

Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

**Statesmen's Forum:
Afghanistan Minister of Defense Wardak and
Minister of Interior Mohammadi**

**Introduction:
John Hamre,
President,
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**Speakers:
Adbul Rahim Wardak,
Minister of Defense of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan**

**Bismellah Mohammadi,
Minister of Interior of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan**

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(Minister Mohammadi's remarks provided through interpreter.)

JOHN HAMRE: Thank you, everyone. Please have a seat. Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for coming. My name is John Hamre; I'm the president here at CSIS. And we've had quite a week here, but I will tell you, I consider this to be the highlight because we're talking about probably one of the most important issues in front of the American public right now, and that is the way ahead with our involvement and our partnership with Afghanistan.

This couldn't be more timely, to have these two ministers – Minister Wardak, Minister Mohammadi – with us. We're very grateful that they are willing to share public time during this visit. Very important – they're making news while they're here. And it's very important that they're willing to take some of this time to share it with the broader policy community. And I would ask all of you to be engaged and respectful of the importance of the day and their commitment to making this a very good session.

So let me turn to Dr. Bob Lamb, who is going to be opening the session, formally introducing these two remarkable leaders. And I will then expect to have a – just as exciting a session as you're going to have. Thank you.

Go ahead, Bob.

ROBERT D. LAMB: Thank you, Dr. Hamre. Good morning. I'm Robert Lamb; I'm the director of the Program on Crisis, Conflict and Cooperation here at CSIS. Welcome to all of you. Welcome, Minister Wardak, Minister Mohammadi.

We are today at a very important stage in the U.S.-Afghan relationship. As you all are aware, the United States and Afghanistan have been talking about putting together a strategic partnership agreement over the past month, and including – just in recent days a couple of key milestones on the road to that agreement have been reached, including the authority over detainees and authority over night raids.

I would like to introduce to you two – in fact, probably two of the most important Afghan officials who will be responsible for Afghan security. They are – Minister Abdul Rahim Wardak is the minister of defense of Afghanistan. He's been the minister of defense since 2004. He's the former deputy defense minister. Is – he's a lecturer and an author, a former mujahedeen warrior many years ago.

We have as well here Minister Bismillah Mohammadi, also known as Bismillah Khan. He is the minister of interior since 2010. He's the former chief of staff to the Afghan National Army. He was a member of the Northern Alliance before the Taliban fell in 2001.

Both of these gentlemen are responsible for the Afghan National Security Forces. Minister Wardak as – obviously is – oversees the military side. And Minister Mohammadi is responsible for all of the Afghan police.

I – without further ado, Minister Wardak, would you like to offer some comments first?

MINISTER ABDUL RAHIM WARDAK: Dignitaries, friends, ladies and gentlemen, it's a privilege to address this prominent audience in this prestigious institution. I would like to begin by expressing the profound gratitude and everlasting appreciation of the Afghan people and the government for the assistance, cooperation and support which U.S., supported by NATO and its partners, have provided to my war-torn country. They are all playing a vital role in shaping the destiny of my devastated nation.

Progress has been made over the last 10 years, but our giant accomplishments have been secured at a cost measured in lives. The debt of gratitude we owe of our soldiers and citizens can never be fully repaid. We mourn those who have given their lives, and we pray for the families of the fallen and wounded. We suffered immensely in the '90s when we were left isolated. And as a consequences, the whole world was affected, and you bore the tragedy of the 9/11 attack. So we fully appreciate the value and significance of your enduring support and assistance.

From 2002 we Afghans were emphatically of the view that the only sustainable and enduring way to secure and defend Afghanistan was to enable the Afghan themselves. This approach would have been much more cost-effective, politically less complex, and would have saved the lives of our friends and allies. For many years we failed to develop sufficient Afghan National Security Forces, and the threat assessment was unrealistically low. The initial size of the NSF was far too little by any historic or troop-to-task analysis. And the scale and the challenge of rebuilding a devastated nation were underestimated. In 2006 when the enemy escalated their attacks, we did not responded effectively until 2009. Afghanistan remain an economy-of-force effort, and a great window of opportunity was wasted.

The new strategy in 2009 paved a clear way ahead to realize our common and shared objectives. This strategy was not narrowly focused on counterterrorism but rather on a comprehensive civil-military campaign which could also defeat the radical ideology and give us an enduring strategic victory. It has been – it has provided a proper vision and had all the element which we have longed for since 2002.

In regard to security situation, the enemy failed to execute their campaign plan in 2011. They have been losing support among the people, and there is a significant rift in their leadership. With the measurably improved security and with the violence having decreased considerably across all categories, I'm confident that our sacrifices will lessen. The enemy avoid direct confrontation and revert to their indiscriminate and inhuman activities of employing suicide bombers, laying mines and IEDs.

Many enemy attacks have been foiled. They have lost ground and suffered heavily. But unfortunately, due to the way the media operates, the perception of security has not improved commensurate with the realities on the ground. The narrative of progress since 2002 in different sectors, and ANSF's achievements, including effectively securing several national high-profile events in the face of repeated enemy threats and actions, continue to – continue to be totally ignored.

The ANA is a success story of the last few years. It is a potent symbol of reform and a physical manifestation of the new Afghanistan, illustrating our continuing transformation into a nation which can once again take responsibility for its own destiny. In the 2011 Asia Foundation poll, the ANA's perceived by 93 percent of the Afghan population to be honest and fair.

Although we have made significant progress, it still remains a challenge to raise a National Security Force and simultaneously conduct a war. The ANSF is increasingly more effective and disciplined. Although we still remain reliant for some enablers, the Afghan National Security Forces is striving to reduce its relying – reliance on ISAF. And I can proudly announce that we are taking an increasing lead on most of the operations, including night raids.

The operational campaign plan for 2012 was developed by Afghans. We already have over 3,000 Afghans in structure, and we are training over 22,000 soldiers, NCOs and officers every day. We have doubled the size of the army since 2009, and we are six months ahead of schedule in reaching the ceiling of the ANA. Attrition and detention are well within an acceptable level, which will allow us to focus more on quality.

The most significant hindrance to the continued development of the Afghan National Security Forces is the Afghan economy. Quite simply, it's unable to financially sustain the ANSF in the foreseeable future. However, rest assured that the Afghan government will increase its share as its economy develops. The future economic prospect are extremely promising and bright. Bearing this in mind, at the last NATO defense ministerial we asked all troop-contributing nation to reinvest some of the transition dividend to the Afghan National Security Forces sustainment. The burden cannot and should not fall wholly on the United State.

I sincerely appreciate the U.S. commitment, especially for their proposal in sustaining the ANSF beyond 2014. It's a clear demonstration of their resolve to preserve the hard-won progress and to sustain a free Afghanistan for future generations. While things are looking bright, initially I had strong reservation about any future ANSF reduction without a sustained improvement in security. Any significant cuts to the ANSF on the heels of an ISAF drawdown and the completion of transitions would have presented significant challenges. But fortunately I have been reassured.

On the assumption of a gradually degrading threat, we recognize the need to develop a planning model to serve as a conceptual basis for the government of Afghanistan and the international community to decide on the future ANSF funding and adjustment of its size and structure through the transformation (decade ?). The size of the force and other planning assumptions will be subject to revision in accordance with conditions on the ground in mutual agreement between the Afghans' government and the international community.

With the tireless effort and heroic sacrifices of U.S. and the rest of the international community and their generosity, it has been made possible the – to that transition become a reality. On that momentous day in Bamyān back in July 2011, we started our giant endeavor to allow Afghans to fulfill their historic responsibility to defend and secure their nation. We successfully completed tranche one. Tranche two is almost completed, which will place half of the Afghan population under protection of their own countrymen. And tranche three is now in

detailed planning. Rest assured, we Afghan are fully committed to the process and will spare no effort in sacrifices to ensure its success.

Clearly the challenge in the long term is the need to develop the ANA from a light infantry-centric force for COIN or counterinsurgency operation to a modern force capable of defending our nation. (We ?) must therefore strive to build our enabling capabilities currently provided by ISAF as quickly as possible. We should accomplish this task while developing further the ANA to enable the Afghans to preserve the achievement of our giant endeavor, relieve NATO completely from the brunt of fighting and prepare the ANA for an irreversible transition.

As we look to the future, to 2014 and beyond, we have operational and strategic imperative which require considerations. Operationally we need to now look to the coming years and the systems we need to embed to counter the drawdown of ISAF forces, the remaining lack of enablers and the capability gap that will be presented post-2014.

Strategically it is in our collective interest to not view and define Afghanistan through a NATO prism of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, but rather in the much wider global and regional security context. It is our earnest expectation that our allies revise their strategic evaluation, appreciating Afghanistan's geographic proximity and potential for its future role within the region and beyond, and to take into account Afghanistan position as a linking bridge for all stakeholders, with its considerable potential to impact global markets from our projected minerals and natural resources. Moreover, you should count on as a reliable and – (inaudible) – for international peacekeeping operation and other activities of mutual interest in the framework of forging collective regional and global security arrangements to curb the negative impact of al-Qaida and other radical, disruptive and destructive powers.

Afghanistan is located in the most volatile region of the world and lies within an extremely dangerous neighborhood. There are significant threats in the region, including conventional warfare between states, nuclear proliferation, territorial dispute, economic underdevelopment, radical Islam, transnational terrorism and organized crime, including narcotics and weapon trafficking.

Afghanistan has on many occasions been allotted in unhappy role on the international stage as the proxy battleground for competing interests. A weak, fragmented and failed Afghanistan quickly invites external interference, and our strategic position continue to attract unwelcome and disruptive attention. Many nation are once again pursuing their own narrow interests at the expense of the Afghan people. There is no better alternative than self-reliance, but the highly sensitive Afghan condition of a tumultuous neighborhood and the nature of the threats makes partnership, include security cooperation with our friends and allies, an inevitable requirement.

Even when we are all capable of taking over physical security, it will still be vital for our national survival and success in this volatile region to maintain enduring strategic partnerships. This is why we are signing and seeking long-term partnerships and agreements. These partnerships help us look beyond 2014, to secure Afghanistan into years ahead and to provide

stability for both Afghanistan and the region and also to prevent the recurrence of the catastrophic disaster of the '90s, in order to realize a stable and secure Afghanistan beneath national unity and inclusiveness of its entire people.

This can only be possible with the continued implementation of reconciliation and reintegration program. We are seeking a genuine peace that makes life worth living, a peace that enables man and nations to grow and hope to build a better life for their childrens. Over recent months, there has been a visible increase in the pace of people reintegration; 4,014 insurgents have reintegrated since the program inception and 1,658 are under negotiation. As far as reconciliation is concerned, we will continue our quest for peace, despite those hindrance from external players.

As for the enemies of liberty, those who are trying to impose revolutionary changes worldwide and seek to transform the Islamic world and reorder its relationship with other cultures and regions, they will not succeed. But peace is the highest aspiration of us all. We will negotiate for it, sacrifice for it, but we will never surrender for it – now or ever.

We are definitely at a critical juncture and defining moment in our joint campaign. Although the serious efforts only began in 2009, I'm well aware the war has been prolonged beyond expectation. I know that economic austerity on a global scale has constrained the international community ability to support this enduring nation. I recognize that election and local political agendas may not favor this continued effort. Above all, I'm acutely aware that the growing number of casualties becoming unbearable.

We must not let these challenges diminish our resolve. At stake are not only the hopes, the aspiration and the future of over 30 million Afghans, but the safety and harmony of the mankind. So for the sake of all – sake of our joint and shared objectives, and to ensure that sacrifices of thousands of brave souls were not in vain, we must adhere to our enduring commitment that we will never allow Afghanistan to become a safe haven or an ungoverned area again where terrorists can hide, train and threaten the rest of the world.

To paraphrase General Allen from the most recent defense ministerial, the international community's continued support for the Afghan National Security Forces in the post-2014 period will be perhaps the single most important (determent ?) in finally achieving our shared objectives for the future of Afghanistan. We are all confident that campaign in Afghanistan is imminently winnable, but only if Afghans are enabled to defend their homeland as they have done it throughout the history.

So our march to victory is inevitable, and we come through the worst. It is now time to begin the effort to secure the future. One day we will have a celebration of victory and witness the triumph of good over evils, right over wrongs and justice over tyranny. We will be all proud that we were all part of this noble endeavor. Thank you, and God bless you. (Applause.)

MR. LAMB: Thank you so much, Minister Wardak. I know that a lot of American defense officials have appreciated your leadership of the Ministry of Defense. And I know we all look forward to continuing this constructive partnership between our two countries.

Next, I would like to ask Minister Mohammadi, head of the – and minister of interior to offer some remarks. He'll be offering his remarks through an interpreter.

MINISTER BISMELLAH MOHAMMADI: In the name of God, the most gracious, the most merciful, I welcome the presence of all those gathered here today. Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon to all of you. And I welcome all of you and appreciate your presence here this afternoon. I would also like to extend my deep appreciation to the Center for Strategic and International Studies for having given us such an opportunity to be in such a distinguished gathering this afternoon.

(Off-side conversation in Arabic.)

First of all, I would like to extend my deepest gratitude and appreciation to the government of the United States and the people of the United States for their undying support and the long-term support they have extended and continue to extend to the people and nation of Afghanistan. The security situation during the past two years has seen considerable progress. In result of the concentrated efforts of the international community led by the United States of America, we have made a great deal of progress and can be proud of many accomplishments and successes.

In result of partnering in operations, we have inflicted heavy damage on the Taliban in the southern and eastern provinces of Afghanistan. And many of their areas and strongholds in Helmand, Kunduz, Kandahar, Baghlan and other provinces have been lost. Despite all of their destructive efforts, they have not been able to recapture the ground that we took away from them and the refuge that we denied them.

Dear friends, we do have information that shows a great weakening of the Taliban – of the Taliban's strength during the past two years. And this group, in order to continue war and violence, is facing a grave threat to its war-waging powers. I firmly believe that during the next year, alongside the concentration and the focus given to the transition process, we must redouble our efforts on military pressure and focus our efforts on the reintegration process and also work very hard on the road to a long-lasting peace. A great deal of pressure must also be brought to bear on the sources and resources given to the Taliban. And we must redouble our efforts and focus on fighting against institutionalized crime as well as the rule of law and good governance. And given all of these efforts, if we're successful, the Taliban will see a great weakening of their popular support that has been steadily weakened during the past few years.

Dear friends, the Afghan National Security Forces are increasing their professionalism and effectiveness day by day. Our security forces, in particular the Afghan National Police, with collaboration with the international forces, has been concentrating on the reduction of threats and securing security throughout Afghanistan. And on this path, they are making daily sacrifices and are hard at work. These sacrifices will lead to an enduring democracy and a bright future for Afghanistan in south – in South Asia and will lead to a decrease in extremism throughout the region, which in and of itself has a direct effect on the national security of the West, in particular the United States.

Dear friends, the greatest part of our concentration and efforts are for – have been and are focused upon an increase in the level of professionalism of the Afghan National Police, a great deal of focus on training, a great deal of attention given to good leadership skills and development of those skills, as well as a fight against corruption within the ranks of the police force. In result of these mutual and – of these mutual efforts and the attention and focus of the international community, in particular that of the United States, today we are proud to have a police force that according to the latest polls taken, 85 percent of the people are satisfied with the service rendered by that police force, 86 percent of those polled respect that national police force and 88 percent of those polled give a great deal of credibility to the Afghan National Police, even though there are many obstacles still to overcome and many challenges on the road ahead for the Afghan National Police.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are hard at work and will spare no efforts to change the mission – the essential mission of the Afghan National Police from a war-fighting force to a law enforcement force, a force that will concentrate on the – on enforcing the rule of law throughout the country and the protection of every Afghan. And the effectiveness of our forces will therefore – thereby increase. And also, we are hard at work and focused on decreasing its gaps and capabilities.

As I mentioned earlier, our most fundamental focus is being given to increasing leadership skills, fighting corruption, institutionalized corruption in the ranks of the police, and training.

We have also – we will also continue our efforts to increase the presence of women within the ranks of the police force. And on this path, we have many successes and accomplishments. And most of our attention has been focused on attracting more and more women into the Afghan National Police force – respected participants.

With the end of the transition process, the importance of the police force in law enforcement efforts, the fighting against criminal activities and an increase in law enforcement and the rule of law will thereby increase as well. A continuing support for an Afghan National Police will be one of the key needs for future success. We are determined that with support – that with support of a – of a properly equipped Afghan National Police and a properly trained Afghan National Police with increased fast operational capabilities and increased intelligence capabilities and increased communication capabilities as well as a closure in the gap of their equipment needs, they will steadfastly withstand any enemy attack and be a key tool in the continuing prosperity and peace in Afghanistan.

As you're all well-aware, two phases of the transition process have thus far gone successfully. In areas where the two phases of the transition process have been completed, people are living in stability and peace. In our opinion – in our opinion, the transition process must be an irreversible process and one aimed at increasing and giving final self-determination and independence to Afghanistan. We are quite hopeful that during the next few weeks the final phase and – the third and final phase of the transition will start to take place. But we must bring a lot of care to bear on the path to the finalization of this effort.

Dear friends, respected friends, as you're all well-aware, recently the government of Afghanistan concluded and finally signed various strategic partnerships with a few countries as well as the final signing of MOUs vis-à-vis prisons and vis-à-vis night operations – has brought us much closer to the United States on the path to the final agreement. And it gives us the security that the strategic partnership agreement between the United States and Afghanistan, which the people of Afghanistan, through their representatives in the Parliament, have already announced their full support for, will be signed prior to the upcoming Chicago conference. We see the signing of these agreements as a full declaration of support by many countries from the international community of – over the long-term security and prosperity of Afghanistan.

Dear friends, as you – as you know, the government of Afghanistan, with the support of the international community, has spared no efforts during the last few years alongside – under the direction and alongside the international community has spared no efforts to bring about a reintegration and reconciliation process. Until today we have enjoyed many successes, and we have had many achievements during which thousands of those who were formerly opposed to the central government and an Afghan independence are now part of an Afghan society.

The May conference to be held in Chicago, in which the entire international community will openly announce its commitment, its long-term commitment for the security of Afghanistan, is of utmost importance because it will be a determining forum that will specify the long-term commitments of the community – of the international community to Afghanistan's security. We are quite hopeful that any decision to be taken vis-à-vis the gradual reduction – the eventual gradual reduction of the Afghanistan national security forces will take into consideration the security situation at that time on the ground in Afghanistan as well as undergo a prior close consultation with Afghan leadership so as not to sacrifice all of the successes and accomplishments which have been gained in blood and treasure of thousands of people during the last decade.

Dear participants, last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude for all of the selfless sacrifice of the international community, in particular the United States of America and their long-term commitment in building a prosperous and stable Afghan National Police force. I thank you for all of your sacrifices.

Ladies and gentlemen, our assessment and our take vis-à-vis what – the feedback that we have received from our people throughout Afghanistan, we can thereby assure you that we are not that far away from final victory. Therefore, we ask the people and the leadership of our greatest friend, the United States of America, and other countries – member – who are members of the international community – we ask them to practice more patience and be more patient with this process, and do not forget all of the sacrifices we've made together, so that we avoid a return to the bitter experiences that Afghanistan shared with the world over 10 years ago. And all of these accomplishments and successes that have been obtained with the sacrifices and the blood of many of our young people should never be forgotten.

I thank all of you for your attention. (Applause.)

MR. LAMB: Thank you so much, Minister Mohammadi, and thank you for your leadership of the minister – the Ministry of Interior. We recognize that your efforts within the ministry to promote professionalism within the police forces and in particular to promote merit-based hiring and promotion as well as ethnic unity (ph) within the police forces are much-appreciated efforts, and I think it speaks well of your leadership.

Both of you are surely aware that many Americans, as evidenced through some recent polls, have decided that the Afghan war perhaps was not worth the effort. You've heard that there is a lot of pressure within the United States for the United States to withdraw as many troops as possible as quickly as possible.

I would think that while that does suggest that Americans are tired of the war in Afghanistan, my sense is not that we want – it's not that Americans think that we don't care about Afghanistan anymore or that as we leave, that it would be fine if Afghanistan collapses. I think most Americans want Afghanistan to remain a stable and prosperous country where the Afghan people can benefit from the progress that has been made over the past 10 years, and also where the government and the security forces and the Afghan people together can ensure that the difficulties that take place in your region of the world, including the presence of some terrorist actors who had been of concern to the United States, will not continue to be a concern.

Both of you are at the center of the efforts within Afghanistan to ensure that kind of success. And I wanted to ask both of you for a little bit more – a little bit more details about your plans in this regard.

The Afghan security forces are clearly key to maintaining stability within Afghanistan. Could both of you speak a little bit more of the efforts that you've made to improve the professionalism and the capabilities of the Afghan security forces, both the police and the army, so that the American people can be confident that as U.S. forces withdraw that there are Afghans there who are ready, willing and able to maintain stability in your country?

MIN. WARDAK: So I will respond to the first – the first part of your question about that decreasing support for the war in Afghanistan.

Actually, I think nobody knows more than the Afghans what it means, I mean, to lose a dear one. And from the beginning, I think the American policy throughout the second part of the – I mean, (toward ?) – the 20th century, it has been always that – to defend the United States as far away from its mainland as possible. And they were the main reasons for your participation in World War I, World War II, Vietnam and Korea and all that.

So right now also I think the 9/11 have caused you, I mean, to come and help us for your security and also to us, the Afghan people.

But I would like to ask the – ask the American people about something else. Actually, we Afghans, not in the past and not now we are fighting only for ourselves or for our own country. We have fought in these last three decades for the collective freedom of humanity or what you call it today, I mean, the global village.

In the first part, when we were fighting against the Soviets when we were invaded, with our blood and your support and your money and your logistical support, we managed – we managed to trigger the downfall of that empire which was threatening the United States in a great way. We contributed to shatter the invincibility of the Red Army. We caused the liberation of two dozen countries. We have helped toward the end of Cold War, and we have helped toward the termination of arms race.

At the end of that, in the – in the '90s, the whole world prospered. A lot of – including United States, a lot of countries have focused – all the money which went – they spending on the defense, they focused it for the welfare of their country.

But what the Afghans have achieved? They have – they have end up with 2 millions dead, millions of widows, orphans and handicaps and close to 200 billion (dollars ?) worth of destruction based on the estimate of World Bank and IMF while Afghanistan was already the poorest country in the world.

So I think we always have raised this slogan, especially in the developed world: We talk about liberty, equality, justice for all. So are these only hollow slogans?

And now also, this threat of international terrorism is not only directed to us. It has already caused damages here in the United States, in Europe and many, many other countries. And it is a type of threat that no country alone can overcome by itself. It need a concerted and coordinated effort of a community of nation with a strategic global response.

So I ask the people and the government of the United States that you have come a long way with us on a very difficult journey; the final destination is now within the – within the reach. So please help us to reach the final destination.

On the second part of your questions, I think we are trying wholeheartedly to build Afghan security forces which are nationally oriented. They're professionally skillful, they are morally disciplined, they're ethnically balanced, and they are operationally cohesive, and they are democratically accountable. That is our aim and our goal, to reach it. And we express of our profound appreciation for all the help which we have got from NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan and also the CSTC-A. They are helping us to improve professionalism and the capability of the Afghan security forces.

So if I do go into the detail, I – in my opening remarks, I think I have talked about some of our achievements at the moment. And we do hope that in the near future, we will be able to relieve you from burden of you in training us, as we mentioned. And also, I think we will focus more to improve core leaderships, the capacity and all the capabilities. But some of the capabilities and capacities and enablers will depend on the help of the international community.

I could go on, but I think I have talked enough. (Applause.)

MR. LAMB: Of course, one of the difficulties is that what Americans see of Afghanistan generally has to do with war and politics. And I think that in any society, including the United States, if all you knew about the society was the politics and the violence, you'd be getting a very – a very partial picture of the situation. Americans don't see news from Afghanistan about some of the hard efforts, the great number of peaceful Afghans. What they hear about are a lot of the difficulties with the security forces, the – when Americans are killed, questions about sustainability and those sorts. They don't see a lot of the details of the training that – and the professionalism that's taking place inside.

MIN. WARDAK: The problem is – the problem is the strategic communication that we failed and you failed also to convey to the American people. And so – and also the way the media operates, that positive news, to not have any bias, so they always focus on negatives. And that is what they are hearing. So I think if we do improve our strategic communication, I think we can do better on this field.

MR. LAMB: Minister Mohammadi?

MIN. MOHAMMADI: I do wholeheartedly agree with everything that his excellency, the minister of defense, has said. My opinion is that in Afghanistan, we do need the collaboration of the people with the government, with the international community. And in result of this, we've had many successes during the past decade to look back upon.

During the dark ages of the Taliban, all schools were closed, girls' schools or boys' schools. Education was not within reach. But the greatest majority of our young ladies and young men today can receive primary education. We have witnessed many advancements in the field of agriculture, in the field – in various fields.

But unfortunately, more often than not we hear the concentration and focus upon bad news coming out of Afghanistan. Today – up to today a great deal of reconstruction has taken place in Afghanistan, even though it's not quite enough. We have many more needs and many gaps to close.

And 150,000-strong force is in and of itself a big accomplishment in Afghanistan today. And alongside his excellency, the minister of defense, under whom I served as chief of general staff, we set a solid foundation for the Afghan National Army, which we're quite proud of. They are sacrificing every day. They are suffering losses every day. And the same can be said vis-à-vis the Afghan National Police.

And during the past years we had the greatest number of independent operations, combat operations, just as we had the greatest number of operations alongside NATO forces. And we're extremely proud of the fact that in the greatest part of Afghanistan – in the greatest parts of Afghanistan, the Afghan National Police and the Afghan National Army are enforcing the rule of law.

We are at a very delicate crossroad point in the history of Afghanistan. All of the nation – the whole nation of Afghanistan wants to decrease the weight that we have placed on the

shoulders of the international community. But we must have the capabilities to assume that heavy responsibility, to provide security for the entire nation of Afghanistan. We are extremely grateful and appreciative of the international community's efforts, led by the United States of America, in the fields of increasing professional capabilities. And we are continuing to increase those capabilities.

As I touched upon earlier, we have placed a great deal of focus and concentration on increasing leadership capabilities, overall training, from basic to highly specialized. Until 2014 we do have plans – we do have plans set up for the continuous improvement of the capabilities of the Afghan National Police force. And all of our efforts are aimed at gaining the trust, the hearts and minds of every Afghan.

And fortunately, with the passing of every day, the credibility and the trust put into the Afghan national security forces by Afghan citizens is increasing. But unfortunately, naturally, we do face still some challenges on this path. But we will spare no efforts at overcoming those challenges and problems. But we need each other's help in order to overcome these issues.

MR. LAMB: Thank you very much, sir.

There are a lot of questions that all of you have. I would make a couple of requests. As I call on you, please wait for the microphone. We are being broadcast live, so we do need the microphone so that we can hear your question. Please identify yourself, and please state your question in the form of a question and not in the form of a speech. And if you could limit your question to a single question, that would be greatly appreciated, so that we can get as many – as many voices as possible in.

So let's begin on the right, over here, please.

Q: Thank you very much. I'm Josh Rogin with Foreign Policy magazine. For many months the Obama administration has been negotiating with the Taliban on a deal that would include the release of five senior Taliban commanders from the U.S. prison at Guantanamo Bay. For the Obama administration, this is seen as a confidence-building measure toward a peace deal with the Taliban. For the Taliban, it's seen as a straight prisoner swap for a Western prisoner they have in their custody. As the leaders of Afghans' Defense and Interior ministries, how do you view the potential release of five senior Taliban commanders from Guantanamo Bay? Do you see this as a good idea? Does this pose added risks or complications for your efforts to win the war? And do you believe that this could be a confidence-building measure that could lead to a greater peace deal with the Taliban? Thank you.

MR. LAMB: Thanks, Josh.

MIN. WARDAK: If I just give you a short answer, definitely any war eventually ends up with peace. So any efforts to facilitate that process will be welcomed. But before any deal, I think we have to make sure that the other side is sincere in their efforts.

MIN. MOHAMMADI: As his excellency, the minister of defense, said, we welcome any action that will take us even an inch closer to the realization of peace. At the end of the day, we must have – we must have a target point to reach and an address to which we refer to. The folks in Qatar wanted to set up an office. We agreed with that. We do hope that that will be – will be a point of reference for the continuing process of peace talks and negotiations.

The people of Afghanistan are tired of war. Any people at war for over three decades would be – would grow tired of it very quickly. So again, to summarize, we welcome any steps taken on the path to a sustainable peace and long-term stability.

Q: Thank you. Andrea Prasow, Human Rights Watch. To date Afghanistan has not seen the need to adopt an administrative detention regime to deal with the insurgency. Yet the MOU dated March 9th signed with the U.S. seems to contemplate such a regime. Is Afghanistan considering adopting a regime of detaining people without trial, pursuant to an administrative detention scheme or otherwise?

MIN. WARDAK: Afghanistan is a signatory to that 1949 and 1977 – second (addition ?) to the Protocol II and also, as of two years ago, I think, the – this process has become a part of the Afghan law. It has gone through to – through the both houses of the Parliament. It has been signed by the president. And it has been printed in the official gazette. So now it is a part of our law. And we are going to implement it.

We have already developed a procedure. At the moment it's a provincial – I mean, a temporary procedure, how to implement it. Together I think we developed those procedures with the international community. And we will – the – and this was the reason that we were able to sign that MOU, that we have accepted that protocol. And so it will be implemented, and whatever it's – imply, it will be implemented and practiced in the future as we go with this issue of the detainees.

Q: Jim Kunder with the German Marshall Fund of the United States. Much of the external investment, the U.S. investment, has been in your two ministries. Are the rest of the ministries of the Afghan government – energy, water, health care, transportation – ready for transition? And if not, what needs to be done?

MR. LAMB: Thank you, sir.

MIN. WARDAK: Yeah, there is no doubt that we have received the bulk of the assistance, and a great deal. But all other ministry also have received aid in the past 10 years. And – but the reason for that was that security is a prerequisite for good governance, rule of law, building infrastructure and economic development. So there is a, I think, there is a – quite a good rationale for what have happened. And initially when we have developed the plan for transition, I think, we have already made three condition(s) for an area to be – to be transitioned. One was that there should be decreasing violence, as far as the security. Second was that there should be a good number of Afghan national security forces. And the third one was that there should be good governance, and there will be these activities of building infrastructure and

economic development. But there is no doubt that we are a little bit more ahead of those other sectors.

MR. LAMB: Minister Mohammadi.

MIN. MOHAMMADI: There is no doubt that your information is quite precise. We have been the biggest consumers of that investment and as – I think any defense ministry or interior ministry under similar conditions would have the same level of consumption. But you do understand that an Afghan National Army and an Afghan National Police, which was completely destroyed and wiped out prior to the efforts started during the last decade, is a big task.

I had the honor to fight against the Soviet invasion and resist against the Taliban invasion. I am still proud to be a soldier for my country. So I have seen all of this for many, many years, and my assessment is that, during the past 10 years – during the past 10 years, perhaps I was – I was afraid that we would not reach a number of security forces to the tune of 150,000, 151,000. But it is a tremendously big deal because we had to stand up, from the grounds up, an Afghan National Army and an Afghan National Police. This effort, this monumental task required an equally monumental investment, but we are quite optimistic that this will decrease as time goes on because now we're in a phase of sustaining those capabilities and those numbers in our security forces. We still have enablers that we need, but we are at a point of sustainment.

And as the – his excellency the minister of defense mentioned, we – in the fields of agriculture, in the field of health services, field of energy, potable water, many great steps have been taken, strides have been made in the fields of education and, quite frankly, those are not enough. So we still have a long path to travel in order to obtain those goals.

MR. LAMB: Thanks. Let's talk a little bit actually about the question of sustainability. Obviously security forces are enormously expensive, and the capacity that the Afghan government has to raise revenue within Afghanistan is limited. Some of that gap clearly is going to be filled by the international community. How confident are you that the resources will be available to sustain both the police and the army?

MIN. WARDAK: Actually, at the moment, I think we are through this negotiation for the last month (plus ?) on this question of sustainability. From the beginning, I think, it was quite obvious that the Afghan economy at the present is not able, I mean, to sustain the force. And also – but in the meantime, we were telling the international community from 2002 that the only sustainable way to secure Afghanistan is to enable the Afghans themselves because, as far as sustainability is concerned, it is almost 70 times cheaper than the deployment of large formation of the international forces. And as I mentioned before, unfortunately, I think, from 2002 to – up to almost 2009, I think there was not much investment as far as the Afghan security forces was – were concerned. So we have always argued with the international community that it will be much cheaper for you, it will be politically less complex, as I stated before, and it will save lives for our friends and allies.

And the reason was that in our history – this is the first time in our history that our friends and allies are shedding their blood on – in our side to defend and secure us, and that goes against our honor because, throughout the history, the only thing which we were the most proud of was that we have defended that country against overwhelming odds in this – different periods of the history.

So right now, I think, still I believe that, with the transition, the dividend at the moment – the international community was spending about \$150 billion a year roughly to do that. We just wanted to (please ?) invest 4 (percent), 5 percent of that money to sustain the Afghan security forces. And as I mentioned before, the future prospect(s) for the Afghans – I mean, if we put it through and we get it right, I think we can be one of the richest countries in that part of the world because of all what have been discovered. There is a great potential in different sector – primarily, I mean, on-the-ground resources. Then if we can harness our water for both for agriculture and hydroelectric, and then I think we'd also need improvement how to collect revenue and taxes.

MR. LAMB: Minister?

OK. Here in the front please.

Q: Thank you. Said Jawad with Foundation for Afghanistan. The Afghans are very proud of their security forces. And both the minister of interior and minister of defense, you're not only the long-standing fighters for Afghanistan, but also the founding fathers of the new Afghan security forces. So the great degree of gratitude by all Afghans for what you have done for Afghanistan.

I'll be very specific on my questions. Both of you have mentioned the issue of mentors, enablers and trainers. Minister Wardak, what are your needs as far as enablers and mentors on the long run, considering all the discussion that's going on about the reduction of the troops and others? And Minister Mohammadi, what is the role of the trainers that they're playing in enabling you and your ministry? And how crucial it is that their mission continue, especially in the light of the – some of the recent challenges that you are facing in Afghanistan and also some discussions here in Washington? Thank you.

MR. LAMB: Good questions, thanks.

MIN. WARDAK: Thank you, Ambassador Jawad, for your compliment. And as we go to 2013, the role of NATO is going to change – including the U.S. forces, it's going to change from actually fighting. It will be – they will be just training, advising and assisting until we get the enablers, I think they will have a role in enabling too. But the question of the enabler is one of the most crucial questions which – I have raised it all these – all these years, that the Afghans should be able to conduct independent operation with lesser reliance on the international forces and that will be the only way that we can relieve the international forces from the brunt of fighting.

So, at the moment, in the structure which has been developed, there are some enablers and some enablers are still needed, I mean, to make us capable of conducting independent operation(s). And most of the – the most serious ones are (AND ?) air assets which are needed by transportation, for reconnaissance, for the support of the ground troop(s) and also in the absence of the ISAF forces to secure the Afghan airspace. That is the biggest one.

Then I think we also need a means – definite improvement as far as the fire support is concerned and also (protected ?) mobility with integrated firepower. And since the enemy is also relying heavily on IEDs and mines – so more counter-IED capability and more improvement in it – and some enablers are in the process of coming, but more focus on that area will also be required.

MR. LAMB: Thank you.

Minister Mohammadi.

MIN. MOHAMMADI: I do thank you, sir. You touched upon a valid point, and I do thank you for your compliments, but also for all of the efforts that have been brought to bear by the international community. Undoubtedly they've gone to a great deal of trouble during the last 10-plus years. The conversations that we've held during the past two days with the secretary of defense of the United States and the Chief of Joint Staff has only reiterated the information (they ?) previously which is the need for continuity in the number of trainers, an increase in the number of enablers and advisers and mentors. And as you know, the process of transition does not mean a complete exit from the picture; it means only a supportive role. Of course, the minister of defense touched upon what falls under the jurisdiction and the umbrella of the MOD. Within the ministry of interior, we have had many of our personnel come to the United States and receive training for counternarcotics efforts, we also have had some intelligence training exchanges. And as far as budgeting, the aid that will be brought to bear after 2014, that will be part of the Afghan budget. Again, I do wish to reiterate my gratitude and appreciation for all of the help of the international community.

MR. LAMB: Thank you for your question, Ambassador.

This gentleman here.

Q: "Salaam aleikum." My name is Omar Samad. I'm USIP, former Afghan diplomat. My question has to do with a news item that came out of Kabul today where President Karzai indicated that he is thinking and he's consulting about probably holding elections prior to 2014, the set date for the next Afghan presidential elections. From a security point of view, can both of you tell us whether the army and the police will be ready to handle elections ahead of scheduled time on one hand? And secondly, what is your overall view of what you consider as being a peaceful and successful political transition in Afghanistan in the couple of years ahead?

MR. LAMB (?): (Inaudible.)

MIN. WARDAK: We heard the news also as you heard it today in the morning. (Laughter.) And then we made some telephone calls – (laughter) – and the result was that even before the news came, in the past, I think we did discuss that there is so much to be done in that 2014, which will be the (completion ?) of transition, and then this political transition, which is the election. So there was a different – it was just an opinion and also something for discussion that, will it be more feasible to bring it forward, from security point of view, since the transition is not going to be completed if it's come a year ahead? So we will have the – some support from the ISAF countries. So it will be much more easier, as far as the security is concerned – our security of the election is concerned.

But as far as how the army and the police is going to secure the election, it will depend on the level of violence and threat in that span of time. We do hope that we will be able that – this year and the part of the next year, to be able to further degrade the capabilities of our opponent, which then, I think, it will make it much more easier to secure the election.

We do hope that based on our constitution and based on the – this principle of democracy, which has been wholeheartedly accepted by the Afghan nation, that there will be a very peaceful transition of political power when the time comes for the election.

But the whole thing will be dependent on the level of violence. If it is degraded and it's less and manageable, then I think everything will go positively and with our expectations.

MR. LAMB: Minister Mohammadi, if elections are held in 2013 instead of 2014, will the police be ready?

MIN. MOHAMMADI: I thank you, sir, for your question. And as His Excellency the minister of defense touched upon, we heard this very much in the same fashion as you did. But when we inquired with our ambassador, Ambassador Hakimi, he clarified that it wasn't an end-all and be-all statement – be-all, end-all statement that the president issued from Kabul. It was only a point of discussion that was brought up in order to gather opinions and get feedback.

In any way, it is our responsibility, the responsibility of the Afghan National Police, to provide security at all times, not just during elections, whether that – those elections take place in 2013 or 2014.

We are proud that during the past great events in Afghanistan, whether they were parliamentary elections, presidential elections, we brought a lot of the security – we contributed a great deal to the security of those elections and to the successful voting process in Afghanistan.

Up to today, thank God, all of these historic occasions have taken place very successfully, even though in the past, let's keep in mind, we were much weaker as – from a security standpoint, but we have gained much more experience in the meantime. We have become much better equipped.

But to the point that I can say, based on what I know, what I've come to understand and know and distinguish of our security forces, I am very – (starts to say "pessimistic") – optimistic

– excuse me – that security will go on and provide – we will provide proper security for any elections. During the previous elections, you don't see – you don't see us having had to go to the NATO forces for any backup because there was a lack of self-sufficiency in providing internal security.

We are in the process, as you know, of going towards the third phase of the transition process. We will take the place of the NATO forces, of the ISAF forces, but we must move on that path quite carefully, because, again, it must be an irreversible process. We plan very carefully, so that as the gradual withdrawal starts, we will not take too long to fill in those vacuums professionally – so altogether, hopefully, so as to avoid the creation of any security vacuums.

MIN. WARDAK: Ambassador Samad, I would like also to add that the actual fielding of the 352,000 army and police force will be completed sometime in mid-2013, according to the plan.

MR. LAMB: A question here in the front.

Q: Thank you. My name is Sostana Barkirs (sp). I'm with the Embassy of Poland. Thank you, Excellencies, for being here with us and for your remarks.

I would like to ask you about the strategic partnership with the U.S. With the two memorandum of understandings, one signed in March and one the past weekend, you stated that it's very likely, it's very possible that the strategic partnership with the U.S. is going to be signed before the NATO summit. I would like to ask you if there are any other issues, any other things that you have to carefully work on and discuss before the partnership can be actually signed, and also if you are forcing a similar partnership with NATO for the post-NATO – post-2014 NATO presence in Afghanistan. Thank you.

MR. LAMB: What are the final hurdles –

MIN. MOHAMMADI: When you said NATO conference, were you –

Q: And did I say – I was – I was meaning NATO summit in May.

MIN. MOHAMMADI: (Off mic.)

Q: Yup.

MIN. MOHAMMADI: (Off mic.)

Q: Yeah, I was – yeah, I had in mind the NATO summit in May, if – yeah, that the strategic partnership will be signed by that time. Thank you.

MIN. WARDAK: Actually, the two main issues with – concerning the strategic partnership, which was the detention and also the special operation, that – those have been solved. So we cannot foresee some major impediment to conclude signing it.

And the second thing is, I think, yes, there is talk and negotiation that we will have a strategic partnership with NATO. We already have some arrangement with NATO, which we have signed several years ago. But at the moment, I think we are negotiating, and also they are – they are going through the detail of that NATO partnership with Afghanistan, which – I think part of it will be – will be discussed in this next week, coming week defense ministerial. It's not the jumbo ministerial, what they call it, and then, I think, it has been the intention of us Afghans and also the NATO to have an enduring relations with NATO for the future.

MIN. MOHAMMADI: These – the points that you touched upon in your question, the – specifically the two MOUs recently signed vis-à-vis the prisons and as well as night special operations – as you know, those issues are no longer issues. They're nonexistent.

But from now on until Chicago, if we do reach a point where there is some finalization and a signature on these documents, certainly you will be among the first to know. But –

MR. LAMB: I have time for two more questions, please. Right here in the front.

Q: Hi. My name is Javada (sp). I'm from the German Marshall Fund of the United States. I have a quick question for Minister Wardak. Mr. Wardak, you spoke a little bit about – in your remarks on the conceptual planning model, and you just recently announced that the Afghan security forces number were going to be reduced from its peak size of 350,000 to 260,000 forces, which essentially means you're going to lay off about 80,000 soldiers. Believe it or not, that's a big number. And given that the U.S. and the Afghan governments have invested in them over the years – in training and equipping them, can you talk a little bit about what's going to happen to them and what are they going to do? Thanks.

MR. LAMB: Thank you.

MIN. WARDAK: Actually, I think the downsizing will take place gradually. It will not be very immediate. And then I think we will also take into consideration that those people are taken care of. Some of them, I think, will get reduced through the normal process of attrition and that the contracts that – their three-years contracts will be over, so the majority of the numbers which you are talking about, they will not be – the major – the – all of them will not be a burden on us to take care of. But still we are thinking on the – that we will come up with ways and means that – to transfer them too as a reserve force and also give a lot of them vocational training, so that they can have a job to make a living.

MR. LAMB: Final question, right in the back.

Q: Larry Shaughnessy from CNN. A question for the minister of interior: Sir, about two months ago, two United States officers were shot in the back of the head, murdered, inside a

ministry building in Afghanistan. I was wondering if you could update us on the search for the person responsible and if you believe anyone will ever be brought to justice for these crimes.

MIN. MOHAMMADI: The incident, the bitter incident that led up to the brutal murder of two U.S. officers inside the Ministry of Interior's building, was the source of great sadness, and I did give my condolences and sentiments to the government of the United States and the family members of those martyrs. Those who had come there with a great deal of self-sacrifice in order to help the development of the Afghan National Police force did not deserve this at all. And again, I would like to reiterate my condolences and sadness and my prayers to the families of those who were martyred. Something that should not have taken place took place.

But you do understand that it was an accident just – and also you do recall the incident prior to that, of the Quran burning inside Bagram Air Base. And during the three to four days after the Quran burning, that's the time when that incident, the brutal murders, took place inside the Ministry of Interior.

But let's not forget that as a result of the Quran burning, during the demonstrations that ensued, tens of innocent Afghans were killed – to be precise, about 40 people. Perhaps over 250 people were injured as a result of everything that ensued with the Quran burning. And again, the Afghan national security forces were able to gain control, the ANA and – the Afghan National Army and the Afghan National Police, shoulder to shoulder.

And this incident was related that those brutal murders inside the Ministry of Interior were in direct result – unfortunate result – of the Quran burning.

We have – we started a serious investigation and inquiry into these murders, and the three to four people who were shown to be accomplices into these brutal murders were brought to – were apprehended, but the main culprit is still being ensued (sic). We have not arrested him yet.

These events preoccupy all of us. We spoke to NATO, and it was important that we learn lessons from every single one of these bitter events, and along with General Allen, the supreme commander in Afghanistan, we all agreed that we must draw lessons for future use.

And I'm certain that these incidents or any other types of events or misunderstandings will not succeed in driving a wedge between the friendship and the partnership that Afghanistan has with the international community as well as the United States. But rest assured that the investigation into this, those brutal murders, as well as the pursuit of the main culprit, continues until he's brought to justice.

MR. LAMB: Here. Minister Wardak, have you got any final thoughts?

MIN. WARDAK: Well, just would like to give a final message to the U.S. government and also the people: that after years of struggle, tomorrow's goal is in sight. And the costs have been high, the stakes even higher, but the good news is that the hope has been replaced by real progress and – though it has been dearly bought, so please bear with us, so that we can go

through that latter part of our final quest to bring stability and prosperity to Afghanistan and as well as to the region and also the security for the entire world.

MR. LAMB: Please remain seated as the ministers exit the stage.

On behalf of – (applause) – thank you. On behalf of our president and CEO, John Hamre, and the Center for Strategic and International Studies, I'd like to thank both of you for coming today.

MIN. WARDAK: Well, thank you very much. It was a pleasure to be here, and there are a lot of friends that we have met in these last years several times, and it – (audio break).

MR. LAMB: Please remain seated.

(END)