



TRANSCRIPT

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

New York – 17 September 2015

(near verbatim)

Participants:

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

Nicholas Haysom: In my briefing to the Council, I probably would want to stress three issues. One is that it was in my view very important to stress that Afghanistan should remain within the close attention of the Council and should continue to receive international support as it takes on a very difficult chapter in its history, with an accumulation of security, economic and political challenges. I think really what I was wanting to address is a temptation to put Afghanistan as the matter that has been settled, and as a country that's safely on its glide path toward self-reliance and prosperity.

On the contrary, we think that it faces really quite significant challenges over the next two years, and from almost any angle that you want to look at. Certainly, the Government remains challenged in providing security for its citizens, and in facing down the threat posed by armed insurgency. It's still in a precarious economic situation, and requires breathing space to develop an economic plan. And politically it is required to really give effect to a comprehensive reform programme which also tackles corruption.

I did want to indicate that at an international meeting held only a week or so ago, known as the Senior Officials Meeting, the Afghan government had an opportunity to persuade the international community that it had a reform agenda, that it intended to implement it, and I think it passed the test according to most of the participants in producing a credible showing.

And then we certainly wanted to highlight a report which we have recently produced in Afghanistan which was a three-way interrogation – if we could call it that – of the UN's role and function and activities in Afghanistan. It was a productive exercise. It gave us an opportunity of looking at what we do, at Afghan needs and priorities, and trying to align the two, and I think to reflect that we've had 13 years of quite considerable international support for Afghanistan, and in many areas there's not a lot to show for it. I think we were keen to find a way in which our

own contribution would have a more lasting legacy, particularly in building and leaving strong institutions behind, but leaving capacity in the hands of Afghans, to undertake and to execute the projects that the international community had initiated in Afghanistan.

The third area was just to give again – and I think echoed by many of the countries that spoke – was the increasing importance, even long-term necessity, of peace in Afghanistan.

There will be no peace in Afghanistan if there isn't a peace process in which Afghans negotiate with each other the ways in which they can live in peace and harmony together. It's not a process that can take place between some Afghans and other countries. It's a process which has to take place between Afghans themselves. So perhaps let me stop there. Matthew.

Matthew Lee (Inner City Press): Thanks a lot. You said that reiterate your call for direct engagement between the Taliban and the Government. What is the sort of the confusion after the announcement of the death of Mullah Omar? Do you think that that's now resolved? Is it back on track? And also you said neighbours should help in the suppressing of terrorism, including but not limited to ISIL. What's your assessment of how big a force it is in Afghanistan? Is it on the rise? Is it on the wane? What's the status of ISIL in Afghanistan?

Haysom: Let me deal with the last question first, because I saw two questions there Matthew. I think it's important not to exaggerate ISIL presence. I've noted that there is a temptation to look at university slogans written on the walls, or slogans written on university walls, and say ISIS is present, or to interpret the IUM, which is definitely in Afghanistan – that's the Uzbek – and say that's ISIL. I think we have to be more specific when we look at the presence and the impact ISIL is having on the country.

Just as it's important not to of course exaggerate, it's important not to underestimate. There is some presence of ISIL. We know for a fact that it is present in certain parts of at least one of the eastern provinces, Nangarhar, where it is engaged in active fighting with Taliban, incidentally. It may have presence in some other areas. It may have a resonance with other groups that are there. But the overall estimate is that the jihadist ideology which informs ISIL doesn't have the resonance in Afghanistan, which has primarily a nationalist rhetoric, to the insurgent ideology.

Unidentified Journalist: How real is the possibility of reconciliation between the Taliban and the Afghan Government? And is it possible to have any such reconciliation without the role of Pakistan at all? I ask this in light of your statement that the rhetoric between the two seems to have lowered Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Haysom: It's in the nature of what I do that I'm an optimist. And I look for and recognize the opportunities for peace. I think there is a possibility. I think there's a possibility because there is an underlying logic here in which the region needs peace for prosperity, for stability. And it needs peace and prosperity in Afghanistan itself. So there is every reason to hope that the region – and I include China and other significant players within that concept of the region – who have every reason to support an Afghan peace process.

I think for Afghans themselves, and for the insurgent groups, there is no way to a legitimate pass in government except through a peace process. And I think there are many who recognize that Afghanistan is way beyond the stage where one group can rule it on its own. There needs to be an all-inclusive national pact. No one group, in my view, can achieve a military victory.

So there is a compelling logic which must force some to the table in the interest of a peaceful Afghanistan. I think there are many factors in alignment which would support a peace process, if not this month, then in the near- to medium-term.

I don't think we should expect a peace process that will have an immediate deliverable impact, at least impact on the levels of violence in the short-term. But that is all the more reason to argue for and to try and promote and activate and initiate a peace process as soon as possible.

In the normal course of my work, I do engage with the Taliban, and I believe that there is a significant body within the Taliban who understand the kind of broader logic which requires them to find a way of living together with other Afghans.

The question you asked me first of all was what was the impact of Mullah Omar's death on the current prospects. My own assessment is that there is a leadership succession dispute being resolved. I think it will be resolved within the medium term, but the dust hasn't settled as yet.

When organized insurgencies undergo a succession dispute, or a succession resolution of their own leadership status, in my view they would be reluctant to enter into something as potentially divisive as a peace process because it involves a strategic U-turn. So we are going to have to wait until Mansour, or whoever else comes out as the winner, resolves his leadership status in the organization before they will commit to a peace process. Having said that, I think that wouldn't preclude peace talks resuming in the next couple of weeks.

Thanks very much.
