



IPI's Special Representatives of the Secretary-General (SRSG) Series Presents:

"Afghanistan: Towards a Sustainable Political Process"

Featuring Mr. Staffan de Mistura

***Special Representative of the Secretary-General of the United Nations
in Afghanistan***

When:

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Where:

International Peace Institute
Trygve Lie Center for Peace, Security & Development
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(Corner of 1st Avenue and 44th Street)

TRANSCRIPT

Speaker: **H.E. Mr. Staffan de Mistura, Special Representative of the Secretary-General and Head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA)**

Chair: **Mr. Terje Rød-Larsen, President, International Peace Institute**

Terje Rød-Larsen: Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, Staffan, dear friends, good afternoon everybody, and a warm welcome to the International Peace Institute and to this SRSG series discussing the way forward in Afghanistan.

It is a special pleasure to welcome our speaker this afternoon, Staffan de Mistura, to wish him back to IPI, this time in his capacity as SRSG and Head of United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan. I know, Staffan, that you were across the street yesterday, we actually bumped into each other outside the Council, you were briefing the Security Council on recent developments in Afghanistan. And we are looking very much forward to hearing your views and your analysis in just a couple of minutes.

But let me first provide a few reflections by way of introduction. I think it is fair to say, in many ways, the political situation in Afghanistan has never been more complex, more difficult, and more challenging than we see today. Indeed, if we should be careful not make premature judgments, this month's parliamentary elections have clearly illustrated the gravity of the problem and a difficult road ahead. Despite safeguards, such as the strengthening of the independent electoral commission, the election so far has been tainted by widespread intimidation of political candidates, targeted attacks on voters to hurt turnout, and serious fraud concerns reported from independent observers from I believe across the country.

As we await the preliminary results in the next coming weeks, the emerging

picture, and the hope for democratic elections, remain bleak. I am looking very much forward to hearing Staffan's views on this, particularly the UN's role in electoral support, and how we can avoid repeating old mistakes.

Now, if we turn to the security situation on the ground, the picture is also stark and worrying. Over the past months, the UN and its partners have experienced an insurgency that is growing in strength, it's tightening its grip on the country, and there's been a sharp increase in the number of militant attacks against civilians, humanitarian workers, and members of the Afghan National Security Forces. There's also been a steep increase in the number of incidents in which improvised explosive devices have been used, contributing to a sense of insecurity and instability. The continued killings of civilians, including women and children, remain a grave concern, and it has led to continued erosion in terms of public confidence, in the government's and the international community's ability to bring law and order and peace and stability to the country.

Despite these grim facts, and despite the current difficult political and security situation, there have been some positive steps in the right direction. One of those steps is the initiation of the Kabul Process, which emerged out of the Kabul Conference, hosted this July, building on a preceding conference and discussions in London. While it is early days still, this process, which is co-chaired by the United Nations in Afghanistan, instills some hope for development of a credible, realistic, and effective agenda forward. It is a critical stepping stone, and a gradual approach, towards national ownership and a full transition to Afghan responsibility for security and governance institutions, economic and social development, and a more peaceful and prosperous future. I believe we must build on this momentum, and we must continue the good work of the United Nations in facilitating national dialogue and reconciliation, and the road towards political stability.

No one, I believe, is better placed to discuss the challenges at hand for Afghanistan and the UN than Staffan de Mistura, my good friend and seasoned colleague from, I would say, common battlefields in the Middle East. His full biography is printed on the back of your participants list, so I won't give you all the details of his sterling, and I would say, exceptionally outstanding career. Suffice it to say he has served an impressive number of years in the field, including very recently the SRSG in Iraq, where he helped oversee a very difficult election process, as well as extensive reconstruction and development efforts. In the UN system I have heard nothing but praise for his contributions under the most difficult and dangerous circumstances. Staffan is known for his strong leadership skills, particularly in situations of complex humanitarian and security emergencies, and in places with difficult political transitions. This background makes him particularly well suited for his current job in Afghanistan as the head of UNAMAM. Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to give the floor to a truly exceptional man, Staffan de Mistura. Staffan, the floor is yours.

Staffan de Mistura: Thank you Terje, thank you for this opportunity, thank you for your kind words. Coming from you, they are particularly appreciated by me. Thank you. Perhaps we could proceed by having a short analysis, and then of course opening it up for questions.

There are many ways of analyzing the current situation and some of the prospects, so I would probably do it in a sort of synthetic way. Imagine that we all concur that this is a critical year in Afghanistan. Imagine that we all believe that this year will make it or break it. And that there is a timetable which is moving forward. And that by July next year, something will have to be clear. Then we go backwards, and we start wondering, what can the UN do about that in terms of assisting Afghanistan and the international community? Forty-six countries are engaged in Afghanistan in addition to the United States. Then, as you know, the Afghans themselves have been going on for many years now in a very difficult situation. So let's look, if this was, and is, a critical year, what happened so far and where there is a pattern, or a form of analysis we can draw out of it.

Imagine we are in a lake and there are stepping stones, and those stepping stones started this year with a meeting in Istanbul, followed by the so-called

London Conference, and then followed by the Peace Jirga, and then followed by the Kabul Conference, and then followed by the election. Imagine that there was a strategy behind that. Which is not the case, as you know. [LAUGHTER] But we can turn it into stepping stones along a certain line.

So the London Conference was meant to reassure the Afghan authorities that the international community, in spite of very difficult times, was there to continue being with them, but they needed to start taking their own future in their own hands a little bit more. And imagine that that was then followed by the Peace Jirga, which was not the Peace Jirga, but was actually a preparation for a possible political discussion which could take place between those who are outside the tent, and inside the tent. We refer to a tent because the Peace Jirga took place inside a big white tent. But that was mainly all people who were already more or less in agreement with the government about most of the major points, but needed to feel and make the President comfortable, that if it did start talking to those outside the tent, there would be a common line, or at least some common red lines. And those came out. That was, in fact, constitution, which means then human rights, women's rights, those elements which have been acquired in this year in Afghanistan. And then the issue about disconnecting physically, perhaps not verbally, perhaps not psychologically, but physically from the foreigners who are Al-Qaida, and three, renouncing to the military option, and more on the other options which could be available.

And then followed by that, you had the Kabul Conference. The Kabul Conference became, every of this meeting – events perhaps at the beginning of the meeting had different connotation, but in the UN, we are known – we are quite trained to see mutations in original plans, and in this case, the mutation was from what was supposed to be simply an alternative to the London Conference, and therefore have a conference finally in Kabul, to become instead the opportunity for the Afghans to say, "You know what? We are particularly proud. And if there is something unifying all of us in Afghanistan, since the time of Alexander, since the time of the Brits, and then the Soviet period and so on, is this unifying element of pride. And we want our sovereignty back in one form or the other. In other words, we want to be more in charge of our future."

The counter-balance to that was, ok -- you want to do that? Well then, in that case, you need to take more responsibilities. And hence came the idea of the so-called realignment. Nice terminology, again very much invented by the international diplomacy, but, in fact, quite effective, which means realigning the actual development emergency – huge aid coming from the international community to the Afghans -- to their own priorities, at the conditions that they, too, were able to identify them, and stick to them. In other words, a beginning of a real compact. Fine.

But then comes the elections. Now the elections were meant for us, at the UN, to recover some of the lost credibility, frankly. We had been identified as being biased, or at least confused, about how to handle the previous elections. And I don't need to remind you of the difficult timing. So, for me personally, for the UN, it was extremely important to be able to re-conquer the type of moral ground, or mutual ground, or professionally qualifying ground in helping the Afghans to have a better election.

So, to do so, we had to apply, first, a strategy of communication, which was: Afghanistan is not Switzerland – obvious – but, in these elections in particular. In other words, let's down-level, downgrade the expectations. It will not be a great election. Then we should not have them. If we should have a perfect election, this is the wrongest country, and the wrongest timing for doing it. But since the President, and the government, and the opposition wanted this election, for different reasons. The President, because he felt that otherwise the constitution would be undermined, and therefore the whole set-up of the constitution – including the authority of the President -- could be questioned. The opposition felt that it was crucial to have these elections, otherwise they will be losing their own legitimacy as members of a parliament that would have disappeared, and therefore, from September onwards there would have been a vacuum.

The international community would have felt it very difficult to support a government which is not democratically valid, because there would be a vacuum, and therefore going on by decree. Bottom line, everybody except the Talibans wanted the elections. So, we had to go through that in spite of the fact that it was early.

So, lower the expectation, phase one. Phase two: increase the credibility of the UN but also of the whole Afghan process. And therefore, insisting on the new electoral commission, obtaining and having a new electoral commissioner, having a presence of two international members at the complaints commission – with, a right of substantial vote –forgive me for the finger, you know the black finger, it was the ink, just to explain [LAUGHTER] I had to, twice, put my finger in the ink, and through the bleach, which almost burned my finger, showed that it didn't go away, in fact, it's not going away after 10 days. And the same applies to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who was with me yesterday at the Security Council having the same problem.

That shows also that this theory about ink being fake or not, probably is a little bit overblown. There has been probably some fake ink, utilized by some, but, you need a lot of complicity for that, because you need the fake ink, you need also a fake committee around you to actually allow you to go in the bathroom in the middle of the election and changing the ink, and everybody else not watching it, and the real ink is probably quite good. And certainly fraud was not done only with the ink; you need a little bit more than that .

Back to the election: so the election needed to take place, we needed to increase the credibility of the institution -- Afghan elections, reduce the expectations but increase the pressure on that. And then obtain something that we were able to, and we are proud of, and in fact we did draw a red line – the first red line we did draw -- was about women. The fact that 68 women needed to have the guarantee of being, having a seat in the parliament. Not obvious, not obvious at all. And because there is a lot of traditional resistance -- forget the Talibans for a moment -- about this type of approach, not only. But since there was an incredibly high level of statistical withdrawal from women, strangely enough, after having been elected, and replaced by very strong men, the idea was that we would obtain, and insist, that if a woman elected withdraws, she will be having a replacement by a woman. The President felt very comfortable with it. We had, had a strong support in doing it; we were able to obtain it altogether. And it was publicly announced.

And last, a very fundamental point was, the mother of all issues about massive fraud, systemic fraud, was one in particular. You know how many days before the previous elections, the list of electoral polling centers was publicly announced? Two days. Last election. Two days before, total confusion. Possibility of ghost stations. Everybody didn't know, nobody knew where to go to vote or where to send their observers, and how to secure them. Major improvement this time. One month before. And, there again, I must give credit to President Karzai for having definitely stood the pressure, which was coming from many sources about the fact that this had to not go back to the previous case. And the electoral commission did show strength in that.

Conclusion: the elections did go in the following way so far: it was a success in the fact that they took place, full stop. In Afghanistan, in September 2010, it's just a miracle – or if you want, a crazy proposition -- to have elections in a situation of the security that Terje very correctly described.

Second, that in fact 4.3 million -- we'll see how many actual voters -- but 4.3 million casted votes, had the courage of going there. Is this a small figure, comparing to 30 million inhabitants, extremely small, but let's re-put it into context. How many real, eligible voters are there in Afghanistan, with a population that is extremely young. And secondly, there is no voting registration. The actual number of eligible voters is close to 11 million. 10.5, 11 million. So, 4.3 out of 11 million, well, even in a European country would not be too bad. Compared to the last year election how many voted? 6.5. But, 1.5 million – 6.7 actually -- 1.5 million were considered invalid votes. So, there were about 4.5

million real voters. Again, not too bad, when you look at the fact that this year the security was much worse, and much more diffused. So we have to put it into context. If nothing else, in order to recognize, acknowledge one major thing: the courage of those 4.3 million, of which 1.6 million women, because they were in a different polling center, as you know, who had the courage in spite of two major massive alerts by the Talibans, went to vote, and did so. And security was concerning. But it was not much, much worse than the previous time, in spite of the fact that the overall situation was much worse. The proof is that it was not totally disrupted.

So where are we now? Well, we are suddenly very cautious. While we will be hyper proactive and positive in a way reassuring about the fact that we need at a certain point to have elections, and better elections, now we are being very cautious. Why? Because that's when the UN and the international community last time made probably a mistake by saying one thing, and then contradicting each other. Especially if there was some internal disconnection. But then, losing credibility and therefore, the high ground.

Secondly, because now it is really the time for the electoral commissions, the Afghan electoral commissions, to show their courage and their determination in proving that these elections are better. There are, you will be rightly saying, almost 4,000 complaints. This looks very bad. True. But there are 2,000 losers. And nowhere in Afghanistan, nor anywhere in the world, people are extremely well trained to be a good loser, as you know. And therefore, each of them have at least one or two complaints, so we are getting close to 4,000, which was logical. The issue is, how much, and how serious these complaints in a transparent way will be actually analyzed and put on the table. And that we will see in the next 20 days. That's why we are cautious, silent – neither saying this is a great or bad election, supporting the electoral commission to have enough courage and determination to stand the pressure, which is taking place, for losers in particular, by losers who know it, and try to de-legitimize the election – and then make our comments afterwards, hoping that these elections, which are not perfect, which will not be perfect, are at least a little bit better than the previous ones. If that is the case, we have at least a step in the direction of democracy, a little bit more than just going into a major, constant fighting.

That leaves me to the last point, the one that we'll be talking least about because it's about the future, and that's where I have to be, unfortunately, cryptical, but positive. And it is about what is left after the election? There is only one thing. There is no military solution. We all know it. And by the way, the Talibans know it, too. Although, naturally, they won't admit it. And there is only one format for the next months – critical, almost a year -- it is political dialogue, reconciliation, deal – but within certain type of criteria. That leaves also for all of us to know that these are going to be very rough months. Because those of us who are being involved in previous circumstances know that this phase of a conflict is the most painful and difficult one. We call it, in our UN terminology, "hot negotiations." You negotiate and you don't negotiate – we don't of course, we are facilitating – it is the Afghans who should be negotiating. But it is also the time when the maximum pressure is being exercised by either side, both sides, at the same time in order to have a better position in terms of so-called dialogue. But that is now the name of the game. And I would just close by saying it is going to be rough and difficult for the reason I just mentioned, but there is no other alternative. And saying that all this will only be doable in the long term if we have a regional contract of engagement. That it would be both internal and regional, but now is the time for doing it. Thank you.

Terje Rød-Larsen: Terrific and thank you very much. [Applause]

Thank you again for a very rich and very candid exposé of the situation on the ground. We now have a great opportunity for all of you. You will have an opportunity to have 45 minutes of dialogue with Staffan Di Mistura and I will, without further ado, open the floor. Questions? Criticisms? Suggestions? Warren. Can you please state your name and affiliation before you take the floor?

Warren Hoge: Warren Hoge of IPI. You spoke about facilitating negotiations, and I wanted to ask you, since these negotiations, as we are to now understand, are between the government and the Taliban on the other side, has the UN been able to establish any kind of contact with the Taliban's side which could be beneficial to facilitating these negotiations?

Staffan de Mistura: I will answer that with some UN terminology, of course, if you'll forgive me on that. Point number one, you know it, and Terje knows it extremely well, one of the great advantages among so many little small disadvantages that we have in the UN, is that we talk to everyone, and people talk to us. In fact, we are meant to talk to everyone. We have met many unsavory characters in our life, and it was meant for the fact that there was a cause, rather than a counterpart to talk to or not to talk to. Point one.

Point number two, we have been 60 years in Afghanistan. During the time – I was there 22 years ago, I met Naji Bulah, we were in a – that was a few weeks before the Russians, Soviets at the time, withdrew. So, and the UN was already there. And I just came, when the mission had already been there for about 8 years, at the time of Sadhu Diniagakan. We are probably going to be there, if God wants, and the Afghans need us, for the next 50 years. We have established links, at the local level, with every Afghans. We were there during the Taliban, we were there during the Soviet presence and we were there during the Mujadeen time. Therefore, at the operational level, when we talk about food aid, vaccinations, which are still taking place, how do you think that these vaccinations can go unimpeded in order to reach what has been a 60-70% rate of vaccinations in Afghanistan. Almost eight million Afghans have, are reaching, are getting food aid all over the country.

Terje Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much, Staffan. I think Raghida Dergham was first and then we have a range of hands down there, I will move to everyone.

Raghida Dergham: Raghida Dergham, of Al-Hayat. So let me take this question a little further. Are you speaking to Taliban, in coordination with the United States, are you looking for the so-called "moderate" Taliban? Are you doing any negotiations? And secondly, how much are the neighbors – are you involved in, involving the neighbors, such as Iran, whereas, in the meantime, we are hearing that many of the countries are going to pull out, as announced by the United Kingdom at one point. So how much... what would happen in that country if the pressure mounts and...

Staffan de Mistura: Which country?

Raghida Dergham: In Afghanistan. If the pressure mounts, and the United States, that is, if the pressure in the United States mounts on President Obama to also get out?

Terje Rød-Larsen: Thanks Raghida. Let's take a couple of questions more before we go back to Staffan. The lady on the left, over there.

Minh Thu Pham: Hi, Minh Thu Pham from UN Foundation. I wanted to ask you about staff security and the reasons behind the threats to the UN, beyond just our support for the elections. The way the UN is viewed in Afghanistan, support for the US or the UN's ideals. Thank you.

Terje Rød-Larsen: Could you repeat the last question?

Minh Thu Pham: Support to the US, the UN's ideals, how the UN is viewed there, aside from just support for the elections.

Terje Rød-Larsen: Let's have one more, shall we go there?

Stephen Schlesinger: Stephen Schlesinger, The Century Foundation. You said with some confidence that you felt that the Taliban understood there is no military solution. Can you

give us some explanation of why you feel that confidence?

Terje Rød-Larsen: Staffan will you respond, please?

Staffan de Mistura: Regarding the fact, the details, on how negotiations are taking place, who has been meeting and where. First of all, the negotiations are needed between the Afghans themselves. They are the ones who are leading it. What we can do, and will be doing, is facilitating and supporting it. But it is an Afghan issue. Now, of course, everyone else needs to be involved, informed, feeling comfortable about it, but it is Afghan-led. So I will not elaborate on that until we go further on this. At the moment it is, what I can say: Afghan-led, supported when, and if, by the UN, and everybody else.

Now, the question regarding what will happen when the US say, decides to leave and follow what is the statement made by President Obama in the past. Well, I think we will have to cross that bridge when it gets there. One year is a century in many places, but particularly in Afghanistan. And much can happen between now and then. Second, from what I understand, that is the beginning of a certain type of process. It's not the end of a departure. In other words, it is a beginning. Now we are seeing in Iraq, that these beginnings can be long and cautious at the same time.

Neighbors. Iran is a very important neighbor. So is Pakistan, by the way. And so are even neighbors who are not extremely close to there, who can have some influence. We need to engage, and they need to be engaged, by the Afghan, by the authorities, into a vision that in a way will be reassuring each one of them that the picture – the photo-polaroid -- of what Afghanistan may be looking in two years time, is going to reassure everyone that it's not threatening, but may not be what they have been dreaming to have. In other words, Afghanistan will find its own format, will explain it to the neighbors, and hopefully will also address some of their own concerns. Iran has concerns. Pakistan has concerns about the future of Afghanistan. But everyone seems to be keen at this stage about the stability of Afghanistan. No one has any gain at the moment out of the instability of Afghanistan. Regardless of what we think. Think about what has been the potential danger of instability in neighboring countries if Afghanistan became more unstable and less even than it is at the moment.

Now regarding the UN perception. Well, I am biased of course. You have to forgive me on that. But the impression I have is that the Afghan people feel very, very grateful to the fact there is and that there has been always, an international presence somewhat assisting them in these difficult moments. That's the UN humanitarian side. On the political side, I think they did resent the last elections. Because they didn't understand where we stood – are we on one side or the other? Do we take a position? That's why it was important, urgent, and still is, to maintain and sustain the credibility of the UN as an impartial player. We do have the human rights side, which, as you know, has been producing reports about civilian casualties, which have been annoying major NATO countries, sometimes, but certainly the Talibans recently. But this, I think is exactly what the UN is supposed to do in order to be credible and therefore also be respectable. The test will be in the future on how we can also be present in spite of the lack of security and make a difference. And not just simply witnessing events, but that's the challenge we are having at the moment. Which is a constant difficult situation we have been facing, and all over the world, I did have it in Iraq. How do you raise the profile? How do you actually make a difference? And, at the same time, by doing so, you don't attract excessive attention by those who don't want you to do too much. Well, the alternative is to do nothing. But then, why go in there and risking our life? So the catch-22 goes back and says, we will do it, we will be aware of the fact that raising profile and being active does increase the risk. But then, we will also increase our own precautions and hoping to be lucky. Was there any other point?

Steven Schlesinger: Were you confident that the Taliban understood there was no military solution.

Staffan de Mistura: Ok. They have not said so. And probably – if they are, as they are very bright people, we should never underestimate them – they will never admit it, even on

the day when they are in the middle of a very intense discussion. And I would not recommend that as a negotiator. But, at the same time, think about where they are at the moment, ok? They are aware of the fact that the Afghans have learned, on their own skin, what does it mean having a Taliban regime. The period when they were able to jump in and be the Taliban's thing – that was the young religious zealots bringing, fighting against corruption and all that -- has been superseded by the knowledge of most Afghans about what is the price of that period. There was no progress. There was no -- people talk about corruption in Afghanistan today, but at that time, perhaps it was not corruption, but there was no results. The medical facilities, the hospitals, the schools – I don't need to remind you. So, the Afghans are very bright people, very bright people. They know it. So, the alternative for them is knowing that they will not be able to take over Afghanistan easily anymore.

Second, there is a strong resistance from a large component of Afghanistan anyway. The northern ex-alliance, and they are very powerful at the moment in present. Three, they are not one group, they are several groups. Four, there are clear indications that the neighboring countries are aware of the complicating factor that the Taliban are bringing. And five, there's never been so many foreign troops as now, whereas two years ago it was not comparable, and the critical mass of the pressure, as you can read in the papers, is incrementally taking place. So it's not really a very nice environment.

Terje Rød-Larsen: Thank you very much. Several hands. Shall we start with the gentleman there with the glasses?

Richard Barrett: Hello, Richard Barrett from the al-Qaida-Taliban monitoring team. You talked about the importance of rebuilding United Nations credibility with the Afghan people. And indeed, you talked about the vaccination program, and so on, which has been so successful there in areas held by Taliban. And I just wondered if you saw any trends from that, you know, from other humanitarian work done by UNAMA and other agencies there, that suggest that the Taliban are being to be more conscious of their need to govern rather than just rule? And, in relation to that, whether you... you mentioned also that the civilians casualty report that the UN put out, and I remember the Taliban reaction to that was to say, well, let's join a commission – UN, themselves -- to go down into these areas and actually see what had happened. And do you see opportunities like that, to test the Taliban. You know, to put them on the back foot as useful initiatives to follow? Thank you.

Terje Rød-Larsen: Shall we take a couple more. I saw a hand immediately behind the last speaker.

Andrew Hudson: Hi there, Andrew Hudson from Crisis Action. Just to return to your point about the peace process. Do you think that the current peace process is meaningful, when you talked about it being Afghan-led, given the international nature of the conflict, is that peace process likely to bear fruit? And secondly, if not, what would be your ideal role for the international community in engagement on a peace process?

Terje Rød-Larsen: Thank you. Ann Phillips on the front row, here.

Ann Phillips: Well, actually I had put my hand down because you did touch on several things that I was going to ask you. But I will expand on it more. I am interested to know what effect on the peace, conflict resolution and sustaining the peace – if, indeed, once you are able to achieve it, does the vast amount of corruption – not just within the Taliban, but I mean, we read every day about the Karzai family, and so forth, and the involvement in the international drug trade. Does this have a negative effect upon... on your role, and your ability to play the role that you hope to do?

Terje Rød-Larsen: Ok, thank you. Staffan?

Staffan de Mistura: First of all, the issue about whether the Taliban, let's say, have learned a lesson. Richard, I think that's what you were aiming at and I think it's a valid question. The indicators we are having -- because we are all over the country, and on the humanitarian side in particular, we are very mobile, due to the fact

that have to reach common people, not just Kabul or the center -- the impression we are having is that they have learned a lesson. Now the problem is that they are also contradicting that by one or two spectacularly negative things. You remember the stoning recently, a child being punished, and a few other cases. Now, they deny, but that is certainly worrisome and referring to the other type of culture.

The impression, if I had to put a bet, I would say that the Talibans which, to whom the President Karzai is referring to when he is inviting them to join him in the tent, are the ones who have learned a lesson. And in the areas where they do have a substantive presence, we have not heard, except for three cases. The outrageous multiplication of it, probably because they have to be careful in not reminding the back. If this is sufficient to guarantee that once they are more engaged, they will be more moderate – well, nobody can guarantee that.

But certainly, if there was any type of – and I have to correct the word “peace process,” it’s a little bit too advanced, and it doesn’t bring good luck normally when you talk about it. [LAUGHTER] It’s always good to talk about reconciliation process, or whatever, beginning of it. Let’s go by steps. At the moment, there is no peace process. There is a clear understanding by everyone that there is no alternative at this stage, except killing more people on one side and then on the other side. It is what has been proposed through the Peace Jirga, a reconciliation process, that may lead to a regional understanding of – and eventually what we could call peace. But basically, reconciliation.

Now, corruption. I’m sorry, you had a question about the commission, Richard, you are right. The Talibans did blink after the rather negative report indicating how badly they are doing with civilian casualties. They were not happy, and I think that’s healthy. They need to know, and we did so and we did it on purpose, to make sure that they understood that when there is such a huge amount of what is called collateral casualty, but in fact it is Afghan young women, men, children. And everyday they need to take responsibility for it, and not pretend that only NATO is doing it and they are not. In fact, the proportion was much higher. And therefore, their first reaction was annoyance, irritation. But the second one was a proposal, which I think is worth studying. But we have to wait for the election first. One step at a time.

Regarding the corruption: When there is such a huge amount of money coming with such a short time frame, it becomes also a strong inducement for corruption, and it becomes also very difficult to control. So what we would like to see, is that from this type of short term, quick fix, immediate results – lots of money, and therefore, very few controls -- it could become much more of less money, but long-term development aid. Less easy, therefore, to have it as a corruptive element, which will always be there, but they will be less fed by all this amount of money.

I think that corruption is a very important aspect in Afghanistan, and is recognized, frankly, by everyone. But I also think we are over-focusing on it. Frankly. We should pay, as we do in our everyday life, a lot of importance to it, but we should not forget, why did we go there. We went there to get Al-Qaida, not able to do what it took place here, in NY, almost 10 years ago. And to have the Talibans not allow them to do so. And eventually be in a country where it will never be perfect, but a very dignified, proud country which would develop eventually into whatever the Afghans feel like having. Not to make it Switzerland and perfect. So while insisting on corruption not being a good thing with your money, with taxpayer money, trying to have checks and balances, and also having better control at the source of the water, in other words when you’re giving the money, I would not also make it an obsession. Otherwise we’re starting losing the focus on why we are there. We can spend a whole week talking about the Kabul Bank, while the Talibans are disrupting the elections and hoping to see us all looking at the Kabul Bank, which is crucial -- and the same time, losing the target. So I’m trying to say this year we need to put the priorities in the right context, otherwise some Afghans will think that we came there to make them perfect instead of making them free from Al-Qaida. And then we would have 30 million people doubting about why we are there, instead of only

30 thousand angry people.

Terje Rød-Larsen: Thank you again for consistently very candid answers. Shall we take a new round? Shall we start there on the left hand side? Yourself, sir? Ok, the young lady behind him.

Erin McCandless: Thank you, Ok, Erin McCandless from NYU and The Journal of Peacebuilding and Development. I'm wondering if you could say a little bit about the quality of coordination between UNAMA, ISAF and even the country team on issues of stabilization and peacebuilding strategy. And in particular, the degree to which tools such as the ISF and UNDAF and the ANDS are useful in that regard. And then, secondly, you haven't... I don't think you've mentioned anything about potentially the DDR and reconciliation of the Taliban as well. And, you know, historically in Afghanistan, government has worked with UNDP on issues of DDR in particular. So who would take the lead on such issues, is there any planning and thinking around that? Thank you.

Terje Rød-Larsen: Thank you. Did I see some other hands in the vicinity there? There are two hands in the front?

Alberto Turlon: I am Alberto Turlon from the Burma Fund. My question was about Islamic Fundamentalism, and if it's gaining some space, and at which extent will gain space in the political landscape and in the civil society? Thank you.

Andrew Sinclair: Andrew Sinclair from the Center on International Cooperation. I was wondering what role, if any, did the embrace of counter-insurgency help open the doors to political reconciliation?

Terje Rød-Larsen: Staffan, the floor is yours.

Staffan de Mistura: Regarding the issue about reintegration in particular that you mentioned. Because you were referring a lot, have you studied carefully the UN, you were using a lot of our jargon. [LAUGHTER] Ok, regarding reintegration, it is an important thing. But, I think we have a saying in most of our mother countries, certainly in Afghanistan, but I'm sure I have it in my both Swedish and Italian background. You don't put the cart before the horse? Is that, you have it in English, of course. Reintegration is the cart. The horse is the reconciliation. In other words, it's very important to have this reintegration, and we have a very good Afghan person in charge of it, frankly. And they've been well prepared, and there's even some funds, and it's there, waiting for them. And actually saying to them, if you do, and when you do it, there will be some type of format, and you won't just be, "thank you, we made reconciliation and good-bye and good luck." But there is a process there waiting.

Also, because by the time that takes place and we have seen it other countries, what happens is, you take 6 months before you have a reintegration, and by then many will have been disgruntled and gone back to the mountain out of disappointment. But, the massive movement, the actual change will take place with the horse, the reconciliation. Which is the type of item we were just discussing before.

OK, I will avoid all the acronym coordination by saying we are coordinating ourselves. But, particularly, what has changed a lot and improved a lot is the type of relationship that – first of all, the UN, so far, has been able to start getting closer to a charter in terms of no separation between the country team and the political team and the election team. Why? Because when things are rough, and things were very rough security-wise, but even reputation-wise, unfortunately last year, due to these internal discussions, that helps in putting the ranks together. Secondly, because I think we have a strategy which we all agree upon, which is three plus one. Which is the three areas which have just been mentioning, including the regional cooperation. So everybody has the feeling that we are covering... the UN can cover the 82 different subjects based on our Security Council resolution mandate. But we choose only three plus one which is the aid coordination plus one, in order to be able to be more effective in Afghanistan we have to use all of the resources we have, which everyone applies as a good

principle. You choose one or two or three hills to climb and not every hill around with the money you have.

But the good news is that we have been able to maintain close contact. Coordination is a strong word because there are different agendas. But very close contact. And non-contradictory contact between the ISAF, new civil representative, and therefore also the military one, the EU, new representative, and ourselves, with somewhat recognition for the fact that the UN represents countries that neither ISAF has onboard, neither the EU, because India, Russia, Iran, for instance, don't seem to be members of NATO, neither of the EU. Whereas they are active members of the UN. And by doing so and by being able to assist the Afghan government to have a consistent voice instead of having different ones. But of course, agendas, priorities, tend to be different. ISAF is focusing now on transition. The EU will be focusing -- they announced it and we are delighted about it -- about electoral reform. We were particularly focused on the election and all the other subjects that we just mentioned. That is a good way to work in the same direction without stepping on each others' foot, but on the contrary, supporting each other. So far, so good. Ok, so far, so good.

Fundamentalism -- yes, there is. But not more than you would see in other countries. What there is, and we should recognize it, and respect it, that's why I was so curiously concerned when this gentleman in Florida was planning to burn the Holy Quran, just at the time of the Eid, can you imagine? And at the very time of our elections? So, I mean, the worst possible time. And the argument was that if they do so, how would we feel if people would be starting burning the Bible on the night of Christmas? When we are preparing our dinner with the turkey and so on. And waiting for the dinner to take place and we see that happening -- should we be not annoyed? So we decided to be even more annoyed than the Afghans, frankly. Because on top of it, it was putting at risk the lives of 140,000, 150,000 foreigners, and who are there, basically, respecting the culture. So culture and Islam are unifying elements of Afghanistan. They are very proud people. And they are unified by this, and we should respect it. Is this fundamentalism? No. I see less there than I've seen in other countries where I've been operating, frankly. There is probably the healthy Afghan nature about being pragmatic in addition to also being very religious.

COIN, the counterinsurgency theory. Well, I would not comment on this at this moment because we have to see where it goes at the moment. It is being applied, but there is a... one size doesn't fit all. In other words, what was learned in Iraq, which I know that we all watched carefully, may have to have a different approach, and I think is having a different approach in Afghanistan – so that I think we should comment on that afterwards.

Terje Rød-Larsen: Thank you once again. Ed?

Ed Luck: Ed Luck, from IPI. One question and one comment. You suggested that there three or four different groups within the Taliban. And I was wondering if you could just aggregate that a little bit in terms of how you see the different groups within the Taliban, and how is that likely to play out in this next phase. You pointed out that in this sort of phase, sometimes there's the rather explosive groups trying to show they have more territory, have more power, sometimes we've seen more violence in civilians and other things, in other countries, at this sort of time. So, how would that play out, and how do you feel in this debate in this country about the so-called "moderate" Taliban? Do you see one group as more moderate than another, and how would that play out at this point?

Now the comment, if I might, because I saw it in the press a couple of times and then you've referred to it a couple of times here. I wonder whether Switzerland is the best example at this point in time, after the "no minarets" and the party running on "no black sheep." You know, I'm sure their elections are very orderly, but I wonder whether politically, that's the best choice. Maybe you might pick Sweden instead. That's just a comment. Thank you.

Terje Rød-Larsen: Thank you. That is such a broad question, I hope there's nobody here from

Switzerland, by the way. I think that this is such a broad question that I think I'll go straight to you on it. Staffan?

Staffan de Mistura: Well, regarding Switzerland. [LAUGHTER] First of all, I do have a lot of admiration for the capacity of the Swiss to have a vote on anything. And it seems to be quite orderly, that's the main point. Secondly, because there is no Swiss ambassador in Kabul, so he cannot protest me mentioning them all the time. [LAUGHTER] And have the benign neglect on their side of being confidently mentioned as an alternative.

Regarding the debate about how many Taliban groups and so on. Well, there is a lot of discussion on that. Then there are various theories, the grey, the white, the black Taliban. The national Taliban. The Afghan Taliban. The outsiders and the Pakistani Taliban, and so on. So, it would require a little bit of a long analogy which I would be glad to give you, but it needs about half an hour on that, because they are very much split also along the local environment. But the theory goes that – and I'm talking about moderate Taliban – is that the real Taliban are Afghans. And I think that what President Karzai is frankly reminding when he uses this kind of appeal to them. Because they are Afghans. And, as such, there could be a discussion among Afghans about it. Second, that the Afghan Taliban has a range of interests and activities of about six miles. They are very local. They don't go to Kabul. They fight and operate at night, or whatever, in the six-mile range. So they are quite linked to the territory, and quite interested in their own territory. Then, of course, then you have a group called the Acani group, you are probably familiar with, which have a completely different approach. And they are probably more active in in-and-out sort of operations. Bottom line, you are right in raising it because there will be, the moment that discussions, serious discussions, on reconciliation will be starting. There will be a need for the Afghan authorities and us helping them, in having a multiple series of discussions. That applies also to the region. Then of course, if you want to dream together, we need to dream once in a while, then you have a beautiful conference having everybody around. But that would be only after a lot of that. You already asked the question, although you are--

Raghida Dergham: This is the second time you avoided the question.

Terje Rød-Larsen: Raghida, please ask from the floor.

Staffan de Mistura: There must be a reason [LAUGHTER].

Terje Rød-Larsen: Raghida can you please take the mic.

Raghida Dergham: Just so I remind you of the question, about the moderate Taliban vs. the non-moderate -- the debate here in the United States, and whether any such thing exists, from your point of view, and whether you are engaging either?

Staffan de Mistura: There are Afghans who are in touch with the Taliban locally. And what we are hearing is that they have learned, quite a few of them, have learned the lesson of the mistakes they made in the past. There are others who are considering that in fact, one of the mistakes was to be too closely associated with foreigners. Foreigners --- Al-Qaida -- and that there is a time perhaps in which you can disconnect yourself, because the price you are paying is too high. If you call them moderates, then let's call them moderates.

Terje Rød-Larsen: Thank you, Staffan.

William Verdone: Thank you, William Verdone. You mentioned the bordering countries, Iran and Pakistan. China is another. Does China see an opportunity for investment -- I am assuming they do, commodities, natural resources. I wonder if you can address some of those possibilities.

Terje Rød-Larsen: I think I'll hand the floor to you again. We have plenty of time so we can take a few more questions. Staffan.

Staffan de Mistura: Alright. China is a neighbor, and has, as you know, not a long, but important,

border in a crucial place in the northern part of Afghanistan. They have shown substantial interest in copper. Afghanistan is rich, potentially. Estimated up to 3 to 3.8 billion dollars value of natural resources. Copper is one of them, probably the second-largest reserve in that part of the world, perhaps in the world. Second, lithium, which may become very popular if we have more Prius Toyotas and electrical cars. Then marble -- which is likely to be very popular in Italy because Italian marble is actually finishing, the Cerrada quality, and this quality is extremely high -- gas, and a few other natural resources including precious metal and material. But all of that it will take a lot of time a lot of investment and a lot of peace. So the Chinese are active in addressing one in particular. But it does take a lot of security arrangement for that. So it's going a little bit slowly, but it's a serious investment. And welcome, because the more we see this type of industrial involvement by neighbors and, frankly, investing inside Afghanistan is something that can produce a lot of interest in the right direction.

Terje Rød-Larsen: Thank you. I think we'll go back to three questions and then a response. Can we start with the gentleman over there?

Jeff Laurenti: Hi, Jeff Laurenti with the Century Foundation. We've talked about China, had mentioned Pakistan, everybody knows Pakistan's big stakes and problematic relationship, and a bit about Iran. There's always that kind of black hole about the three -stans to the north. And we wonder if you could explore for us a bit, to what extent anyone in Kabul sees the other side of the northern border as relevant. There's Tajikistan, there's Uzbekistan, both of which have co-nationals, or co-ethnics in large numbers in the northern part of Afghanistan. Are they a factor at all? What is it that they seek? What is it that they beg of UNAMA, and what possible positive contribution can they make in stability and securing Afghanistan's long-term peace?

Terje Rød-Larsen: I see a hand at the very back.

Naureen Chowdhury Fink: Thank you. Naureen Chowdhury Fink, IPI. The previous question just touched on Pakistan a little bit, but it's been widely said that as long as Islamabad feels that they need to have a hand in what happens in Kabul, that really it's not going to be so Afghan-led, that, in many ways, Pakistan's fears about its security will determine success in Afghanistan. So, what are your perceptions on the role of Islamabad in Kabul. Thank you.

Terje Rød-Larsen: The gentleman at the very back?

Hammad Dogar: Thank you very much, my name is Hammad Dogar, I am from Pakistan Mission.

Staffan de Mistura: You should answer. [Laughter]

Hammad Dogar: I thank you for the information that you just gave us and I really appreciate your coming here to IPI. My question is that if we see Afghan war – it lasts a pretty long time, the Afghans are engaged in this war now, since 70's. And I believe that most of the people there, as you said young voters, a whole lot of them, they were either born during the war period or they were raised once Afghanistan was at war. So there is a lot of war economy, if I may say, in place there. And that, coupled with the drug economy and lack of jobs, and industry being non-existent, and natural resources that you just talked about, that they have the potential but needs a lot to be done. So, what are your views on how the world can put an end to that war economy thing, so that we see a change in the Afghan economic culture, socio-economic culture? Thank you.

Staffan de Mistura: Regarding northern neighbors, the -stans. They are important. UNAMA is paying a lot of attention to them, frankly, because we have established a Silk Road initiative which is, in fact, the only forum available now in Kabul for those who are not normally in the circuit of NATO, ISAF or EU, such they are. But are very interested in being engaged and involved in what can be a constructive way of working in Afghanistan, with Afghanistan.

Let's address two of their own main concerns. One is drugs. And that's a problem that is affecting the Afghans, too. 800,000. It's affecting Pakistan. Iran has

protested about it. And has the Russian Federation. And these drugs go through at least two of those neighbors. And producing, security, health. And the mafia-type of, linkages locally.

The second one is their security concern. Because we have seen – the more pressure is increased in the Helmond area, or in Kandahar, we've seen the Talibans using a technique, or a tactic, of trying to destabilize places such as Nuristan, or in the north, where you don't expect them to do so. I know that the Russian Ambassador yesterday at the Security Council expressed concern about this trend, but you can imagine their stance, how more concerned they are. And then, what you rightly raised, their own ethnical linkages to some of the populations who are in Afghanistan. Bottom line.... no, before doing bottom line -- they have also have areas of interest, but also constructive involvement -- electricity, water and roads. There are already some very interesting projects that Afghanistan is actually doing with them and we have been promoting in order to improve the type of common interest on an economic, energetic point of view. And also communication one.

The bottom line is, we need to not forget them. That's why I am very glad that you are raising that. Because at the end of the day, they are going to be part of the solution as well. We always talk about Iran and Pakistan, but we tend to forget them, and they are not, at least by us.

Now, the Pakistan involvement. I would certainly ask our colleague from the Pakistan Mission to want to elaborate on that, because it's only fair that he should. But my feeling is the following: based on the current assignment. Point number one, there is no question that any type of solution – peace solution, reconciliation solution, stable solution -- in Afghanistan needs to make sure that also Pakistan feels comfortable about it. That has been a traditional thing. There are long borders and so on. At the same time, I think President Kazai has been many times going to talk with the Pakistanis side, and vice versa, in order to make sure that the comfort should not be at the cost of the Afghans. And, therefore, some type of mutual understanding on that.

Three, the Pakistanis are suffering a lot. Apart from this awful flood that has just taken place, but they've been suffering a lot from the Talibans themselves. They have seen what terrorism has taken place. And in their own country. And they've been in there for a... looking very seriously, my feeling is, about what was, and should be and could be their relationship, which was close, with the Talibans in the past. But they have also started looking at, in a very critical way, because the Talibans have been also been a major cause of concern for them, too. And they are not same like they used to be. But I'd like you, please to elaborate on that. I know that the line that, which is clearly coming up, is that it is in the interest of Pakistan to have a stable Afghanistan. Over to you.

Hammad Dogar:

Thank you very much. I'll try to justify answers to so many concerns which have been raised – but please remember that Pakistan is itself one of the largest victims of terrorism. Being a neighbor of Afghanistan, we have paid a very heavy price. And to start with, what we are suffering from is the overflow, of Afghan refugees which came into Pakistan in '70s and '80s. Those people, most of them, are still in Pakistan. And going by any moderate estimate, if we calculate the price of those 30 million people who are in Pakistan as refugees, we have spent – they have taken from Pakistan's economy, billions of dollars over all these past 30 years. So that's one thing on account of which we have suffered a lot. And those Afghanis have traveled everywhere in Pakistan, they're our brother Muslims, and we could by no means stop them or by any means tell them that "don't go there" or "don't do this" – they are part of the Pakistani society now. Though we will desire that sometime in the future, we decide about their future. That is one account on which we suffered economically.

The second thing is the Taliban factor, which has just been elaborately highlighted. We ourselves have become a very major victim of this. And we are suffering on account of this. Seen by any standards, we are a nation which has suffered the most from terrorism. Why it started, how it started, we go back to the Russian occupation of Afghanistan. And then, how was that Taliban force

created? And what should have been done and was not done because of the war that was facing those Talibans, they are the major questions.

And I have a little experience having served in those areas, but remember, there is no industry there. There is not much of agriculture now there except the drugs. And there are houses and houses and towns and towns and people and people. They need to be fed. They need to do something. They need to spend some constructive time, part of a constructive moderate society. If the world don't give them an alternate economy, an alternate social economic thing, those children who open their eyes in wartime, they have seen nothing else but violence, war, drugs and religion being exploited.

So, I will not go into more detail. But coming back to the Pakistan's interests, of course, we are the first neighbor of Afghan. And, not only that, we have very strong cultural ties with them, across the Durand Line, across the international border. We have tribes on both sides, which have relationships. And we would not like that there is any kind of instability in Afghanistan. Because we always suffer because of the overflow of people, of violence, of ideology, or whatever happens there. We are the first affectee in that sense. So, it is in our prime interest that we have a stable government in Afghanistan. We have stability in Afghanistan, and as such. I don't know if I was able to answer your question properly or not, but these were some of the point I had. Thanks.

Terje Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much. We are quickly drawing to a close. Staffan is actually going straight to the airport from here to go back to his duty station, I hope being very much inspired by the dialogue here. I actually only have one question for you, Staffan, and that goes back to the regional dimension which you mention at the very beginning, and which several of you have touched upon. Because some would say, I mean, you focus very much on the internal dynamics within the Taliban and within other factions and political entities in the country and the international, political, military and humanitarian presence. But some would say that the conflict, in plural, in Afghanistan, is now so intertwined, so interconnected, so interdependent, of the broader conflicts way beyond the region, stretching in a belt from Afghanistan, Pakistan, through the Middle East, then maybe all the way down to the Sudan and Somalia. And whether our interests at play in a great game in the region, and whether there might be spoiler powers which can prevent, actually -- even if there was a deep interest and a genuine interest in good faith to reconcile in Afghanistan -- that could actually block such a development, I'd very much like you at the end of our great session here this afternoon, if you could comment on that broader regional setting.

Staffan de Mistura:

There is a broader regional setting. There is an interest that goes exactly along the lines of what you mentioned, Terje. Having said that, the feeling we are having -- I mean, it could be many ways of interpreting this -- that everyone in the region, broader or non-broader, has a lot to lose if Afghanistan is becoming a totally unstable country, or again, goes back into Talibans/Al-Qaida environment. And we can't see any one of the neighbors and beyond having any interest in that. So, is this going to be instead a playground for the big game? I want to believe the time for the big game is over in that sense. Also because the Afghans themselves have demonstrated that they are extremely conscious of their own sovereignty, and they are showing it even these days, frankly. And rightly so. So, if I have to start from the fact that the Afghans have learned themselves not to become part of a big game; B, that there is no vested interest in going back to having an Afghan destabilized by anyone, around and beyond, I would hope that that should be sufficient critical mass that when a format is found of the so-called reconciliation, there will be a possibility of having a wonderful conference where every neighbor would see its own interests in what may not be ideally what they wanted to see in Afghanistan, but sufficient to make them comfortable, and therefore, let Afghanistan be what it is: a proud independent country. Thank you very much.

[APPLAUSE]

Terje Rød-Larsen:

Thank you very much, Staffan. Everybody who has been working with you and following you through your career -- I know for myself, who has been working

closely with you for several years -- know that you can walk the walk. You are a doer, you deliver. But what you've demonstrated this afternoon is that you can also talk the talk. And very convincingly. So, I think on the basis of what you've said, I think, and I feel very confident, that everyone will give you free passage – even in Switzerland – though I'm a little bit worried about my deputy, who might be made *persona non grata* there and prevented from going to the Secretary-General Seminar there a couple of weeks from now. Staffan, you are great, good luck to you, and thank you so much.

Staffan de Mistura: Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]