



Overall U.S. Effort in Afghanistan

Richard A. Boucher, Assistant Secretary

Ronald E. Neumann, U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan: Lt. General Karl Eikenberry, Commanding General of the Combined Forces Command-Afghanistan

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Press Attach □: Good morning, everyone. Thank you for being here. We're very pleased to have you with us this morning to talk about Afghanistan, the overall U.S. effort in Afghanistan. We have with us Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard A. Boucher; Ronald Neumann, the U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan; and we also have Lieutenant General Karl Eikenberry, who is the Commander of the Combined Forces Command in Afghanistan.

The three guests will make brief opening remarks and then take your questions. I would just ask you that you keep your questions brief so that all of your colleagues have an opportunity to ask questions. I think we'll just go ahead and turn it over to Ambassador Boucher.

Assistant Secretary Boucher: Thank you, Robert. It's good to see you all this morning. It's a pleasure to be with you. We're here principally for a meeting of the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, which is a group that meets in Kabul -- and our Ambassador can explain it more if necessary -- of which the German government has taken the initiative to organize a meeting, in capitals, and we very much support that initiative; and I think part of the strength in which we have turned out is a sign of how important we do think that this coordination mechanism is.

In Afghanistan, we're taking a comprehensive approach. It's a question of building the security but also building the government and building the economy, and it's really about giving the Afghan people what they need and deserve. They need and deserve to get the benefits of good government throughout the country, and so what we're in now is a period where those benefits and that government is extending outward to the frontiers, and I think we're very much focused on how we can do that effectively and how we can give the Afghan people what they need and deserve from their government.

We have, as you know, been very heavily engaged in Afghanistan for five years. We've spent about 14 billion dollars already on the civilian reconstruction and training side of things, but now we're proposing to spend an additional 10.6 billion dollars over the next two years, so it's a significant increase from what we've been spending. This money will go into training and equipping the police and the military; it will also go into building a road system, principally in the south and the east; it will go into building the electricity grids for Afghanistan; to extending government by building government centers and justice centers, and training government employees; and to fighting narcotics and building a new rural economy. So it's very much a stepped-up effort, it's an effort to do the civilian work -- the business of extending government -- more broadly throughout the country, especially in some of the areas where there's conflict, and also to do it, I think, with better coordination; and that's why we very much appreciate the German initiative here today. And we'll be working with our European partners. I had a lot of conversations in Brussels, the Secretary of State had a lot of conversations with people at NATO and the EU, and we'll be working with our other partners not only in Afghanistan but also in capitals to try to make sure that this effort is not only strengthened and broadened but that we also coordinate it better, because it's more effective when it's better coordinated.

So that's what I'll say for the beginning and give my colleagues a minute or two to tell you about their perspectives.

Ambassador Neumann: Thank you, Richard. This is an important meeting, and I think it's important to put it in a context, and the context is that we have a comprehensive strategy. We had actually one and now we have a second. The first was the comprehensive strategy of the Bonn Conference, and that put in place a set of goals which looked audacious when they are organized, at building a national set of institutions, of an election for the parliament, the constitution, and an elected president. Those goals all succeeded, and they looked pretty audacious when they were conceived and now of course we look back on them and say, well, that's fine, that was done.

The purpose of the London Conference one year ago was to create a new comprehensive strategy to take the place of Bonn because, effectively, the road map of Bonn had been run off of, we had reached those goals, and we needed a new set of principles to organize the international community. That was what the conference in London created, a set of goals which began to look at building the state throughout the country, and not just the national institutions. That's a very diverse process, and it is a very difficult process, because it requires action on many fronts at one time. The mechanism for carrying out this strategy, the comprehensive strategy, is the Joint Coordination and Monitoring Board, and it recognized by international agreement a reality, which is that with multibillion dollar programs of many nations -- much involvement -- that it is implementation on the ground which is the supremely difficult issue. It's not having the bright idea of the strategy, but it is making it work. And that mechanism is working.

There are actually two pieces to that mechanism of the comprehensive strategy. One is the international effort to coordinate with the Afghans in the Coordination and Monitoring Board. The other piece is the Afghan-driven effort to elaborate their development strategy, the Afghan National Development Strategy. The two are closely linked. We have had some real success. It is a slow process. You are talking about a country ruined by 25 years of war, which was among the least-developed countries in the world when we began. If you compare the challenge in Afghanistan with, say, the challenge at the end of World War II, with the Marshall Plan, in Europe you had an educated populace, a trained group of bureaucrats, a system of government, and a probably more developed infrastructure after the end of the war, with all the destruction, than has ever existed in Afghanistan. It's a very large challenge, requires a lot of coordination, and it has moved forward. The last report of the JCMB is a remarkably frank document, for international documents, about what has been done and where the problems are. Now we're taking that to a second level, having a Political Directors meeting, then we go back to Kabul. One reason so many of the ambassadors from Kabul are here is because it is, again, a Kabul-driven process to keep the donors together and to keep them together with the Afghan government. A lot of the work has to focus on building the capacity, the ability of the Afghans to hold up and reach, hold up there and reach the goals they themselves have helped set. So it is to keep moving forward with the comprehensive strategy, which we have, that we are running this process and that we are here. And why don't I just stop there.

Lt. General Eikenberry: If I could, just very briefly, say that I believe that the Government of Afghanistan and the international community, NATO, are all postured very well for success in 2007. It's clear that the extremists, the Taliban, as they look forward in 2007, our assessment is that they actually look at time working against them, and that we can expect in southern Afghanistan and eastern Afghanistan over the course of this spring and the summer that there will be more violence. But against that, I say that we are postured well for success, first of all with regard to international military forces, specifically NATO. NATO tested over the course of last summer and spring and they acquitted themselves extraordinarily well, and they proved themselves to be a very capable military alliance. Very importantly, they had much more presence in southern Afghanistan than the coalition did last year at this time. And, most recently, the United States made an announcement that, for the next 120 days, we're going to extend the presence of our forces in Afghanistan and in addition have other replacement forces coming in. This announcement was welcomed by the Government of Afghanistan, then by NATO. More importantly, Afghan National Security Force capability is increasing now monthly. The capacity, the strength of the Afghan National Army in southern Afghanistan today, compared to one year ago, there's been a very significant increase. The police program is now starting to show results throughout Afghanistan and very much in eastern and southern Afghanistan, and, of course, the police program is a program that Germany has made a very significant contribution to. As well, and perhaps even more significantly, the governance in eastern and southern Afghanistan has steadily improved over the last 18 months. And, as Assistant Secretary Boucher and Ambassador Neumann talked about, the comprehensive approach that we've been following over the years is starting to get better results now in southern Afghanistan as well, with more reconstruction and development.

The Assistant Secretary mentioned the significant increase that the United States is making this year for the development of Afghan National Security Forces and for reconstruction. A lot of those reconstruction efforts will be in roads and in the development of infrastructure, which will have a direct effect in some of the more troubled areas of southern Afghanistan and eastern Afghanistan.

And the second point I wanted to make was I'm just completing now my second tour of duty in Afghanistan. I served in Afghanistan in 2002 and 2003, and have now served from May of 2005 as the Coalition Commander until today, and I did want to say that one of the greatest honors I have had as the U.S. Coalition Commander on both tours of duty is serving side by side with the military of Germany, which is a great military and has served extraordinarily well in Afghanistan, has served side by side with Minister of the Interior police officials, serving in very difficult circumstances in Afghanistan and making great, great progress. So, as I look back on my career, having served in Germany from time to time in the 1980's during the Cold War, and now to be in distant Afghanistan serving side by side again with the German military, it's been a very great honor. Thank you.

Question: Hans Maurus, German Public Radio, Berlin. General Eikenberry, the German Foreign Secretary said yesterday that the security situation in Afghanistan has deteriorated last year (inaudible). Could you elaborate a bit more on that and maybe gives us some figures on casualties and so forth? And how do you actually assess the military situation there?

Lt. General Eikenberry: 2006 was the most violent year that has been experienced in Afghanistan, and there are several explanations why there was this increase in violence. It's important to remember what Ambassador Neumann was saying, what the Assistant Secretary was saying about the base line that we all begin with in late 2001-2002 in Afghanistan. There was no Government of Afghanistan. There were no institutions. There was no physical infrastructure of Afghanistan for us even to start to build upon. We talk about reconstruction - it wasn't reconstruction, it's construction. So the challenge that all of us have faced - President Karzai and his administration, the international community - has not been necessarily in fighting against a strong enemy. The enemy is not strong. The challenge of Afghanistan is that the institutions of the state remain weak, and that's very understandable after three decades of civil war, after the trauma that the Afghans have been through. And so, our challenge remains: helping the government of Afghanistan stand up its institutions, build its security forces, develop the infrastructure that it needs to extend its control into the far reaches of Afghanistan. There are no areas of Afghanistan where this extremist enemy has been able to take an existing presence of the Government of Afghanistan -- with good security, with good social services -- and been able to push that out. There are no examples of that. It's the areas of weak governance where the enemy has been able to gain strength. And, as I said in my opening remarks, I believe in 2007 -- as we look at a lot of the trend lines, as we look at a lot of the capabilities now -- that the Government of Afghanistan has in its hands increasing commitment from the international community. I remain optimistic that 2007 could well be a turning point.

Question: Michael Weidemann, North German Radio. You have talked about the additional funding that the U.S. Government is going to give to Afghanistan. My question is what kind of additional funding do you expect from Germany and the other donor countries? And what tasks do you expect these countries to take over?

Assistant Secretary Boucher: I think the simple answer is: as much as possible. We looked at the task and really decided it was time to step up and do more, step up and do more throughout Afghanistan and try to do it in a better coordinated fashion. And I think everybody needs to look at that, look at how they can expand their contribution and really make...you know...contribute as much as possible. That said, I certainly welcome a lot of the things are being done already. The German police training program that's already underway is a good one; it's a very good one. The General knows that, he can speak more about it. The focus that the European Union has taken on the ESDP mission to focus on police training is very good. It's not always just a question of money. It's often a question of putting, being able to put the right people out on the ground and having police trainers who can go out, who can go to the different provinces and regions and help with the deployment of police and the activities of the police in various parts of the country. Those kinds of things are very important, too. So, you know, we have a lot of big numbers but I think everybody needs to do whatever they can.

I was rather pleased at the NATO meeting. It wasn't a particularly -- it wasn't a pledging session for people to show up and to do tally sheets and all that, but virtually everybody who came brought something to the table. They said, "we are interested in doing this," "we are going to support that," or "we are going to contribute to this." And I think everybody is thinking in the same direction; so I think, as we go forward, particularly looking with the Afghans at meetings like the one today -- where are we, what are we doing, where do we need to do more? -- that that will prompt people to come forward.

Question: Emily Harris, National Public Radio: I have a couple of quick clarifications. On the money, I think you said, Ambassador, that the U.S. was (inaudible) another six billion for building □

Assistant Secretary Boucher: 10.6 □

Question: 10.6. Most of that is for security, isn't that right?

Assistant Secretary Boucher: Well, it's almost indistinguishable. I mean, it's the whole point to extend the ability of government to operate throughout the country and to deliver safety and justice and economic opportunity. 8.6 goes to training and equipping police and military. Two billion goes to roads, electricity, governance, counter-narcotics and agriculture. So, big sums of money in both cases.

Question: And I have one question for Ambassador Neumann. I just wanted to ask you, you mentioned the progress reports for the JCMB were quite frank. And they are. And one thing that they point out, particularly in the Minister of the Interior report, is that one obstacle is that, basically, people that you might call "old guard" or obstructionists are still very much in the Ministry of the Interior and that's causing a problem in reforming it and going forward. Could you just explain why they are still there, why those people can't be gotten rid of?

Ambassador Neumann: I believe they can be. First of all, I think the thing to understand there is we are -- we are pursuing a program which will substantially rebuild -- un-build and re-build -- both the Ministry of the Interior and the police force. With the Army, we started with a clean slate. We picked them. With the police, we ended up with a lot of local commanders and their men -- called policemen. And it took a while for the international community to recognize that this was going to have to be reformed from top to bottom. That's what we are doing. We have had two phases now of changing senior police officers, a third phase going into effect soon. That is also being followed by a massively increased effort in the Ministry of the Interior to take hold of that institution and help the Afghans take hold of it. It's going to be hard. I don't think anybody should have illusions about that.

Afghanistan has lived for 25 years in a culture where you protected yourself first because you had no idea whether you'd have a job or a government in the next year. That is a culture which also needs to be dealt with. It's not just a few officials. There are certainly historical examples of countries that have gone through that, and changed. But I don't think anybody should hide that it is going to be a long, tough task. I think now we have a much better definition of that task than we had when we began. And it is part of the whole problem of corruption in Afghanistan that President Karzai himself has been quite frank about, recognizing more has to be done. We have some major new opportunities now, with a crusading Attorney General at a new Supreme Court. There is a lot more to work within Afghanistan now in rebuilding, or building, a justice system that has to be part of the police. And I think we can make a good deal of progress on that.

Lt. General Eikenberry: Emily, if I could just add to that, on what has been accomplished over the last six months, twelve months, with the police reform, and that is there is now what you would call a transparent, standards, merits-based program for selection and for vetting. And again, given the trauma that Afghanistan has experienced over the last 25 to 30 years, that's not a perfect process. But the fact that that process now exists, is politically accepted by the Afghan leadership, that is a tremendous step forward, but it's not going to lead to very quick results. But my expectation is that over the next year, the next two years, the next three years, we will see very steady improvements.

Ambassador Neumann: Could I just, I just want to add one particular point, because I think it illustrates both the difficulty and the progress. When we did the second phase of police reform, we got major changes in the senior police officers in the south and east, but we also had a number of police officers left where there was a good deal of unhappiness about their competence and their human rights background. And there was a lot of press attention to that at the time. The Afghans agreed with the international community to set up a probation board. That probation board had a series of meetings, used the evaluation reports of the international mentors, and essentially all but one of those chiefs have now been removed through the process of that probation board. And the one who was not removed was not removed because

the international mentors in fact recommended that he, because of the amount of progress he was making and how he was doing his job, remain in his place. One, one or two were shifted, but over all there was partial success, re-evaluation, concentrated work, and a considerable additional success. And that gives me a certain amount of confidence that we can keep moving forward, and it also tells me how hard and slow it will be.

Question: My name Dietrich Alexander, with Die Welt, a German newspaper. General, may I ask you two short questions? First, would you expect the German soldiers -- you mentioned the good cooperation on the ground -- would you expect the German soldiers in the near future to be on the front line in the south and in the east? That's the first, and the second is, could you elaborate a little bit more on the rapid force that is going to be created in the next weeks by the U.S. Army?

Lt. General Eikenberry: Sure. First of all, having, as I said, having served in Afghanistan for almost three years, I don't talk about a front line or a rear line, or a rear area in Afghanistan. Afghanistan remains a difficult place to serve and all of our military forces, of NATO, are acquitting themselves extraordinarily well in difficult circumstances. Of course, more broadly, what any commander would say is that the more flexibility that a commander has to use forces under his command, as needed, on a very agile basis, so that if a crisis arises in part of the country, he has the flexibility perhaps to shift forces to that area; or, on the other hand, perhaps an opportunity opens itself in a part of the country -- the ability to flexibly move forces into that area, that's something that any military commander would aspire to. And I know that the Secretary-General of NATO and the SACEUR have both made that a point of emphasis with regard to all the troop-contributing nations in Afghanistan.

With regard to the United States' decision to leave the additional forces now in Afghanistan for another 120 days, those will be at the disposal now of the commander of the International Security Assistance Force, currently General David Richards; on the 4th of February it becomes the U.S. General Dan McNeil. But those forces will be available in eastern Afghanistan, in southern Afghanistan. And, as traditionally we have seen, the Taliban extremists during the spring months, when the winter thaw sets in and the conditions are more favorable for them to move. We have those forces now that are postured, and, actually, at this point, already conducting necessary operations, very much together with the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police, to preempt any action by the extremists.

Question: Some words about the Tornados?

Lt. General Eikenberry: The Secretary-General of NATO has made clear that he would certainly welcome that contribution. Once again, the SACEUR, General Craddock, has also endorsed that. What I would tell you, as a military commander in Afghanistan, is that the contribution of the capability that is offered by a capability like the Tornado, with its excellent reconnaissance capacity, intelligence-gathering capacity -- sure, that would be very welcome, if I were a military commander on the ground and on the receiving end of that, it would be a very great contribution.

Question: Peter Blechschmidt, S□ddeutsche Zeitung. General, I would like to give it another try on this question of NATO demands of more German forces. Maybe you know that among German government circles there is great concern that the deployment of the Tornados might open the door for further demands by NATO to send in, for example, more ground troops. Can you exclude this, or can you comment on this in any way?

Lt. General Eikenberry: No, that would be a question that is more appropriate for the Secretary-General, for the NATO military leadership to address. There are requirements that were agreed to politically by the members of the Alliance. There are military requirements that remain unfulfilled in Afghanistan. And, in the spirit of a well-functioning Alliance, collectively, the 26 nations of NATO, they need to find a way to address these shortfalls and to fill them.

Assistant Secretary Boucher: I think, just to remind people, we set these requirements together politically in meetings of ministers and militarily in the planning processes of all the NATO nations together, and it is an obligation of each of us to look at what we can do to fulfill the NATO requirements. We have done that and contributed a large number of our forces to support the NATO mission and we hope that everyone else does the same.

Question: Hugh Williamson, from the Financial Times. I've got two questions for you. First question. I would like to pick up on the comments by Mr. Neumann, Ambassador Neumann, about the extreme, the supremely difficult nature of the implementation process, of the compact, as it were. Could you say something about that in some more detail? Perhaps the other presenters could also comment on that? Where were the difficulties? One hears a lot about the difficulties of coordinating and delivering reconstruction work. Where are the difficulties in that sort of area of coordination and implementation on the ground? Second question is, one still hears a lot of criticism from the Afghanistan side, again this -- in the last couple of days this criticism from Afghan ministers here in Berlin of the very small amount of international reconstruction money flowing through the Afghanistan government itself -- only a very small proportion in the hands of the Afghan government, most of it in the hands of international organizations in Afghanistan. Can you comment on that criticism from the Afghan side, that there is too little money being given to them, even in the context of the well-known criticism of corruption, and so on?

Ambassador Neumann: Yeah, happy to. Good questions, but complex. Implementation is in large part hampered, not only by the physical difficulties of Afghanistan -- lack of roads and things like this -- but by the very small number of trained and competent bureaucrats after years of war, after the interruption of their own educational system. Kabul University, as an example, was a pretty fair university when I visited Afghanistan 40 years ago. It now has teachers that are almost entirely graduates of the university at the bachelors level, with very few doctorate holders. So, turning out quality people to run programs is a long-term process. Implementation is complicated because you have multiple donors and then you have multiple ministries. So, to give you one example, perhaps at the risk of too much detail, energy is a key issue. It does not face the problem of blowing up the infrastructure, but it faces the problem of having to produce a lot more infrastructure. Only six percent of Afghans are tied, get their energy, get any energy from a national grid. So you have an effective start because you have Germany, India, Asian Development Bank, World Bank, America, all involved in a complex process to bring energy from the north. But we found that we needed more work on putting the different organizations together, we needed more work with the Government of Afghanistan on policy issues and on coordinating between the ministries themselves so that work was not stuck as it went back and forth.

What the JCMB process was able to do was to bring first the donors together, to have common views on energy policy, and then to take that as a common, shared view to the Afghans to get them to agree in discussion to certain changes, so that we could have a much more efficient implementation of a broad policy as well as all the specific pieces of this multibillion dollar contract. That's one example in one area. It goes into your second question. There is a clear need, to which we have agreed in principle, to run more money through the Afghan government. And any government would want more control over funds, more ability to know exactly where they are going. That is natural. The primary problem is not the one you referred to, it's not corruption; it's the capacity to move the money. They have improved quite a bit from last year to this year, but there are still large amounts of development funding they haven't been able to move out of their own budgets. The way to solve this is to have a dedicated program to improving their ability to move money. We are doing that internationally. There is an effort that we are going to be discussing that has already got a lot of donor support in how to target and focus more our multi-donor work on improving key ministries' efficiency. We, for example, are engaged in a program with the Ministry of Education to improve -- they have a very good minister now, Hanif Atmar -- we are working with him to build their capacity to contract, to oversee contracts, to oversee the technical standards, and to oversee the fiscal standards. That's a two-year program, roughly. We hope at the end of that that we will get out of the business of building schools with foreign contractors and we would put all of that money through the Ministry of Education. But it is not an either/or; it's a process of building capacity, and we need to coordinate the effort of the donors with the Afghans, and that is one piece of broad strategy which the JCMB process helps greatly to integrate on the ground in Kabul.

Question: Louis Charbonneau from Reuters. Yesterday, President Karzai made an offer, a public offer, to the Taliban, saying that he would like talks with them, to try to end the bloodshed □

Ambassador Neumann: I saw that.

Question: This seems a bit surprising because in a way it's an admission of how, it's an admission of the resurgence of the Taliban. And I just wondered what your reaction was to that, and if you think such a thing would be wise?

Ambassador Neumann: I saw those stories. It's interesting, he made a very brief comment which has been interpreted very differently in different headlines, and I think it's being misconstrued. There is a process of reconciliation which allows people to come back into the process. More than 2,000 Taliban, mostly low-level, have already been through that reconciliation process, and there are, in fact, some members of parliament and one governor who were formally in the Taliban ranks. And I think that is what President Karzai was referring to. I think it is misconstrued that there is any openness whatsoever on his part, or on our part, to renegotiating the democratic

principles agreed to at Bonn. It is not a question of giving up power or changing power arrangements to a group that is fundamentally hostile to the whole process of democracy and liberalization. It is a question of making clear that they have an alternative, if they choose to use it, of coming in to the political process which exists. And, as I said, some have done that. Recently, one middle-level Taliban commander who had been fighting in an area fairly close to Kabul turned himself in after operations (inaudible) then he turned himself in, he said, I've been watching what you're doing -- and this was a combination of Afghan and coalition efforts -- he said, "I've been watching what you're doing, I see what you're building; I'm a Taliban, but I'm not a stupid Taliban," and he decided to change.

Question: Guy Jackson from the AFP news agency. A question for the Assistant Secretary and perhaps the Ambassador. Today's talks are about reconstruction. What would you like to see happening in Afghanistan in five years time for you to consider it a success?

Assistant Secretary Boucher: It's a good question. I think what we would like to see is a more capable Afghan government first of all, one that is able to handle its own affairs -- to provide education and health and safety and justice to its people -- and a government that has its reach throughout the country, and a government that has a solid base in the democratic institutions that have been established through the Bonn process. I think that's very much achievable. Certainly there is still an insurgency out there, and there are still enormous difficulties of developing what's a tremendously underdeveloped country. But compared to last year and previous years, this year there is more army, more police, more government, more roads, more development, more economic opportunity, more legitimate economy, and more pressure on the Taliban from all sides, including Pakistan. So there's still a long way to go, but I think we look at this year, you know, we're better set than last year, and I think in five years time one can look forward to a government that is much more capable but still has important partners in the international community. I don't think we should think of this as a short-term exercise, but I would hope that the nature of our responsibility would change as the nature of the Afghan responsibility expands.

Ambassador Neumann: Could I just add to that, because I totally agree with that, which is a good thing since Richard is my boss -- but I do agree. I think a very important aspect of what we're engaged in now and what I would hope to see in five years is the rooting of the government in the operations in the provinces, and I think this is possible, but difficult. It is possible because there is still an enormous amount of Afghan support for building the national government and for the international presence. This is one of the important distinguishing characteristics of Afghanistan: the continued across-the board, across ethnic, political lines of support for the international presence, because they know how dangerous it would be if they left. And that is true across all groups -- Pushtun, Tajik (inaudible). But there is great fear that it won't work, that they will plunge again into the kind of internecine strife they had before.

And so one of the key things is the ability of the government to bring justice and to bring a measure of service into the provinces. There is progress there. The elected provincial councils -- not a lot of power -- but they've gone to the parliament and complained and the parliament itself is rewriting the provincial government law. This is not a measure of something that the government asked the parliament to do, it is not something where the international community or the donors or the democracy organizations took them by the elbow, but it is a spontaneous decision of the parliament to rewrite that structure. I think there are hopeful signs. The provincial development councils are at a very, very early stage in their development, but, at least in some of them, I see them beginning to work together, and beginning to shape development plans. So I think we have a lot to work with and I don't by any means underrate the difficulty of the task.

Question: Andr  Spangenberg, the news agency DDP. Once more to the Tornados. The question is to General Eikenberry. First, am I right that we are talking about six jets, six German Tornados? Is that right? Second, when do you need these jets in Afghanistan, in March? Is that right? Third question is, how long should they stay, for three, or six or some months? And the last is about the information exchange between ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom.

Lt. General Eikenberry: I'm not trying to avoid your question, but I'm not the NATO commander, I'm the U.S. commander. My understanding is that the discussion is

Question: My question was about your opinion.

Lt. General Eikenberry: Yeah, the discussion is about

Assistant Secretary Boucher: My opinion is what the NATO commander says.

(Laughter)

Lt. General Eikenberry: The discussion is about six Tornados. I don't know when the hope is, the expectation is that that capability can be in Afghanistan. It's never a question -- with forces in Afghanistan -- it's never a question of what particular unit, what particular squadron of aircraft need to be there for how long a period of time. There are sets of enduring requirements and those can be filled with different kinds of -- in the case of reconnaissance they can be filled with different kinds of aircraft, different kinds of platforms that fly up in the air. It's not a question of how long will a particular squadron stay, it's what is the requirement that exists for the gathering, in this case of intelligence and reconnaissance; what kind of capability can best perform that, and so that's something for NATO to resolve.

Question: The last question was about information exchange between ISAF and Operation Enduring Freedom. Our discussion in Germany, we have to have mandates, that's why it's nice to see Tornados in the Afghan sky but don't give information directly to the (inaudible) forces because we can take part in the war in Afghanistan in this way.

Lt. General Eikenberry: Yeah, again, that's something for NATO to resolve, but there's tremendous intelligence sharing that goes on between the U.S. coalition forces and NATO, as it must be, and so trying to create artificial barriers I don't think would be helpful.

Question: Dave McHugh, The Associated Press. A question for Assistant Secretary Boucher. What do you hope comes out of the meeting today? I understand it's not about more money. If it's not more money, what would you like to see agreed on and come out of this?

Assistant Secretary Boucher: I think, first of all, we very much support the meeting because we think the civilian effort in Afghanistan needs the level of visibility that it gets by us getting together in Europe and other places; it's a chance for us to emphasize what we are doing in these areas and to review together and also somewhat publicly the amount of effort, the amount of money, the amount of training and roads and electricity that have already been done on the civilian side. Second of all it's a chance for the Afghans and the United Nations, who are in charge of this committee, to come and talk to officials in the capitals. As much as Ron [Neumann] says I'm his boss, I'm really his banker. He's out there doing things, he's out there building roads and building schools and building hospitals and clinics, and my job is to get him the money so he can do that. And I think that exists probably for all our nations. And so it's a chance for the people from Kabul -- especially the Afghans, who are in charge of their own development program -- to say, here's what we're doing, here's what we have planned, and here's where we need the resources, and then for all of us from capitals to make sure that we're putting resources into the priorities of the Afghan development strategy, and not just generally but specifically in terms of what they are doing right now. So the goal is maybe not to have such an accumulation of new resources but rather make sure the money's going where it's needed.

Question: Christian Schw gerl, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. I have a question for Assistant Secretary Boucher and Ambassador Neumann. Despite all the Western efforts, the Afghan economy largely rests on opium production, and Afghanistan produces 90 percent of the opium worldwide. I just wondered what the (inaudible) program and the extra money that comes in (inaudible) will do about this? And also, to what extent your intelligence tells you that the opium trade actually helps finance the Taliban?

Assistant Secretary Boucher: First of all, the numbers, to get a little perspective on this. About a third, we think, of the economy was based on opium last year. But also that's a proportion, it's been going down. The legal economy, the licit economy has been growing faster than the opium economy, and so actually the percentage is going down. Well, it shows that there's more economy, there's more economic growth besides this opium. Second of all, what I've tried to do is really look at the experience of countries that used to be the center of the opium trade. Look at Turkey, look at Pakistan, look at Thailand. These countries eventually became poppy free, and in discussions with people about what happened in those countries -- it was a question of time and persistence, which I think we have; it was a question of government determination, which is expressed not just through speeches but through arrests and interdiction and eradication; and it was a question of developing an alternate rural economy. So, I think we have those elements in Afghanistan.

We have a five-part program that was put together by the Afghan government that goes into education, interdiction, eradication, law enforcement, and building an alternate economy. And so that's a broad program and it's one that we're trying to carry out; I guess we're trying to strengthen each of those pillars this year. There's been a strengthened eradication program, we'll see more arrests and interdiction, we'll see more eradication this year -- a strong commitment from the Afghan government. We'll see building of a better law enforcement system for the drug courts, and we'll see more money going into the alternate rural economy, including farm-to-market roads and things like that. So it's been a matter of thinking, looking at the experience of others, looking at the program in Afghanistan and knowing that it's focused on the right things, and then keep trying to strengthen and continue it over the number of years that might be necessary to make Afghanistan poppy free. And so some of the additional money that we're asking for in the next two years, this new budget, will go into all those areas.

Question: And the financial question?

Ambassador Neumann: Let me take that. There is a pretty clear linkage between drugs and drug money and the Taliban in Helmand province, where the problem has become so overwhelming. The evidence for that linkage is logical but there's simply much less evidence for other areas of the country, and I think that it is also important to note that we have a number of areas in which we have had some real success in various provinces in the east and north. They have been, that success in declining opium in those provinces has been drowned out by the increase in Helmand, which means the overall figures have gone up. And I don't want to obscure that in any way, but it also shows that there are areas in which progress is in fact possible, and I think we are seeing more seriousness of purpose by the Afghan government.

I think President Karzai very clearly recognizes that the flow of drug money is probably the most significant danger to building national institutions; the capacity to rock the state structures is very large. So I think we will continue to make progress but there is no place where this has happened quickly, and I think it will take a lot of hard work. I was sort of surprised why nobody has asked us why we Americans are -- I hear a lot about...Americans are about violence and everybody else is about building, and I am surprised that hadn't come up in your questions because, in fact -- it goes into drugs, it goes into everything -- I think we've actually been the leading proponents of the joint strategy between civil and military development. I don't know that that is particularly recognized and I hope some of you will come to Afghanistan and go also to the areas in the east, where fighting was so heavy two years ago, and where we have had substantial progress in both the war in building, and it has been because we have integrated the strategies. As General Eikenberry has worked and as I have worked with him, every military operation has involved road buildings and clinics and indeed working with the civilian administration, and that is something which NATO is now doing, has always wanted to do and is doing more effectively. And if you look at Kandahar, the first NATO operation, which was militarily a great success in repulsing the Taliban, had problems getting the relief and the civil administration online, so you had something of a flow back of Taliban. The second NATO operation, which has been concluded now, had those pieces together, including USAID money, and the commander's reconstruction fund money from the American military who are part of NATO in the south also. And that program is working very well and we've had over 4,000 families already returned to this rather small area where that battle was fought.

I wanted to have a chance to mention that there is very much an integrated strategy of building and fighting, where fighting is necessary, and that NATO and ISAF and we are pursuing extraordinarily similar pieces down there, whether it's in the south or in the east, and I would hope some of you will come and visit some of the areas where we have worked, because I think there is a myth here that I would like to dispel.

Lt. General Eikenberry: I wonder if I could say one other, if I could make just one addition to your question about the intelligence. The mandates of Operation Enduring Freedom, the counter-terrorism missions, and NATO -- those two mandates are very clear and they are not...I think they are a mutually-supportive set of missions. With regard to intelligence, the sharing of intelligence is absolutely essential with all of the international military forces in Afghanistan, and with the Afghan Security Forces. Our mandates are very clear between Operation Enduring Freedom and NATO ISAF. The enemy and the threats don't necessarily follow those mandates precisely, and so I would say that for our combined success in Afghanistan -- and very importantly -- for the protection of all of our military forces, it would not be responsible to try to create artificial barriers in simply the exchange of intelligence between the two mandates. The exchange of intelligence does not necessarily lead to operational actions.

Press Attach □: Thank you all for coming.

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