHIER: If you wanted maybe to share your view on... the positive side?

GILLES DORRONSORO: First, we should do it quickly. And it's not years, it's months. Between 2002 and 2006/2007, the Coalition was in total denial of reality. Of course, that is not now the case, but we are too slow; the Taliban are able to adapt very quickly to our new strategies; we are not very adaptable in Afghanistan. Basically, if we don't change anything, the trend is like that, I think it's lost in one year or 18 months; so it's really a matter of months, weeks, making decisions right now and not waiting for the next election. It's right now.

Second, we need two different strategies, according to the region - if we are south and east, or if we are north. If we are south and east, basically, we don't have the resources to go outside the cities; just 20,000 men who control just the central valley of Helmand - it's just crazy. Plus, the fact that it's a failure, but even if it was a success, it's not the way for the north: they're not going to take one by one every Pashtun district in the south, it doesn't make sense.

The only thing we can do in the south is secure the cities; just that, it's very complicated, because a city in Afghanistan is not exactly a city – it could be more like anwazis, with no clear distinction between the city itself and the gardens and the villages around. That's why it's so difficult to control places like Panjab or the candidates. So we have to focus on that. Why? Because the cities are the places where we can find some kind of social support.

People just, most of the time, like in the Pashtun Belt - they're just hating foreigners right now; they are fed up with this stupid offensive, destroying places, whatever. We are like the Soviets, more or less. We have to focus on the cities, to protect the cities, where we can use the Afghan national forces much more easily on a defensive role. We have to forget about the countryside, because we don't have the means to do anything, plus the fact that if we try to control the countryside, Taliban can always do hit and run from Pakistan.

Pakistan, of course, is not supporting us at all, but still supporting the Taliban. So nothing has changed with the rest of Tansil [?] against the Pakistani Taliban and not the Afghan Taliban; it's very clear.

The second thing we can do is to try to fight the Taliban in the north. In the north, there is a possibility to stop the Taliban, if we're acting now; but what we have seen in Kunduz means that it was relatively easy six months ago, it's much more difficult now. We have to do it, even if it's a crisis of NATO, even if we've got to speak to the Germans, for example, in the case of Kunduz. The point is not to have 4,000 men in the north if we are not doing anything with it. The thing is to fight an insurgency.

Is it reasonable to have this kind of regional organisation, where people are very happy to be in the north because it was quiet – and, no, it's no more quiet, so they don't know what to do about it. It's a choice: a political crisis in NATO or losing the war. I don't think losing the war is very good for the credibility of NATO, personally. It's our choices, and I'm not sure who is ready to do it. At least, we know that it's now and not in two years, and not in 18 months.

It's still possible to stop the insurgency in the north, for the moment, but it means not more troops, but different kind of troops, to be much more aggressive and to build Afghan police and Afghan National Army. Following on that, we can try to stabilise the situation in the next 18 months, two years. The mistake that would kill us when we're in Afghanistan would be another Helmand operation; we do that just one more time, we have lost the war.

That was the positive side of it.

FABRICE POTHIER: Thank you very much for trying, at least. I think there will be lots of questions, so maybe what we do, we take them by group of three questions. If you could kindly introduce yourself, and don't hesitate to challenge Gilles, obviously; and try also to bring some suggestions about how you see the way forward. I think Gilles has some interesting things to say about the elections: what does it mean for the Afghan State, or what remains of the Afghan State. You had some very interesting points earlier at NATO, and I think people would be interested to hear them; but let's take the first question. We have one from the Ambassador.

AMBASSADOR DANIELSSON: I don't really know where to start, listening to this very sobering, or very critical analysis. I think in many aspects, you are quite right, but there are different ways to look at the whole Afghanistan operation.

I've been on the EU side for many years, I moved over to NATO two years ago, and having followed ESDP, CFSP for the last seven, eight years on the EU side, my biggest surprise when I was nominated ambassador to NATO, and coming there and seeing that 80%, 90% focussed on the Afghanistan ISAF operation, I was surprised, knowing how 21 EU members that all had NATO allies when you come to the other side of town, how the issue of Afghanistan hardly featured on the EU's agenda, be it in Corp Ed [?], be it in the COPs meetings, be it in the regional groups. It was one of many countries in Asia – yes, we had EUPOL, which we did by quite badly – I can be self-critical as an EU representative.

Then I come to NATO as an organisation – yes, I see the enormous resources: 21 EU member states, plus their Transatlantic allies, pool on this country and trying to deal with Afghanistan. But with this – we're talking two years ago – already, I said in the autumn 2007, with a very clear message from NATO's side to the international community, and later the same allies, but with a civilian arm: we need more civilian interventions, we need more development aid, we have to have a long-term approach to it, it has to be a comprehensive approach.

My first reporting to my delegation to Stockholm, my capital, was: we are a PRTV [?] nation in the north, as you know - yes, the north is now getting more worrying - where is our bilateral aid, to begin with, and where is the Swedish voice in the EU to get EU instruments, community aid, to be increased. Well, yes, EU has many priorities and this is sort of... I would not mention names, but you had high-level people in the EU. Councillor Gotterne, the Commissioner, said: well, Afghanistan is NATO and the EU does the rest of the world.

Now, if I'm to generalise a bit, I would say, from Bucharest on – and I thought that was a successful summit; we, being NATO, we managed to get the whole international community, at least within that

meeting, focused, from the UN [unclear] to the commission, two heads of states and governments, with a commitment, and a commitment to a comprehensive approach, I would say an even bigger awareness on the military side, that there is no military solution to Afghanistan, but they don't have the resources to go on the civilian side; so the only thing NATO could do was to call out and say: if we're in it, we have to be in it together jointly, but using all the resources.

I'm not going to go into the caveats issue, and the German issue, because it is a national issue, as well as they have elections coming in that country; so it's not only... There are reasons for the situation, as you know, for the German side.

I'm more hopeful today, which might sound awkward to you, because, in a way, I see Afghanistan as the first serious international test case for the new American administration, with, when I read the latest McChrystal approach, now coming in the 60 days review. I worked with the development side of NATO, at the EU before, so I have a basically development background - when I read one of the highest military and operational command from ISAF, basically speaking, as a major NGO will speak, in its approach, how the military should work, how they should learn the culture, having done the cultural behaviour when they approach their mission, asking for long-term commitment by the soldiers...

I met my own Swedish soldiers in the North; they are often more aware of Muslim traditions, Muslim culture than sometimes new-income NGOs might be. Yes, it's a new sexy area, we get new money, let's go ahead - no clue about the Muslim way of working. Many soldiers have, I would say, a better awareness.

But all this to describe a difficult... I think, yes, mistakes, it's not only NATO's mistakes, it's international community and capitals' mistake, who for seven, eight years have been around - now it's seeing this as a purely military operation, where the military have asked for something more. As I said, the political side has only now started to realise, yes, we're in it together and we have to find a common solution; and it's not only the military side, it's a civilian development side.

We have Gymnich on Saturday in Sweden and one of the main, I saw, mainline, how children today is again, yes, basically: we're losing this, or going very badly - I'm quite optimistic. One of the main titles in the Swedish main paper today is: EU is finally having... this is one of the main engagements, we're putting forward two strategies, Afghanistan, Pakistan, a comprehensive aid package, hopefully. It should be more comprehensive.

Finally, I would say, the EU and many capitals are realising that if they want to, as you say, succeed, it is a long-term commitment, it's a development commitment, it's starting with developing the basic structures, and I will say Kabul has that awareness, Karzai or not. We have corruption, we have lack of good governance, etc, but I think the overall awareness in which direction we have to go is there and it's adapted and agreed by everybody.

Now we need time, and I think it's a bit destructive to be so extremely critical and say, the Taliban are winning, because in a way you're creating a situation where people, of course, on the ground, we work on this on a daily basis, the Press, by only focussing now on: Helmand was lost, some military feedback, at least for the last three, four weeks, which was not totally your approach, and they even had expected a stronger Taliban reaction with the two special operations; now there's a question of holding land.

I think the whole difficulty with these two special operations was badly organised, because they went in massively and there was no way to hold the terrain and to start regaining immediately. Of course, people see that soldiers come in and then they cannot hold for a longer time, they go out and nothing happened - so, yes, I become a Taliban or I sympathise with the Talibans.

On short, I think one could be more optimistic because there is understanding in which direction we have to move; and now we have to have the patience, but as you said, mobilise as quickly as possible resources and start working on the ground, particularly in the North where it's still possible, even though it's getting more difficult; but I think the approach, training the ANS, the Afghan National Security forces, the police

and the military – all that is part of the strategy, but it will take more time, and there are no quick solutions.

FABRICE POTHIER: I think that counts for three questions, but it was very interesting point, I find.

AMBASSADOR DANIELSSON: But you need to make a tour de raison to understand...

FABRICE POTHIER: If I can formulate your statement into a question, which is, there has been a shift in the thinking and in the EU and NATO strategies, and now the question is, can we translate or how can we translate into change on the ground? If you can hold on your answer, we'll take two more, maybe a bit smaller questions. But it was very interesting, especially from this double hat: EU, NATO; I think it's necessary. Yes, the lady...

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR: I'm the BBC observer, and I would like to post three short questions. What do you think about a new NATO strategy? It's a dialogue with moderate Taliban that NATO would declare as a new strategy, that they would like to develop a dialogue with moderate Taliban as the key to a success, first.

Second, do you think that the elections would bring the country into turmoil, because Abdullah Abdullah and his supporters wouldn't accept their defeat, and we will see the rise of aggression and violence?

Third question, how we can call the elections credible if we Press were prohibited to deliver negative news on the same very day the election started? I was phoning my colleagues to Kabul and they were saying, we heard seven explosions in the morning, but we were not allowed to transmit anything through. That was it.

FABRICE POTHIER: Thank you very much. If you may hold on your question, because we already have a lot of interesting points already. Gilles.

GILLES DORRONSORO: There was no really question in the first comment because it was a comment, but in a way, it's interesting to have the official point of view. Because you're shooting the messengers; you're telling me that I have bad news, so it's bad to give bad news, and whatever the situation we should try the positive look. I don't agree, basically.

I've been saying since years and years, you're going the wrong way in Afghanistan, and nobody was ready to listen to me. When I was writing two months ago – do not go to Helmand, it's a stupid mistake; and what happened? They went to Helmand, after eight years. You're telling me we have understood the mistake, we have a new thinking, what do you see? People going to Helmand, doing exactly everything you shouldn't with what is absolutely creditable, but totally fake.

I don't buy the idea that NATO has understood, EU has understood – I don't buy it because I don't see it. Where do you see this new thinking? I don't see anything on the ground. That's my first point.

Second point, when you're thinking about long-term commitment, people learning the culture, I'm not sure. German soldier – three months on the ground; French soldier – six months. Basically, after six months, everybody's back because it's too hard. We don't have time to learn Pashto; how many years? Who is speaking Pashto here? Nobody. We don't have time to do that, it's over, at least in the South, it's over, just over, it's finished.

Next point, the development strategy is not working; basically that's that. What have we done all these years? We've poured money into the south and east. When you're in Helmand, the development per capita is 250, around 250. When you are in Kunduz it's 50? Why? We systematically made the mistake of putting a lot of money in the places where there was no security – it's not working. We should put money where there is security, Azarhadj, Mazar-e Sharif.

AMBASSADOR DANIELSSON: I agree.

GILLES DORRONSORO: It's not going to change, no; I'm not sure, at least. I never saw any official statement from the EU or NATO, whatever, or the Monee de Priorite saying that, now we have a different strategy, we are going to work where the situation is quiet. Look at the French, for example. I love very much the French government, but they're operating in Turkistan, especially are difficult to deal with. They put managers there where they don't have control of the ground.

When you are on US soil, the French or whatever, when you are going out of your outpost, you go by armoured convoy, 250 guys, you have no contact with the population. Why put the money there and why not put your money in Azarhadj, where you can travel more or less freely, or Mazar-e Sharif?

What I'm seeing is again and again the same mistakes. We are financing the Taliban, we are the first resources of the Taliban, because we are creating a wide economy. Kabul is a mess; we have this bubble of Western people overpaid, totally disconnected from the population, with nice places like the Atmosphere and so on.

AMBASSADOR DANIELSSON: I wouldn't rave about these places, I'm sorry. I've just been there also, I've just come back a week ago.

GILLES DORRONSORO: Yes. I mean, it's totally...

BETTINA MEISCHEIDT: Kabul is a bubble, but it's not perfectly nice.

GILLES DORRONSORO: The point is the bubble: whatever is in the bubble, it's the very least horrible; and that is going on, and if you put more money, you are just a bigger bubble, it is not going to change. I don't see this new thinking whatsoever on the ground. That's basically where it is aiming. Where is the change?

FABRICE POTHIER: Just to add on Gilles' points, because I think your points were interesting, and I recall when I was starting working on Afghanistan, General Eikenberry was heading Operation Enduring Freedom at the time, and I had a long exchange with him, and he was famous for saying: if I had to choose between the brigade and building bridge, I would rather have money to build bridge.

This thinking, this military thinking of development, I think, was already rooted into the kind of elite of the US military, but yet it had not translated, and it has not yet translated; so it's interesting - I think there's a discontinuity between, indeed, some very healthy thinking, especially on the side of McChrystal, who has been very blunt, but there is point about how we translate that into change on the ground. But I didn't want to...

GILLES DORRONSORO: I don't think it's the solution, basically. The three questions, the official question, I'm going to keep them short and sweet. Moderate Taliban is kind of a joke, because the problem is not the moderate thing. We can define moderate... Dostum is a moderate, a war criminal, but he's a moderate politically, so what's the point of a moderate thing?

What we are interested in is to find some Taliban we can deal with; so what we want to do is to break the Taliban movement in two or three pieces and take one maybe. It's not going to work because the movement is centralised, because if somebody is going out of his way he's going to be killed, and it cannot work. Why should it work now? The Taliban have the momentum - they think they are going to win. How do you want to break down the movement right now? It seems to me too dangerous. I think it's going nowhere, and it's typically this kind of Saudi Arabia thing: to be part of the game you're not doing anything, really; so, useless.

The second point is about the election. I don't think Abdullah is going to ask people to riot in Kabul, etc, but he's not necessarily in control of things. Now, when you got 2006, the people, the riot in Kabul, were not organised by the Taliban at all, it was Panjshiri people who came. We cannot be sure about that.

There are contracts between Abdullah and Karzai, kind of negotiations, typical Karzai style: getting everybody... I'm not sure it's going to work, and not going to choose to just stay out of the system. Anyway, Abdullah Prime Minister is not going to stop anything. I'm very pessimistic about that. Another prime minister could be as good, but Abdullah the Prime Minister is not...

FABRICE POTHIER: You were mentioning Ghani...

GILLES DORRONSORO: Ashraf Ghani - could be more... We know that he is good at that. Abdullah, we don't have a clear indication that he is good at that.

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR: But while you were saying that, we don't accept it, it was conspired and it's...

GILLES DORRONSORO: No, that's worrying me, especially. Abdullah is not going to go to Bhutan and the next day you have riots in Kabul and everywhere. No, it's not going to happen like that at all. No, I don't think so.

The third one was credibility for the election – the answer is no, clearly no, because you had no control in the election, we don't know what happened in the countryside first, or most of the places. It's very clear a huge case of fraud.

I was thinking about Kandahar, because it's a place where, really, Karzai is going to use the official to... Well, it's huge fraud. You are going to 80% or 90% of people voting for Karzai in Kandahar, and with probably an official turnout of 40%, and the rate is going to be totally different; so, no, it's... There's no credibility for the Afghani poll and, of course, not for the Western public opinion because the journalists, basically it's okay, but they've done their work. When you're reading the newspaper, the last two weeks, most of the time, journalists have been very clear about the fact that there was no credibility in this election.

FABRICE POTHIER: If you could just expand on your point about Karzai's strategy before the elections to build this kind of coalition of the, we want to quote them, and what does it mean for the Afghan state?

GILLES DORRONSORO: Most of the time when you are winning an election, you have more legitimacy so you can introduce a new policy and do something. Look at the United States people: you have one year for the programme, or whatever; you have a few months where you can... It's exactly the contrary in Afghanistan, because Karzai has built his coalition with people like Dostum, like Fahim, like his brother, of course, a few others; and these people, they have local economic interests, they're not interested in building a State, it's going to be more autonomy for the periphery, and it's weakening the centre.

The coalition that has been built by Karzai is a coalition of people who want more autonomy, less State, more militia, more control of resources; Gul Agha Sharzai in Jalalabad also have followed him. It's going to be a break inside the system: they are going to kill everything that would go for more transparency, that would go for more efficient police, whatsoever; so it's a major point for us. Whatever the strategy we want in Afghanistan, we need an Afghan partner; and this new coalition of people around Karzai are exactly what we don't need – very clear. That's going to be extremely difficult to deal with that for five years or something.

FABRICE POTHIER: We have the gentleman at the back, then a question here. Yes.

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR 2: I think it took some time before the international community agreed that a comprehensive approach was indeed the answer. First of all, do you think it is the answer, because until now it is just a slogan - Comprehensive Approach. On the one hand you have the military, which have a very big difficulty to even agree on how PRT should work, because every PRT works in a different way; you have the civilian side who should do the work to development, because there should be a clear

distinction between the military and development, but humanitarian activists are not willing to engage with the military because of their security, the same for development activists. Basically, who should do the work, and if you don't agree with this comprehensive approach, well, who should do it?

MICHA RAMAKERS: I am from DG EuropeAID in the Commission, working on the Afghanistan desk. A question about State-building, really, with three sub-questions, perhaps. This is obviously a big buzzword in the development community, working on Afghanistan fragile states, and so on and so forth, so we do State building.

There was an interesting article by Martine Van Bijlert of the Afghan Analyst Network recently in a publication of the Dutch government, saying that the institutions that we are creating are imaginary institutions and we're in fact, keeping the whole system in a double bind, simultaneously strengthening and weakening the local administration. I tend to agree with that, but I would like to have your take on that.

The second sub-question: we've invested a lot of resources and we are investing a lot of resources in the Afghan National Police – what is your view of that organism and how is it perceived locally – which I think is a difficult or an interesting issue.

The third question related to this is the whole issue of standards and norms in the international system, where Afghanistan is being held through all kinds of conventions, UN covenants and so on and so forth, [unclear] into. As an aside it's interesting to look at the dates of when Afghanistan entered into these things and when they have been ratified – there is very often a huge gap between those two. How does that play locally, in your view? For example, I'm not trying to make an argument for or against, but the whole issue of promoting women's rights, the whole issue of how the Sharia law on personal status of Shia was tackled by the west. What is the fall-out, what are the consequences locally for the perception of the international community?

FABRICE POTHIER: One more short question.

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR 3: May I put the short question? Thank you. A, the picture you're painting is gloomy - is there any chance that if, for example, we looked against the unsavoury coalition of Hamid Karzai to strengthen some of the institutions that are there, notably the Afghan parliament. I know that you take very dim views on the parliament. What could be done if the international community did something to strengthen institutions that could be binding of a more national issue-based approach versus, for example, a nothing [?] approach?

The parliament is the only institution where people actually sit together, and instead of fighting they talk to each other and they come from very different quarters. In my view, humble view, very humble view, as political desk on the Commission, a hugely overlooked and underrated institution, as unsavoury as many figures are that are in the parliament; so that is one of the things.

Secondly, legitimacy of the international community: do you think there is any chance that we could come together and enforce vetting for the next parliamentary elections, to improve some of the credibility of the international community? Full stop: thank you.

FABRICE POTHIER: Thank you, Gilles?

GILLE DORRONSORO: There are two questions now: a question about the PRT and a question about the imaginary situation, that are very close. Well, let's start with something: I don't think it's a good idea, this integrating the military and NGO. I don't think it's a good idea, actually.

My feeling is that we should separate NGO work and military work as far as possible. The PRT are failures; so first, they are a failure when they are a failure, they are a failure when they are a success. Why? Because when they fail they fail, so there is nothing to see. When they are a success, they take the space of the Afghan State, I think. It was perfect: I have to read this out.

That's exactly that. When you are going to Gardeyz, the governor of the province of Gardeyz is basically an employee of the PRT, because he has no resources, he has nothing, no security; he cannot do anything by himself. He's totally dependent on the US guy, who is a nice guy, basically, but that doesn't change anything; and he is seen by the people as the employee of the US. That's it: there is no Afghan state; there cannot be an Afghan state when you put parties everyone.

PRTs are exactly the thing we should not do. The crime is that the PRTs are here, so what do we do with that, now? Organisation of the PRTs is everywhere in the discourse – it's nowhere on the ground. I've never seen any organisation of PRT, but there are 20, or 26. I'm not sure...

MICHA RAMAKERS: 26, or 28, or something...

GILLES DORRONSORO: 28, yes, PRTs in Afghanistan; so we should check everywhere. As far as I know, there's never been a process of organisation, and that says something. Karzai is weakening every day; we are putting more and more resources, we are taking the space of the Afghan State, the potential Afghan State, and at the end of the game, you will have the Taliban on the one hand, and the International Coalition on the other, and nothing in between – and that's going to be the failure, the major failure. If we are doing that, the Taliban have won.

Why separate the two? NGOs should work, where it's possible, to stick... Where there are few provinces where you can go out of the cities without military support; and when the security is really bad, you do not do this PRT thing, do not try to integrate the military and the civilian, because it's not working.

When you go into a village with the soldiers, you're part of the military, that's it; you have no autonomy: people are seeing you as a soldier – without a gun, but you are a soldier, basically. It's possible to make a lot of deals with people when you don't have a gun. Somebody said it'd be dangerous, but basically it's doable; plenty of people are totally under the radar – they are doing local deals, even with the Taliban, or people close to the Taliban: it's doable. Better to do that than to integrate this... It did not work. Show me a place where PRTs have worked - even Oruzgan, I don't think it's a good example, actually; when you are looking a little bit closely, it's not working. The question of that will die in itself.

The resources for the police: we have one basic problem, is that we are training the police as a military unit in Afghanistan: that's a key point; so what we are doing is transforming what should be a police into a kind of auxiliary of the military. Typically, in the north, when there is a problem, the International Coalition is not moving out of its space, the army is too weak or not there, or whatever, so who is going to fight the Taliban? The police. It's not a normal situation. The thinking right now is that oh, the police is too weak to fight with the Taliban, so let's train the police to fight with the Taliban; but if you train the police to fight with 100 Taliban, it's no more police, it's a military force – let's be clear about that.

I think we should shift the resources, clearly. If we want to fight the Taliban, it's army business, it's not police business – police business is different; police business is connecting with the people; it's being not too cold [?]; it's working inside the villages, inside the cities. It's not military business. If you transform the police into a military unit, there is no connection with the population, because the basic work of the military is to be protected, to be separated from the population; and that's the major problem we have now. That, I'm not sure it's totally understood.

About the standards and the norms: I think that people tend to be very critical of Westerners in Afghanistan, because what we're saying is not what we are doing, basically. Corruption in Afghanistan is not something traditional so to speak: Afghanistan is not traditionally a corrupted country.

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR 4: Baksheesh?

GILLES DORRONSORO: No, I'm sorry, no. Baksheesh - every country is a little corrupted, but this level of corruption we are seeing now, it's after 2001. The communist regime was not corrupted, certainly not; the Mujahideen were quoted as [unclear], but not in '80s, basically. The 90s was civil war, whatever, but no, there's no tradition of corruption in the state like that. Okay, in the, say, '60s or '70s, you were paying a little bit the local soldiers to do something, but it's not what I would call a corrupted country by nature, by tradition, not at all; it's after 2001.

Sorry, it's not about drugs, about opium, it's not about Wali Karzai – mostly, it's about what we have created: it's a war economy; it's this incredible thing that, if you want to rent a house in Kabul right now, it's thousands of dollars, and you have to pay in advance for two years. That is crazy; you will need \$20,000 just to rent a house in Kabul; you have a problem. That's why you have no more I would say, common norms in Kabul and in a lot of places in Afghanistan, because we put a lot of money. Half of the money, by the way, is coming back to Western expatriates, whatsoever, companies, but we are injecting so much money in the system that we have corrupted all the system; that that's a major point.

The second point is that we are speaking about human rights whatsoever, but what we are doing on the one, for years and years, has been totally different. When you beat a prisoner, when you torture a prisoner in Bagram, what's the validity of your discourse when you are killing civilians? Why should people take you seriously when after you say, okay, you are to be respectful of women? What part of our credibility is that?

We should be extremely careful; we should from time to time probably put pressure when there is some kind of red line, but basically, it's better not to intervene directly, it's better to fund women's association whatsoever. Their strategies are better on that, because we don't have much credibility left.

What's going to happen next year, we'll have much more contractors, special forces, etc; it's going to be violent: they are totally out of control. Private companies are extremely corrupted - it's funny to see Blackwater called...

FABRICE POTHIER: Xe.

GILLES DORRONSORO: Xe, ex-Blackwater, operating fully in Afghanistan – this kind of people. Then we are going to have official discourse about human rights with them - we have to make a choice here: we are not credible.

FABRICE POTHIER: Then there were between us two questions related to the parliament, that it could be the alternative institution, and whether we could vet the candidates to make it more of a credible functional institution.

GILLES DORRONSORO: Basically, if we look at what the parliament has done the last few years, we agree that it's not exactly a major institution in Afghanistan; it's not a place where decisions are made, or there are not huge legislation - that's a fact: it's a weak institution.

The second thing is that it's going to be much worse next year; normally there should be elections. I'm not sure it's going to happen, because you have at least ten provinces where it's totally impossible to have reasonably fair elections, because people cannot vote. How do you vote in Helmand, Nimruz, rules, Zabul, Paktia, Paktika, Wardak...

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR: Ghazni.

GILLES DORRONSORO: Ghazni, Kunar, even in Faryab, Kunduz? How do you vote in these places? Prisoner, basically, you can vote, even in prison you can vote; so I believe there is going to be huge corruption and fraud.

What's going to be the credibility of the new parliament? The elections in 2004, 2005 were, I think, a success. We don't have a lot of success to show in Afghanistan, but that was good; considering the general situation, it was very, very good. I don't see how it's possible to do the same thing next year.

Probably what's going to happen is that in some places there will be no election at all. I don't think it's possible for the Afghan Constitution – I have to check that. The parliament is not going to be the centre, it's not going to be alternative.... Plus the parliament doesn't do anything if you don't have political parties. A parliament without political parties, national agreed political parties is not going to work, is not useful. We need political parties in Afghanistan. We have plenty of political parties, but we don't have a real political party or two or three, that would really define the political feel and oblige people to work.

FABRICE POTHIER: And also create an opposition.

GILLES DORRONSORO: And create an opposition. Karzai is destroying everything that could be useful, systematically, because Karzai is making a deal with everybody, with a war criminal like Dostum, whatever, Sayav, with... It doesn't matter. There is no opposition. Abdullah is now in a position but probably is not going to that one more time – I don't know; but, you see, the system is destroying itself.

What can we do? Probably very different possibilities; we can work with local leaders, it's extremely dangerous. Gul Agha Sharzai in Jalalabad; Attarin Mazar, whereas Mehran could be back in the system in Iran; Dostum, of course; there's the Wadad in Kazerhaja – we know we can do that, but, of course, it's in the north. All the guys who are really strong men, we've got Falwad, it's in the north; so army training in the south is not going to help a lot.

In the north it could be more ethnic conflict - I'm thinking about Dostun. It could be really bad and it means that it's a losing strategy because it means that we are clearly thinking that there will never be an Afghan State and we'll be obliged to stay there or to leave a terrible situation, with possible ethnic cleaning. That's why I'm not very favourable to that line.

The other possibility is to have a prime minister, to try to do something with the prime minister. I think it's a long shot, but we should try it because we have nothing to lose. There are also possibilities to try to more or less take control of certain security institutions, not the police but the army, and, really, to put pressure, to try to work with the guys we think are responsible in the meantime, but it's going to be a solution. That's more or less what I am seeing, and honestly, I don't have a solution, a quick solution, it's not easy.

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR: And the parliament?

GILLES DORRONSORO: How do you do that?

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR: Next elections.

GILLES DORRONSORO: How do you do that?

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR: There are mechanisms, as suggested by the ICTG.

GILLES DORRONSORO: But it's an Afghan thing; you cannot from outside...

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR: The International Community's role could be [overtalking].

GILLES DORRONSORO: Because we fund the elections.

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR: Could it be paid?

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR: We pay for the elections, so that's the leverage.

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR: There is a question for political pressure for...

GILLES DORRONSORO: Now, we can put political pressure on Karzai, but from outside...

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR: They're problematic at best.

GILLES DORRONSORO: We cannot say, okay, these guys are going to make and... No, it's not possible.

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR: You have Afghan institutions, but then if there is backing from the international community for a proper vetting process... I allow myself to call think-tankers, they would also have colleagues from the ICTG, talk to SADEK or our NGOs.

GILLES DORRONSORO: If you want to say, introduction, this guy is not going to be a candidate because there is a guy in Washington who decided that he's not going to be candidate...

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR: I speak about Afghans.

GILLES DORRONSORO: It's going to be...

FABRICE POTHIER: When we have drinks, we can continue this discussion. Unless there are a couple of more questions, I will be closing the discussion, which I think was quite intense, but in a way, also very healthy because it's a reality check. Ms Ambassador, you have a question?

AMBASSADOR DANIELSSON: No, it's somewhere more a comment.

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR: We'll take a round of applause for Gilles, he's very courageous.

FABRICE POTHIER: And I want to say that he's doing the same in Washington, which is much more courageous.

AMBASSADOR DANIELSSON: But on a personal note, with all the expertise, and in most points you are right, and all the mistakes we have done, we still do, we continue to do, and I think most of us sitting in this room, take the positions to criticise ourselves and would like to go much quicker forward.

What I do regret, if there is a commitment, and particularly people who are working actively, as you do yourself, as well on Afghanistan - I think it's a pity if one... even in such meetings like... you're critical, yes, and you have to be critical in order to have lessons learned for the future, but I think it would be important also to be able to give more concrete... Because you mentioned: we do, yes, we could do that, but then at the same time you kill all the potential suggestions you put out. We're all trying to look for good solutions, and it is a very difficult, very complex situation, but a think-tank's role should also be to be constructive and have a constructive criticism. Because what you basically say: if I were a journalist I would say, okay, we withdraw, we leave, that's it; and that's not the solution to take.

GILLES DORRONSORO: It's not totally fair, because my first...

AMBASSADOR DANIELSSON: It's a bit like, it's not personal.

GILLES DORRONSORO: Yes, okay, for the entire of this meeting...

MEMBER OF THE FLOOR: No, no.

GILLES DORRONSORO: But, no, just one word, maybe. It's not fair, because my first report for Carnegie was for an alternative strategy.

AMBASSADOR DANIELSSON: But if somebody comes new here, I think they will say, what the hell are we doing there? Let's just leave, that's it, we've had it, we're losing people, we're losing money...

GILLES DORRONSORO: No, but I've been constantly suggesting strategies. Where it's getting me a little bit aggressive is when people are doing things that we know are going to fail. My question is: who is advising the US military? Do we have serious guys? I'm sorry, because in 2003 I was writing out saying that the Taliban were back; we are in 2009. You can't just stand a personal point of view.

AMBASSADOR DANIELSSON: Okay, it was...

GILLES DORRONSORO: I have seen that coming.

FABRICE POTHIER: Just to finish, I think you have a fair point. This is, as I was saying at the opening, there's a duty for think-tankers to come up with alternatives, and in all fairness to Gilles, I think he's coming back from the field where you have had also a shock – the situation has really degraded. The first report by Gilles, when he joined at Carnegie, was called Focus and Exit; and it's really, like a roadmap for a focused military strategy, not a pullout, but a more targeted military strategy on the population centres, not everywhere, but just the key population centres, and then you'll probably see phase-out and Afghanisation.

At the time, the paper in Washington, I think it fell in a hole, and now "Exit" has become mainstream. I think he had the point and his proposal is quite positive – it's about saying, we can't do everything, we have to make choices; and population centres, it's exactly what McChrystal is saying. It's just that today, I think it was more about this kind of reality-check back from the field, but there are some interesting proposals on the table. Thank you very much.