



TRANSCRIPT

MEDIA STAKEOUT FOLLOWING SRSG NICHOLAS HAYSON'S BRIEFING TO THE SECURITY COUNCIL

New York – 15 March 2016

(near verbatim)

Participants:

- UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Nicholas Haysom

Nicholas Haysom: I've just presented to the Security Council on the occasion of the presentation of the Secretary-General's first quarterly report, which is a report which gives us an opportunity not only of looking back over the last reporting period, but probably having a hard look at what lies ahead for Afghanistan in 2016. I think what was notable in the session of the Security Council is the degree of consensus, not only in regard to the hopes for Afghanistan and the commitment to Afghanistan in the future, but a hard appraisal of the extent of the challenges which face Afghanistan.

I drew attention to the fact that Afghanistan is facing as testing a time in 2016 as it did in 2015 in managing its transition, and I said it faced five particular challenges it had to overcome to simply survive 2016.

In the first place it had to deal with serious economic challenges, which is a very low growth off a low base, high unemployment, and with the social consequences that come from that unemployment.

It faces tough security challenges. Even as we speak, the insurgency is really active in all parts of the country -- in Helmand in the south to Baghlan in the north. And although there are hopeful signs that the Afghan National Security Forces are going through a period of adaptation and lesson-learning, no one, either from the member states or from the UN, really assesses the challenges as anything other than daunting.

Then in addition to that, the Afghan Government faces a difficult situation politically, a fractious and fragmented political elite in Kabul, which it needs to manage, particularly in the interest of developing a greater level of political coherence among the political class and the political elite

in Kabul, especially if it's going to generate a sense of confidence in the future and build the morale of the people and the security forces.

In addition to that, the Government must secure, at important conferences this year, medium-term commitment from the international community to support Afghanistan. Medium-term commitment is important because it gives people confidence that the international community is not abandoning them, but it also gives a level of predictability and certainty in regard to facing down its economic and political challenges.

And then finally, the fifth hurdle is the capacity to develop a peace process that will have some traction. At the moment, we've seen some encouraging developments -- in particular, the four meetings of what is known as the Quadrilateral Coordination Group, which is US, Pakistan, Afghanistan and China.

There has been real progress in that group, but we need to bear in mind that that group is a group that is supposed to midwife a peace process. It is not a peace process itself. And in regard to that peace process, we note that at least it appears that the rump of the Taliban have not agreed to participate as yet. And it's critical that they do participate for there to be a sustainable peace.

And so what I suggested to the Security Council is that those five challenges are the critical tests for survival. Survival is not a low bar, because it means it must overcome each one of those five hurdles. It can't afford to fail on any one, and particularly if it wants to deal with the potential refugee crisis, the flow of immigrants out of Afghanistan.

Afghanistan is a country where people have a fresh memory of a horrid past and a future which appears opaque to them, and I think that stimulates the drive toward immigration. What is required is a far more hopeful message, particularly from the leadership within the country, and that's broader than the Government of National Unity.

In the course of the meeting, there were human rights concerns raised. Notably, attention was drawn to the fact that the impact of the conflict -- the tragic impact of the conflict -- is on the ever-growing number of civilian casualties, which now tops 11,000, reflecting an intensification of the conflict. I like to point out that "11,000 civilian casualties" doesn't capture the full tragedy and the drama. One has to bear in mind the survivors, the communities, the colleagues, the family members who have lost loved ones, and parents who have lost children and children who have lost parents, and families that have lost breadwinners.

So we drew attention to the civilian casualties. Quite frankly, we've had some traction from the parties in terms of condemning civilian casualties, and we've seen commitments on both sides to avoiding civilian casualties, but the figures keep rising. So we want to, as it were, see fewer public statements and more real attempts to influence battlefield tactics, battlefield methods.

I also drew attention to a rise -- a disturbing rise recently, drawn to my attention by my humanitarian colleagues -- of attacks on medical and educational facilities in clear breach of international humanitarian standards. We drew attention to the issue of the listing by the Taliban of two news agencies in a way that suggested they were to be categorized as combatants. Certainly we've directly confronted the Taliban on this issue, but this year saw an attack -- which we assume to be in follow-up to the listing of those news agencies -- on one of those news agencies. We saw seven journalists killed.

And we would want to believe that doesn't, we hope, mean an extension of the battlefield onto the terrain of ideas, where battlefield tactics are used to control who says what and influences the flow of information and opinion in Afghanistan.

I would draw attention to our continuing close monitoring of violence against women in Afghanistan, noting that there has been a rise of what are called parallel justice punishments meted out to women, in particular, for what are called moral crimes. And we will continue to monitor and speak out against those.

Edith Lederer (Associated Press): Thank you Mr. Haysom and welcome back to the United Nations. It's always nice to see you here. You said that the survival of the National Unity Government depends on meeting all five of these challenges. What happens if they're not met? Does that mean the government's going to collapse? Are we going to see even more intense fighting? The collapse of Afghanistan? What are the repercussions?

Haysom: I think what we see is that all five of those areas are quite closely related. The peace will affect -- if there is peace -- the levels of security, will boost investment and investor confidence, will provide a real relief to the people, which will stabilize the country politically and simultaneously in regard to the economy.

On the other hand, if any one of them -- if the Government fails in any one of those -- it will have dramatic consequences on the other four factors, the other four hurdles I mentioned. If, for example, Afghanistan fails to persuade the international community to invest in the medium- to long-term in Afghanistan, it will promote political instability, promote greater loss of faith and political confidence in the country, which will have its impact on the economy. In 2014 -- as recently as 2014 -- the government was unable to pay its civil servants twice.

We do take note that survival doesn't mean treading water or standing still. It means actively engaging to make sure that you do have an economic plan, that you are promoting political stability, that you are holding the ground on the battlefield. What would happen if there was a serious failure in any one of those? I think it would have severe political and other consequences throughout the country. I'm not saying that would mean that the country would collapse, but it would certainly deepen the crisis in which Afghanistan finds itself.

Joseph Klein (Canada Free Press): You said in your statement that you appreciate the efforts of Pakistan to assist in midwifing the peace process. So my first question is: Do you have any concern about Pakistan's long-standing relationship with the Taliban and how that might affect it being an honest broker, if you will? And is the trajectory so far in 2016 on civilian casualties about on the same level or even more than the 11,000 casualties in 2015? Thank you.

Haysom: Let me just answer the second question first. I think the civilian casualties had a slightly different pattern. It reflected a higher number of deaths from what is called indirect fire, which is essentially mortars, which itself is a function of the intensification of ground fighting in urban areas -- in highly populated areas. Quite frankly, we should acknowledge a diminution in the use of mines and improvised explosive devices, still the number two killer, IEDs. But the increase in the number of casualties comes primarily from the increase in the number of deaths resulting from intensified ground fighting.

I have made the point -- we make the point in the United Nations -- that there is no reason, even if the fighting intensifies, that it should have a corresponding increase in the number of innocent

civilians killed. The number of innocent civilians killed is a function of how you fight, not the fact that there is fighting.

On the other issue, I think the effectiveness of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group is precisely because Pakistan has had some influence over the Taliban. The question is whether we have confidence that the Pakistanis will use that influence to help support a peace process.

The initial indications are that they have done not just a lifting but some heavy lifting to try and get a peace process off the ground, and I think they would see themselves as now publicly accountable for the success of that strategy, and have taken that responsibility seriously.

Unidentified Journalist: As you've just said, Pakistan has committed to the peace process, but it all depends on what the Taliban do. The Taliban have again and again rejected this. Even now, they seem to have rejected it. What do you think should be done by the international community to overcome that factor? Pakistan, despite the promises, has not succeeded.

Haysom: I think we would firstly encourage Pakistan to exercise as great a degree of leverage it can, but I think we also need to engage the Taliban. On the one hand, there would certainly be advocates who might want to argue that time is on the side of Taliban, that they should be in no rush to enter into peace talks, that the developments might favor them.

But I've argued, including with the Taliban, that there is another logic, which is that if they wish to be part of the future government or to govern, they will need international assistance and international legitimacy. And what we've seen is the only way you can obtain that legitimacy is through bona fide participation in a peace process, such as FRELIMO in Mozambique or the FARC now in Colombia. It is the only way they can be an acceptable member of international community. And they have stated that it is their aim to coexist with nations, to essentially be a neutral player in world political events, which is another way of appealing for legitimacy as a potentially responsible government. If they want to demonstrate that, the best way of doing it would be to participate in a peace process.

Unidentified Journalist: So you think they do not feel they are part of the peace process?

Haysom: Before I ascribe motives and intentions to the Taliban, we should just recognize that there are number of groups, and really it's a question of trying to work out what views are held by what group. In my own view, there is a group in the Taliban that recognizes that there has to be a political agreement at the end of the day, and I think we have to find a way of persuading the Taliban that this is the only way forward.