

AMERICA ABROAD MEDIA

THE U.S., NATO AND THE WAR IN AFGHANISTAN: AN INTERNATIONAL TOWN MEETING

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(Direction.)

(Music, applause.)

(Note: Ms. Hassel's remarks are delivered via translator.)

TINA HASSEL: Good evening, Germany. Hello, America. Salam, Afghanistan.

We are now connected, across thousands of kilometers, with Washington, not only to talk past one another, but with one another, and this is about one of the most controversial issues of the day. Two days before the Conference of London, we put the question to ourselves: How do we get out of the dead end of Afghanistan? And arguments about how to proceed there are found within the German government, as well as between the allies on both sides of the Atlantic. Therefore, it's worth talking about.

Hello, Frank.

FRANK SESNO: Hello, Tina. Welcome, from Washington and America Abroad Media for this trans-Atlantic conversation. As you say, the issue of Afghanistan is very controversial here, too, where troubling questions are raised about Afghanistan's prospects, Europe's commitment and the region's stability. The NATO partners, it seems, come at this issue with mixed emotions. They harbor both high expectations and deep frustrations, which we'll explore here today.

Our thanks to the German Marshall Fund for supporting this important program, and welcome to those of you listening on public radio stations across the United States. We're with a young audience here, eager to pose challenging questions to our two panelists, who themselves are known to be outspoken. On our side, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, President Obama's special representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan; on your side, Tina, something of a rising star in contemporary politics.

I will say this, Tina: The feeling in Washington here is that Afghanistan policy must succeed. The questions here, though: how, at what costs, and what role for the allies?

MS. HASSEL: Yes, precisely. Those are the key questions here as well. President Karzai arrived in Berlin today. Tomorrow we'll have the government position being stated by the chancellor. And you now talked about our guest as a political pop star, but if you have such a hot topic, you very quickly get into the gun sight side of political commentators.

We're happy to have the German minister of defense, Karl-Theodor Zu Guttenberg. Welcome, Minister Guttenberg. (Applause.)

Good evening. You can see that Minister Guttenberg had to be added via electronics from Berlin. But we have students and soldiers here in the studio, and we'll also hear voices from Afghanistan. And in Afghanistan, by the way, the entire broadcast will be sent by the largest TV network there, Tolo TV, and we're happy to have that and we're happy about our collaboration with our American partner, America Abroad Media.

But now, let's get directly to the questions, because we want to talk with one another, we want to discuss the issues with one another, and our question, now, is going to be put to Washington.

Q: (Via translator.) Well, greetings to Washington and Afghanistan. My question to Mr. Holbrooke is as follows: NATO has been deployed for 8 years there. There are very few successes, if even you can talk about any successes. Soldiers have been dying for 8 years, and there have been a very difficult – a threatening situation for the Afghanistan's population. So my question is, how can you explain all of this?

AMBASSADOR RICHARD HOLBROOKE: Well, thank you for the question. Before I answer, let me just express my thanks to ARD and Tolo TV for their leadership role in this extraordinary three-continent venture, and my personal words of welcome to all my friends in Germany, where I spent one of the most enjoyable periods of my life as American ambassador. And especially to Karl-Theodor Zu Guttenberg, an old friend, and I'm glad to hear that he's a rising star. (Laughter.)

The question presupposes that nothing has been achieved in Afghanistan, and I would question that. But let me go to the real point of why the United States and Germany are in an alliance on behalf of stability and peace in Afghanistan, and why its neighbor Pakistan is so critical. We are – Afghanistan should not be confused with Iraq. It should not be confused with Vietnam. We are fighting on behalf of the Afghan people to help them get rid of the Taliban, and to combat al-Qaida, which poses a direct threat to both Germany and the United States. Our commitment is deep and sustained and it is no question, as you said in your comments, that it's a difficult situation.

But it's certainly better for most of the Afghan people than it was before the NATO troops came into Afghanistan in 2001, 2002. Millions of young Afghan children, including a great number of girls, are being educated. Roads are being rebuilt. Television – this program could not have been broadcast in Afghanistan; Tolo TV did not exist. To be sure, Afghanistan has lots of problems. We know that. But I want to be clear that there has been progress.

On the larger issue, why are we there? President Obama and Chancellor Merkel have repeatedly made clear that from the border areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan is a threat to both our countries. It was exhibited on 9/11, when people led by somebody educated in Germany attacked the United States. That threat is still real and that is why we're there and I know we'll return to that as the conversation goes on.

MR. SESNO: We will, and we're going to come back to that in a number of ways, through our audiences and through our follow-ups. So let us now turn to our audience here in Washington, for a question for the German defense minister. Go ahead.

Q: Good afternoon, Ambassador Holbrooke, and good afternoon, Minister Guttenberg. My question is for Minister Guttenberg. It seems like previous German governments have hesitated to call their engagement in Afghanistan a war. Minister Guttenberg, do you believe that German and NATO troops are involved in a war in Afghanistan?

MINISTER KARL-THEODOR ZU GUTTENBERG: Well, that's an excellent question. This is one that would be rarely discussed here in Germany. At first, I would like to really give my thanks to the broadcasters for this initiative, which is reaching across three continents, and I would like to especially greet my friend, Dick Holbrooke. It's nice to see us across TV. I'm sure we'll have plenty of opportunities to talk in the next few days.

For the German – the deployment in Afghanistan, that is to say our engagement in Afghanistan, is something that is debated very intensively. This is a debate that always puts the question, what are we doing there? And what sense does our deployment make? And it's been very difficult for us over the years to find a realistic description of that's what is going on in Afghanistan.

In America, in English, you have the word "war," which in Germany is called "krieg." The Americans are a little easier with this word "war" because we're always thinking about the international law implications of that word, and I have always emphasized that we have to talk about the realities.

And the reality in Afghanistan is that we, as a minimum, have war-like situation there, and I understand "everyone" to include every one German soldier who says that is a "war," because that describes it very clearly and it makes it clear that the deployment – also the deployment of our German soldiers in Germany – is not one that we can do by just waving at people. We also have to use weapons on occasion.

MS. HASSEL: Let me put a follow-on question here, very quickly. Even because of this openness that you have, isn't there a fundamental misunderstanding if all the allies, who are talking about war, but nevertheless, the federal government is trying to dodge the question?

MR. GUTTENBERG: Mrs. Hassel, we're not trying to dodge the question. If you talk about the concept of war as the concept of two countries who are fighting one another – so there we come to the issue of whether or not this is under international law a war or not.

As I've said, I have agreed to everybody who calls it a war from the normal speech, everyday speech, but if you talk about what is international law and what is the concept in international law, that's something different. I don't see this as an international war with two armed sides. It reads maybe more or less like the Spanish civil war, and I think, legally, that is something that is not too important for the actual soldier who's deployed there.

MS. HASSEL: Thank you very much, Mr. Minister. As you know, there are big issues that are associated with this situation. People have become a little bit more sober in their appreciation, and now, in order to be going from the same point of view, we can talk about the same history.

The 11th of September, 2001, with the attack on Washington, we have the beginning of the global war on terror. Afghanistan is the American target. The goal: the Taliban, at that time; those countries who are a haven for the Americans (sic). The American position is very simple; the war quickly supports the United States. NATO talks about, for the first time in its history, Article V of Mutual Defense, and federal minister-chancellor is also a supporter, without any compromise. The German Bundestag supports the federal government's willingness to follow up on the declarations of absolute solidarity with the United States with concrete insistence.

And so German troops are stationed in Afghanistan, first in Kabul, and then in the North as well. This is declared as a humanitarian operation aimed at civilian reconstruction. The Taliban regime is quickly toppled, but Osama bin Laden has disappeared. The Americans see him as a ghost. But it is a time for change and hope. Hamid Karzai becomes the first president of the new Afghanistan government and now he carries the hopes of the Western world.

Above all, the life in capital, Kabul, comes back. Women are playing a visible – public life again, on the streets and in politics. Schools are built to include schools for girls. But the Taliban are coming back. With hardly a day now – there's hardly a day now without a bombing or a suicide attack. The high number of victims leads to doubts about the military operation, both among the Afghan population and in the West.

No later than September, the – or at order of the German army two gasoline tankers are destroyed in Kunduz, and 140 people are killed, it becomes an issue. The federal minister of defense is forced to resign, and his successor, Mr. Guttenberg, is also under pressure. The presidential election at the end of the summer of 2009 is a political disaster, with millions of votes claimed to be rigged. The extent of corruption, mismanagement, becomes evident. Nevertheless, Hamid Karzai remains president.

This is a very difficult – President Obama is under pressure to come up with his new strategy. He plans to withdraw from Afghanistan at the beginning of 2011, and now he's going to put more troops in, and he demands more troops from allies, to include from Germany.

MR. SESNO: And with that as background, let's turn back to our audience, for another question. Go ahead.

Q: Hi, Minister Guttenberg. My name is Brooke Pierson (sp). The question I have is that, given President Obama's personal popularity in Germany, has the German public become more supportive over the last year of German involvement in Afghanistan?

MR. GUTTENBERG: The popularity of the American president, to transfer that strictly to the Afghanistan deployment – well, that is too simple. The American president is popular but

the Afghanistan deployment must be declared by German politicians, and they must explain it very clearly.

And the second point is that we are partners internationally, that we don't betray each other, that we have common position. And I look forward to the opportunity in London this week to come up with a common position, which includes learning from our mistakes. In past years, we clearly made a number of errors, and consequently, we have changed our strategies. We must adapt our strategies and our mandates, and I think we have good opportunity to do that.

MS. HASSEL: Good. That is a good initial question, but there are many other questions, and we want to directly put them. And there comes our direct next question to Washington.

Q: (Via translator.) Hello. We just saw that more troops are supposed to be sent for more "peace." I think that's weird, because if you have more troops, you will have more fighting, which means we will have more victims. How are you going to win the trust of the people if more and more people die?

AMB. HOLBROOKE: That is an excellent question, and it goes to the heart of the strategy we're trying to pursue. And as I answer it, I want to also comment on what Defense Minister Guttenberg said a moment ago. I don't want to get involved in German internal politics, but it needs to be said that Germany's contribution in Afghanistan is a vital, indispensable part of the effort. And we in America are aware of it and we're grateful for it.

I have watched this issue proceed in Germany since I was ambassador in 1994, when the Karlsruhe decision first, of the High Court, first allowed Germany to send troops outside Germany, and they went to Bosnia. And here, in Afghanistan, over 30 Germans have already paid the ultimate price. I know, from personal knowledge of your country how difficult this is for Germany. But I want you – everyone in Germany watching – to understand that what Germany is doing, in conjunction with its NATO allies, under a United Nations resolution, and under the NATO unanimous decisions, is not only important, it is indispensable.

Now, back to your very important question. Germans hate war, for reasons which are special to your country. We Americans hate war too. But when we were attacked, on September 11th, and the world rallied, and the U.N. rallied, to declare that we should go after the Taliban and al-Qaida, we did so. Until that is a successful outcome, we will be forced to do something none of us want to do, which is conduct military operations as part of a broader civilian military strategy.

No one mentions the other part of our efforts there. Germany and the United States are training police – the Germans have an outstanding police training center under the minister of interior in Mazar-i-Sharif. Germany and the United States are supporting agriculture, education – especially of girls, rule of law, growth and improving the governance. We have much to do there and we're going to increase our efforts.

Secondly, in the end, only the Afghans can do this for themselves. Two thousand and nine was a very complicated, challenging year for the international coalition in Afghanistan

because of the Afghan elections. Those of you watching on Tolo TV remember well what a tremendous, contentious election that was.

But at the end of it, even though the outcome was somewhat messy, as President Obama said, the result was that President Hamid Karzai was reelected as the legitimate leader of Afghanistan. And he will be coming to London in that capacity. And our goal in London will be to strengthen him in the civilian areas, not just the military. And I want to stress that to the questioner because this is not simply a war.

MR. SESNO: And we're going to come back to what's going to happen in London, what the expectations are. But I want to play on something you said, Ambassador Holbrooke, and ask you, Minister Guttenberg, to respond. You just heard the ambassador talk about the vital and indispensable nature of the German contribution, the German role in Afghanistan. And there has been great discussion and debate inside Germany as to what level your troops will be augmented in Afghanistan.

And the reports widely seen now suggest a thousand, maybe fewer than a thousand additional troops. Is that the level of participation that a vital and indispensable ally provides to a challenge, as Ambassador Holbrooke has just articulated?

MR. GUTTENBERG: Many thanks for this obviously very critical question that needs an answer that very often is missed out on, from you and from Ambassador Holbrooke, who knows exactly what Germany has done in the last years and what we are doing in the international (context ?). We are, and that we will also be the third-largest provider of troops for Afghanistan. We've had enormous development in the last years regarding the number of troops.

And now I have to address the question the young lady posed, whether more troops would mean more fights. And I think we have a very important mandate to explain what is our goal. What is the goal? Is the goal to win Afghanistan militarily? And I think we have been pushing the envelope here.

Militarily, whether or not you call it a war, Afghanistan is not winnable. But we only can do it by addressing the civilian component. And the question is what the international community can reach with military alone. Our goal is that we have to refocus on the protection of the Afghan people. We have to – we have to, in order to get a transfer of responsibility, we have to put an Afghan face to the conflict and also to create Afghan ownership.

And we have to focus on training and civilian reconstruction. We have to put it on a broader foundation. That means more training, more protection, in order to create a prospective for the transfer of responsibility. And transfer of responsibility also means, for the international community, a perspective of retractment (ph) of the military. And therefore that is a very important approach and a very logical approach, and one which we will support significantly.

MS. HASSEL: Many thanks, Minister Guttenberg, for your very important comment. But at the same time, when we are talking about more troops, there will be anxieties – how do

you get them back? How can you exit from this dead-end Afghanistan? And that will also be the gist of the next question. Please, your question?

Q: (Via translator.) In the media, both in Germany and the U.S., you're talking more and more about a comparison between Afghanistan and Vietnam – often, one is talking about Obama's Vietnam as well. Is that the case? And that is the question, of course, to Washington. Is this correct, that this is – can we possibly talk about Obama's Vietnam with regard to Afghanistan?

AMB. HOLBROOKE: Thank you for this question. I served in Vietnam as a civilian for three-and-a-half years at the beginning of my career, and I get this question a lot. And I want to answer very clearly. There are structural similarities perhaps between the wars in terms of terrain, and the guerrilla warfare and the asymmetrical warfare. But there is a – three fundamental differences, and you should focus on them very carefully.

Number one: The Viet Cong, and the North Vietnamese, never posed any direct threat to the United States or any of our allies. The al-Qaida, backed by the Taliban, does. They attacked the United States, London, Madrid, Casablanca, Mumbai, Islamabad, Bali and they have very clearly stated they wish to attack other countries. Germany above all should know that they are not immune. If they can attack London, they can certainly attack in Germany as well. Indeed they've threatened to.

Number two: The nature of the enemy is completely different. In Vietnam, it was a single, organic, vertical structure, from the central committee of the Communist Party in Hanoi down to every village. In Afghanistan, it's a group of motley tribal leaders, some of whom are allied with the Taliban, but many of whom are not.

And one of the most important things we hope to do in London is support a new fund, a reintegration fund that President Karzai will propose, in which he will suggest ways to bring people who are not ideologically committed to al-Qaida and the Taliban leadership into the fold. That was not possible in Vietnam.

And number three: the nature of the sanctuary. In Vietnam the sanctuary was North Vietnamese, and the United States was bombing North Vietnam. In Pakistan, where the leadership on the border – Pakistan-Afghanistan border areas – the al-Qaida and Taliban leadership take sanctuary. But Pakistan is an ally – although a very complicated one – of the United States and our NATO allies, including Germany, and we work closely with them. So recently they undertook major military offences against the Taliban in Swat and in South Waziristan.

So I want to caution everybody: This is not Vietnam. And I think no one else working on this issue now had experience on the ground in Vietnam. So I want to underscore that point.

MR. SESNO: Ambassador Holbrooke, I want to follow up too on something that the defense minister was speaking about just a moment ago. And that is the decision that must be

made in Germany, and presumably will be articulated and given some larger purpose in London, about these additional troop deployments.

There's a lot of grumbling here in Washington – you know it well because you've heard it a lot – about the role that other NATO allies are playing in Afghanistan. Reports now that Germany will come across with maybe fewer than a thousand additional troops. Is this an appropriate level? What is the United States' position about this level of participation, both on the military side and on the civilian side?

AMB. HOLBROOKE: We welcome any support that our allies give.

MR. SESNO: Would that disappoint you, if it were at that level?

AMB. HOLBROOKE: Quite honestly, I am delighted with the German contributions. If, as Defense Minister Zu Guttenberg as suggested, there will be additional troops, they will be welcome. I think we should concentrate on the extraordinary voyage Germany has traveled, the one I mentioned earlier, over the last 15 years, to do what they're doing – be grateful they have just –

Germany has just gone through a very traumatic incident in Kunduz, which the defense minister mentioned. My heart goes out to everyone who was involved in that tragedy. And we are intensely grateful for the German contribution.

I have heard some people – on background – I have heard some members of Congress, and I've heard many members of the previous administration, criticize Germany. I was in Munich, along with Karl-Theodor Zu Guttenberg, when the previous defense secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, and the previous German foreign minister, Joschka Fischer, got into an extraordinary public argument about this. That is the past. We don't do that with our great allies. Germany is one of our greatest allies.

MR. SESNO: So you're satisfied with this level of support?

AMB. HOLBROOKE: I don't know – I'm waiting; I don't know what my friend on the other side of the Atlantic is going to do. What I do know is that whatever they do will be appreciated.

And I want to stress again – I really want to stress this, Frank: What Germany does is enormously appreciated, very important, and I hope that the German people understand how valuable it is. And I hope our listeners in Afghanistan, particularly because of what happened in Kunduz, recognize that that was a tragedy but the German contribution is entirely positive.

MR. SESNO: Okay. To our question here, back to Cologne.

Q: My name is Julian Waller (sp), and, Minister Guttenberg, given the Obama administration's stated goal of beginning withdraw by 2011, how does that affect the German people's willingness to continue engagement in the conflict? And, as we said before, talk about

increased troop levels. In addition, how does this complicate and present new challenges to the German government, in trying to craft a long term and thorough response and policy towards Afghanistan and to the region itself?

MR. GUTTENBERG: Many thanks. These are excellent questions. For one thing, it is very important to see that we must deal very carefully with data when we are talking about prospective of withdrawal. It would not make any sense to name a final date because you would support these people who are just waiting for the opportunity, and you could “turn off the light” and then they would revert to their terrible behaviors.

At the same time, it is very interesting that President Obama has mentioned the beginning of a process for withdrawal. And I think one of the viewpoints that are – that would help us to lead the argument in Germany, is in order to create that perspective, we have to make a special effort, namely the effort that if we want to withdraw successively from Afghanistan, others would have to take on our task. And these tasks only could be performed by the Afghans. And therefore, the setting of a date at the very beginning of the process – it is meaningful, but the setting out of a final date is – the wisdom has to be questioned.

MS. HASSEL: Well, that is true. When we are discussing today, we are talking about what has gone right in the past 8 years, and we’ve found that through our Western perspective, how do people in Afghanistan think? What do people think in Afghanistan about their country? Here are a few voices from Afghanistan.

Q: (Via translator.) The houses of people are searched without reasons. People are really living under (curfews ?). People are executed, they are violated, they are hurt, they are killed – and nobody questions that the world community has to respect our laws. You have the responsibility for the whole world. You have promised us Afghans to be loyal, to be open, but now you have to create the conditions for that, so we can help each other.

Afghans have been living with war for a very long time, and Afghanistan has to be progressive and free, and that’s what they have promised us. During the first year, the Taliban were pushed out. Everybody was witness. After 8 years, now, there is not a single province and a village can be freed from the Taliban – they don’t have an air strike and they are not strong on the ground.

Why can’t you push out the Taliban if the years – when you were able to do that during the first year? You can’t even control a mayor. This is an important question for the people – it’s ever-present.

Q: (Via translator.) My question for the world community is, why isn’t there peace today? They said in the North, it’s peaceful, but in Kunduz, it was good, and now after 8 years, it really has worsened. It’s worse than in the South.

MS. HASSEL: Well, these were very critical voices we heard from Afghanistan. And the last point, it is massive criticisms on the security situation in Kunduz. And that is of direct relevance to you, Minister Guttenberg. What would you like to respond to these people?

MR. GUTTENBERG: I need to respond that we need to be more with the people, that we have to concern ourselves more with the protection of the people, that security cannot come from one camp alone, but we have to be more present in the field overall. And these are some of the approaches which we are going to pursue.

MS. HASSEL: Follow-up question: When the Americans, now, are sending 205,000 troops (sic) into the north, doesn't that mean that they are not trusting us, the Germans, to do the job alone?

MR. GUTTENBERG: No, that's simply an expression of that the international community has recognized that the safety situation in the north of Afghanistan has worsened. And we are very grateful the ISAF troops and the principle of field-wide coverage is fulfilled.

MS. HASSEL: Let's go to Washington, now. Frank, you probably want to respond to the voices and criticisms aired in Afghanistan.

MR. SESNO: Well, what I would ask Ambassador Holbrooke is just that – you heard there was a range of comment and criticism there. And it addresses principally their security situation: What is being done and what are you doing specifically with the allies? What comes out of London to address that?

AMB. HOLBROOKE: I thought that the voices from Afghanistan were extraordinarily interesting and every concern voiced was a legitimate one. For years the international military effort in Afghanistan did not respond to these concerns. When Gen. McChrystal became the new commander of the International Security Assistance Forces in Afghanistan, he set out to reduce civilian casualties. First of all –

MR. SESNO: And he's been working on that?

AMB. HOLBROOKE: And he's made real progress.

MR. SESNO: But my question, ambassador, is what will come out of this London conference in just a few days that can address the concerns we heard expressed from those Afghan citizens?

AMB. HOLBROOKE: The London conference, I hope – and as I said earlier – will establish international support for the reintegration fund which will create an opportunity for the great majority of people fighting with the Taliban, who don't support the positions of Mullah Omar or al-Qaida or Osama bin Laden, to come back into the political and social fabric of the country. We will increase our agricultural support – agriculture is the key to Afghan economy and it was ignored under the previous administration. We're going to re-emphasize and revitalize those efforts.

MR. SESNO: Okay. And to your question now for Germany.

Q: Mr. Zu Guttenberg, my name is Eddy Fonyodi. I'm in the security studies program at Georgetown University. Minister, Europe has often been labeled as the one who does the dishes after America has cooked the dinner but many Americans feel that it is a common threat we are facing in Afghanistan and that it therefore is unfair that U.S. troops should bear the brunt of the fighting and the dying.

Do you believe the European and German troops should be more involved in combat in Afghanistan? And how can the German government convince its citizens that this engagement is crucial to protect them from extremism?

MR. GUTTENBERG: Sometimes you have to remind even friends that not only the American troops have suffered bitter casualties – and we are, of course, sorry for each one of these losses – but the very same thing, obviously, applies to the allies, albeit in lower casualty numbers. And we have German soldiers who have fallen, who are injured and they fell in battle. And we didn't describe Afghanistan as a war deployment but it really is a war and we are at an important juncture.

And the focus now is when you're talking about protection and training, you're not talking solely about offensive fighting troops but you need to put at the center the protection and training. If the population – that could mean a risk, but it is the more correct approach.

MS. HASSEL: Minister Zu Guttenberg, please allow me a follow-up question. I think it was very, very important that you put it in the right relationship and it is a fight on the one hand and civil – the British ISAF colonel in the main – (inaudible) – said when the Germans don't want to risk their life, they have to stay at home. Do you think that's cynical? What would you like to respond to him?

MR. GUTTENBERG: I do not know the statement of the British colonel. I can only say that our soldiers, indeed, are risking their lives in Afghanistan and too many soldiers have lost their lives there.

MS. HASSEL: The next question from us to Washington is – it's a question about corruption and let me just see – who wanted to pose this question? That's a very important topic as we know. And your question about this important question?

Q: (Via translator.) Mr. Holbrooke, it has been said time again that the corruption in Afghanistan must be fought against. At the same time, the United States goes with their money bags to the local warlords and the leaders – how does that fit in? Which response do you have to that issue?

AMB. HOLBROOKE: Corruption is a huge issue. It is like a cancer eating away at the society. Now, there's always been some low-level corruption in that society, as there are in most societies. The United States and Germany are not immune from the problem. But it is a great recruiting tool for the Taliban. And the United States and Germany and our allies in the United Nations have made a big point of this issue.

President Karzai addressed it in his inaugural. He promised to restructure and strengthen the anti-corruption commission in Afghanistan. We're looking forward to seeing that happen – it's one of our highest priorities.

MR. SESNO: And where that corruption starts and ends and how the money is put to use or not is a key part of the rebuilding of Afghanistan and the credibility when any government official from any government goes to the public and says these will be your tax dollars at work and we can actually get somewhere. Let's go to our next question here in Washington for Germany. Go ahead.

Q: Hello, Minister Von Zuttenberg (sic) – my name is Steven West, I'm from the Transatlantic Academy and my question is, there's widespread agreement that the only way for America and Europe to get out of Afghanistan is to train more Afghan police forces. Now, Germany was responsible for training for many years, so why are they falling short on sending an adequate supply of trainers now to Afghanistan?

MR. GUTTENBERG: Let me come back to the question of police training. There is more that has been done here. There is the maximum of what is even possible is being done. The key is not simply training policemen – it's training for policemen and the Afghan army and we have a combined interest here and we're both responsible. It's very difficult to organize the Afghan police at this time. From the German perspective, they are very – including volunteer trainers that are doing this job and we're thankful to them.

MS. HASSEL: And that puts us directly to the next question to Washington. And this has to do with how to deal with the Taliban. Well, your question?

Q: Well, there was always the opinion that one could negotiate with the Taliban and I would like to know how do you see this negotiation. Are you prepared to do this – because this is not only a matter of human rights but also for women's rights.

MR. HOLBROOKE: I agree completely with you – the Taliban represent an odious social movement which has done particular damage to women and women are overwhelmingly opposed to any compromises on that issue. And so is the United States. In fact, I talked to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton about this very subject yesterday at length as we were preparing for the London conference. And we're going to be issuing a special document on this within the next day or so.

Now, in regard to the question of what you called negotiating with the Taliban – let me remind you again that we're talking about two very different things. The reintegration program that President Karzai is announcing and that the international community will support is an opportunity for people fighting at the local commander level to stop fighting, come in from the cold and rejoin Afghan society if they renounce al-Qaida.

MR. SESNO: That is to say, members of the Taliban –

AMB. HOLBROOKE: Members of the Taliban –

MR. SESNO: – at the lower level –

AMB. HOLBROOKE: – that’s right.

MR. SESNO: – to be part of the government.

AMB. HOLBROOKE: That’s right.

MR. SESNO: To be part of the solution?

AMB. HOLBROOKE: Not part of the – no, Frank, you’re mixing up reintegration and reconciliation. I know these are technical terms and they’re bureaucratic terms to you but they’re critically important and this young woman’s question addresses both halves of it and it needs to be distinguished.

Reintegration is not a negotiation with the Taliban leadership. Reintegration is an opportunity for people – the vast majority of the fighters with Taliban don’t support these things. They’re fighting because they misunderstand the NATO presence or they’re there because of some local grievance. The previous question about corruption raised an obvious reason.

Those people are welcome to come in. There will be a special program for them. It’s a very important thing. Gen. Petraeus, for example, has called it a potential game-changer. Now, what the young woman –

MR. SESNO: I want to go back to the question, so if you could quickly –

AMB. HOLBROOKE: – has asked about. But I have to distinguish or there’ll be massive confusion. What the young woman has asked about – and I’m glad you asked this question – is the question of negotiations with the Taliban leadership. The press is making much about this these days. This is one of these cases where there’s more going on in the press than there really is going on. The United States has no direct contacts with the Taliban leadership at all. But there are many indirect contacts going on.

Every Pashtun family in Afghanistan, as the viewers on Tolo TV know, almost every Pashtun family in Afghanistan knows people who are fighting with the Taliban. They even have relatives in the Taliban. That kind of indirect contact is their business. We are not in a negotiation with the Taliban now and if there’s going to be any movement on this issue, the Taliban will have to sever all its ties with al-Qaida. And this is a critical point.

And I want to reassure the people watching in Afghanistan that while we support their desire for reintegration and reconciliation and that has been shown in recent polling data that has come out including the ARD/BBC/ABC poll we are not supporting anything which would undermine the rights of the Afghan women and the Afghan people and their desire for freedom. Nor would we do anything which would allow their odious policies to re-enter the government.

MR. SESNO: All right, we've got your clarification. We'll try to come back to some more on that if we have time later. I hope that answered your question. We go to the question here now for a question back to Germany.

Q: Good evening. My name is Leila Hernandez. I'm with the German Marshall Fund. And my question is that it seems that most of Afghanistan has never had a strong central government and it also appears that there is not just one central Taliban force attacking NATO troops – and if this was the case, then there would appear to be no definite military victory. And if so, why aren't Germany and NATO forces focused more on reconstruction and humanitarian aid rather than combat?

MR. GUTTENBERG: Well, you have now come to a conclusion and you have put a question. And actually there is an internal contradiction here because when you say on the one hand that there is one or two places at the borders where you could have a central taxation possibility for Afghanistan – well, that's true. Afghanistan has many regional differences. There's a culture of tribes that has been developed over centuries and that are very different and they have common points and different points.

We have to be just with this cultural situation if you want to proceed. You have to give an opportunity for that situation to work on those things that you talked about – about corruption and good governance and et cetera. To deal with the regional issues is one of the main goals that we have, but nevertheless we should not undermine a central government with that. But the question is, can we do that via combat?

No, we have to talk about reconstruction. We have to talk about how we protect the people so we can do the reconstruction. And that puts people into combat situations and that is something that the German soldiers have done. They've done a first-class job there and the German population realizes that. I think we should very clearly understand what we're talking about in this regional perspective.

MS. HASSEL: Our next question to Washington is one about the goals and what we want there.

Q: The question about the situation in Afghanistan is, are we even legitimate to try to prescribe our Western values to the Afghan population? Is it not impossible because the Afghan population has their own values?

MR. HOLBROOKE: We're not trying to impose our values on the Afghan population. Afghanistan has a strong and vibrant culture and society and its own methods of dealing with issues. All of this was destroyed by the Soviet invasion. They've had 30 years of turmoil from the Soviet invasion to the warlords to the Taliban to the current phase and it's up to the Afghan people to decide for themselves how to proceed and we support them. And I must in all respect – I would reject the premise of the question. I cannot see any place where we're trying to impose our values on Afghan culture and people who attempt to do that are certainly doomed to failure.

MR. SESNO: Tina, very interesting questions from both of these perspectives and I know you've got some other voices there that you've been listening to.

MS. HASSEL: Well, exactly, Frank, and that is the great thing about today's broadcast – that we have voices coming from Afghanistan and we have quite a number of questions that have to do with the civilian situation we want to talk about.

Q: (Via translator.) Our students studied at good universities and they graduated. They have no goals now and they don't know what to do with themselves. I'd like to know, now, what the world did in Afghanistan? What will the future hold for us after our university days? The world hasn't fulfilled our hopes and dreams.

What sort of life is this? Not enough food, insufficient security, nothing to study. When there's no security in the country, there's no work for the young. There's no security anywhere – not in the cities, not in the rural areas, not at the workplace. You don't feel safe anywhere.

As long as the youth don't have any opportunity to make a contribution to our society and work then they can't do anything. If they can't study now, then what's going to happen? In the rural villages the girls are uneducated. Their rights are violated. They are married off while they're still very young. What has the world done? All of ISAF has become very strong in Afghanistan. Why can't they do something about bribery and corruption in our government? Everybody knows what's going on here but nobody does anything about it.

MS. HASSEL: Minister Guttenberg, the question goes directly to you. They sound very disappointed. We do a lot, but as you hear that, do you think we're doing it improperly?

MR. GUTTENBERG: Well, the question, of course, to the international community that was said about criticism and about wishes – I think we're dealing about illusion. We can't have the international community do everything. The only way we're going to achieve our goals is with the Afghans. Now, there were some very bitter complaints here and I think one thing that is very clear is that security is a prerequisite.

If you don't feel safe then, of course, there is no hope for the future so that puts us again to the notion that without security, there can't be any development. And therefore development, then, comes back to the point – you have to have development in order to continue security. And that is why you can't do this, militarily, alone. We are trying to set the conditions in order to protect the populations but nevertheless, that makes us subject to attacks at the one place or the other. We can only achieve our goals if we come together with the will of the Afghan people.

MS. HASSEL: Of course, we're very excited to hear what Ambassador Holbrooke has to say about this. Ambassador Holbrooke, what are your comments?

AMB. HOLBROOKE: Well, watching those voices from Afghanistan, where I just was a few days ago, my heart goes out to each of those people. They've made articulate and eloquent statements of their concerns and I want to assure all you people who are watching on Tolo TV how deeply we in the United States government share those aspirations.

It's going to take a little bit of time and Defense Minister Zu Guttenberg has already made a very critical point: Security is the absolute prerequisite for every other issue of development – anti-corruption, good governance. And that is why President Obama is increasing the troop levels – a very difficult decision for him to make and why so many other countries are doing similar things.

MR. SESNO: Security and development, they go hand in hand and –

AMB. HOLBROOKE: No, no. Security is the prerequisite to other things.

MR. SESNO: I, I –

AMB. HOLBROOKE: There's a complete confusion on the civilian-military integration. And although everyone always says on these programs, we're going to get to the civilian side – we never do. So I want to be very clear on this. We have a massive agricultural program. We have massive education programs and so on. But as the defense minister said, security doesn't go hand in hand, it must precede. Otherwise – and I've seen this in wars all over the world – you build a health clinic, you build a school, you build a bridge and the Taliban, ruthless destroyers of things –

MR. SESNO: Yeah, they come in and they knock it down.

AMB. HOLBROOKE: One grenade, one mine and they undo all the work and they terrorize people. And you could see that in the voices from Afghanistan. So to the people of Afghanistan, let me say that the additional forces are there to provide the time and space for your government – with international assistance – to deal with the civilian issues, which is what you care about, but which, unfortunately, we don't discuss.

MR. SESNO: Let us go back to another question here for Germany.

Q: My name is Timur Karimi. I'm with Bamiyan Foundation and a member of Afghan community in D.C. area. My question is to both Ambassadors Guttenberg and Holbrooke. I would like to – my question is directed towards the latest dynamics in Afghan politics in the sense that if we look back at Bonn conference, the political basis to be incorporated into Afghan political culture was democratization, rule of law, good governance, women's rights, gender equity, respect for international convention – so on, so forth. But in preparation to London conference and in view of the latest decision of the parliament, it seems that it suggested the contrary.

In the sense that during the nominations, members of minorities – whether they were ethnic in terms of Hazaras, Uzbeks or Tajiks or women minority or members of civil society, which is another emerging minority – they were all rejected. Absolutely –

MR. SESNO: – question for the ambassadors. Go ahead.

Q: And then you combine that with the focus on negotiation with Taliban. So it seems that as opposed to democracy taking root into Afghanistan, relaxing Afghan political culture, it's the contrary. It seems that –

MR. SESNO: What's your question? Turn it into a question, please.

Q: It seems that democracy is being forced to be molded into Afghan culture and what's the reaction of the international community in terms of this latest dynamics?

MR. SESNO: Minister Zu Guttenberg, go ahead. You take first pass at that, please.

MR. GUTTENBERG: The question and the commentary were very important. And these reflect that there were disappointments about one or the other thing that has happened that what which was promised from democratization hasn't happened yet. But on the other hand, the development of a parliament is indeed a democratic process even though it's very difficult at this time.

I think the important thing is that the different cultures and the different traditions to include in Afghanistan have to find their way. And this is something, I think, that will be discussed in London and in London we will not be totally discussed if one or the other talks about the notion of having dreamt about setting up a democracy according to Westminster (ph) standard or ideal Western standard – that that is very difficult. But, no, we have to take the Afghan culture as it comes and that's part of the truth there as well.

MS. HASSEL: The minister just talked about Afghan reality and something that is always criticized there is the poppies that grow opium. And that puts the next question to.

Q: (Via translator.) Well, good evening to Washington. Cultivation of opium in Afghanistan is something that has increased tremendously over the last few years and I would be very interested why it wouldn't be possible, simply, to purchase all of the opium fields and simply then to give that land to the people for their agricultural purposes? And perhaps you can also say how much the government of Hamid Karzai is even interested in doing anything against the growing of opium poppies there.

AMB. HOLBROOKE: The drug culture is a very serious result of the events of the last 30 years. And we're doing everything we can to encourage Afghan farmers to return to their great traditions. Afghanistan used to be one of the great agricultural export countries in the world: pomegranates and pistachios and almonds and raisins. And we are putting great deal of money into restoring that. And I think we're making progress.

As for your idea of buying the poppy crop – all I can say is it's been suggested for 40 years; it's been tried elsewhere. It always fails. People sell it to the government and then they grow more. So while the idea sounds good, every time it was attempted it failed – all over the world.

MR. SESNO: We turn back to our audience with another question for Cologne, go ahead.

Q: Thank you, Minister Guttenberg. Here's my question. With the Cold War over and NATO's original 1949 doctrine irrelevant in the 21st century, what role does Germany hope to play in, number one, the ever-changing global NATO initiative and, number two, more specifically in Afghanistan?

MR. GUTTENBERG: Well, in Afghanistan we have undertaken a leading role. Don't forget that the responsibility, the commander of the northern Afghan sector of ISAF is in Germany. And that also increases our responsibilities. As far as NATO is concerned, this is a core alliance for our security – the – core alliance for our security. And as a supporter of trans-Atlantic, I think it's not something that we can say, hey, NATO is at fault.

But nevertheless, NATO has to deal with the new challenges that come globally. And this shows us very clearly what these new difficulties can be seen from these new challenges. And I am certain that NATO will take on its responsibilities and execute them properly.

MS. HASSEL: That was a view into the future and you can tell that puts us much to the end of our discussion time today. So we have the final questions from Cologne to both this guests.

Q: (Via translator.) My question is as follows. I would like to know what precisely is going to happen if the strategies developed at the London conference don't, well, if they don't succeed?

MS. HASSEL: You mean if London is a failure? What will happen then?

Q: (Via translator.) Well, what happens if people's attitude changes and well then, I would like to know what exactly is going to happen if the strategies fail?

MS. HASSEL: Yes, the first question to you Mr. Guttenberg. What happens if London fails?

MR. GUTTENBERG: Well, it's probably the typical political answer if I say it may not fail, the conference may not fail and we'll do everything to make sure it's a success. But nevertheless, we have to deal with both the best-case and the worst-case scenarios.

But we proceed from the assumption that even though they are difficulties, we will succeed with the approaches of training, protection and less offensive actions. And if the civilian element does not come on as strong as it should, well then we'll have to ensure that it is reinforced.

AMB. HOLBROOKE: May I add a word here? I think the London conference needs to be understood in the context of the fact that there will be a follow-on conference in Kabul later this spring. The London conference is part of a process of strengthening the international

support to the government of Afghanistan. And so I think a pass/fail grade on London would be to mislead you as to what's going to happen in London.

MR. SESNO: Ambassador Holbrooke, thank you very much for your time and for your reflections here. This London conference is a very important one. As you say, part of a process – a very long process. Thank you very much for your time here today.

AMB. HOLBROOKE: My pleasure.

MR. SESNO: I know you've got a lot to do. We also want to thank the German Marshall Fund, NARD for making this program possible. Tina, what we've had here today is really an extraordinary opportunity, as you mentioned, to talk across three continents and for the elected and appointed officials to make their case and to explain their policy and for the public to listen.

Without public support in the United States, in Germany, in Europe, in Afghanistan, all of these efforts are going to be fruitless. So this is a very important start, a very important continuation to the discussion. I'm Frank Sesno with America Abroad. Tina, back to you.

MS. HASSEL: Exactly, Frank. The West has clocked into – (inaudible) – time and that's a proverb, but it must not lead to effect where the West is engaging in a precipitous withdrawal but the longer foreign troops are fighting in the country and people will view them as occupiers. And the London conference is trying to find a way out of the dead end. In this spirit, many, many thanks to our viewers. Many thanks for the interesting discussions on either side of the Atlantic. Many thanks, bye bye. (Applause.)

(END)