



## TRANSCRIPT

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

New York – 21 December 2015

(near verbatim)

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#### Participants:

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

**Nicholas Haysom:** My presentation to the Security Council was concerned to look at what had been achieved in 2015, and perhaps try and frame the challenges for 2016.

The main message is that Afghanistan in 2015 faced a formidable combination of challenges, partly because it had to deal both with the intensified insurgency at the same time it was going through quite difficult political transition – transition to the new Government of National Unity and finding a methodology to work – at the same time as encountering really quite serious economic challenges as a result of the economic circumstances they inherited from the previous government. So within that, I think it's acceptable to drop the bar a little instead of setting out a long list of benchmarks by which to judge them is to acknowledge that they had to make their way through three difficult transitions, the failure on any one of them would have been catastrophic and impacted on the rest.

Having said that, I thought it was necessary to acknowledge that 2016 will not allow generosity in assessing achievement to benchmarks, because the real test is going to be the capacity to persuade the international community to recommit, more or less at the same level, of financial aid for the next four years, which is what the ask is going to be at Warsaw and in Brussels – the two big conferences dealing with the renewal of commitments, one military and one civilian, next year. And in that regard, the donor community will be having to set out difficult priorities between Afghanistan and the other post-conflict countries – or conflict countries – which are equally demanding of both international attention and international resources.

And they will, I'm sure, want to know not only does their money meet a country with considerable needs, but that that money will have an impact. In other words, they will be looking at the measures taken to decisively improve governance, deal with corruption, and deal generally with government effectiveness going forward.

So with those few introductory remarks, let me open the floor.

**Matthew Lee (Inner City Press):** In the resolution, it raises concerns about the potential growth and the level of Islamic State in Afghanistan. From your perspective, how serious is that threat? And do you see a need a need for foreign countries that are still militarily active not just to maintain current levels but to up their engagement beyond what is already out there and promised?

**Haysom:** Well let me start off by saying that I think the security situation is extremely challenging. And whether it's ISIS or Taliban, I would certainly say that the most significant threat comes from the Taliban insurgency not ISIL itself. I think with ISIL it's important not to exaggerate its impact, but not to underestimate its impact either – which of course might sound like nothing, but that's because I think most approaches do one or the other. I think the task is to keep it in balance, and recognize that ISIL definitely has a presence but it's a limited presence, and it's in one, primarily in one of 34 provinces – that's Nangarhar in the east. There are certainly presences in other provinces, but not of such significance.

**Lee:** On Sangin. It seems like Sangin in Helmand province has fallen or is about to fall to the Taliban, and the Deputy Governor there said that they don't have enough ammunition, and made various complaints. Is that reflective of just that one place or something larger? And also, just on ISIL, is it true they have a radio station in Nangarhar, that they've started a radio station to recruit?

**Haysom:** There was a report a few days ago. I personally haven't heard it. I don't know if it's even that significant. There are hundreds of radio stations in Afghanistan. On Sangin, it would be a quite significant military event if it has fallen, not necessarily decisive, because it has fallen before, but I think most people would view it in the larger context of what is going to happen to Helmand province. And in particular whether it would have an impact on the security of Lashkar Gah, which is the provincial capital.

**Edith Lederer (Associated Press): Question:** Thank you. Do you have any details about this attack near the air base today that – in which six foreigners were killed.

**Haysom:** No details at all other than what I heard myself in the Council which is that allegedly there have been six casualties, fatalities, of a patrol that was attacked by a suicide motorcycle driven IED.

**Lederer:** Is this a reflection of the security – the insecurity or the need for greater security, or for beefed up activities that the government needs to...

**Haysom:** It's hard to read from that incident. What I would note is that there have been very low casualties for a very long time and that this constitutes really quite a significant event, precisely because we're not used to it and haven't seen anything like it for some time.

**Unidentified Journalist:** Just a follow up on ISIS. Do you know how limited is ISIS – or do you have any numbers for their fighters there or their jihadists or, on what basis...

**Haysom:** I don't have – I have no reliable figures at all and that's one of the problems. I've seen a figure which says 1,500, but I don't know whether that's... I think a lot of people speculate quite frankly, guess.

**Unidentified Journalist:** Is 1,500 limited in your opinion?

**Haysom:** I don't know. I don't think so. When you look at the scale of the conflict – I don't know. Where is the 1,500? How is it concentrated? Is it all in Nangarhar? Nangarhar is one out of 34 provinces. It's almost as if people want the ISIL presence to be more than it actually is, which is why I say we have to be judicious in making our assessments.

**Unidentified Journalist:** But still on ISIS, you said not to exaggerate, but even the little presence – doesn't that help in a way the Taliban? Doesn't matter if they are enemy or not, the point is, the fact that there is somebody, you know, the enemy of my enemy becomes my friend, so are you worried about it, that there is a presence, any presence there?

**Haysom:** Certainly it's worrying to have a presence there. The thing is just let's keep in proportion what that presence is. All I'm saying is let's be scientific about working out how many and how far and what the implications. What I also said is not to underestimate them, and they certainly constitute a worrying factor when they represent an alternative flagpole around which a large variety of disaffected groups can rally.

And they clearly have a capacity to grow, but let's also be clear that their resonance in Afghanistan has been limited because Afghanistan has no Salafist base except in a few areas where ISIL has obtained some traction. The Taliban itself is not a global jihadist insurgency. It is very driven by its nationalist sentiments regarding Afghanistan. That may change. I'm not saying it may not change, but let's just put it in proportion.

**Unidentified Journalist:** UNODC this week released their full data set for Afghanistan and the opium crop there. They said it's fallen and there was some suggestion that it was due to draught. Is your office monitoring that?

**Haysom:** The UNODC office monitors it and their report came out this week. I understand it reflects a significant reduction in both opium production – almost 50 per cent – and a reduction in the amount of areas under cultivation. I have to tell you people are not taking as much credit for that because they are not properly – the way I've heard it, is not a proper understanding as to why it took place. And there's definitely been some more effective poppy eradication, but it doesn't account for the extent of the decrease.

**Question:** So you're not sure why that happened?

**Haysom:** I'm not sure why it happened. I'd like to claim it as an effect of the effectiveness of the national anti-poppy action plan, but I'm not sure one can claim all of that.

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