

Transcript of Remarks by Anja Dalgaard-Nielsen, Senior Fellow and Director, Terrorism and Counterterrorism Program, Danish Institute for International Studies

**CEPA Inaugural Conference
October 17, 2006
Washington, DC**

As a SAIS graduate I am always delighted when I have a chance to get back here, and I am especially delighted to be here today at this inaugural conference of CTR and CEPA.

You have been given a broad overview now over NATO activities/issues on the agenda. My role is to zoom in on one part of that, which is ISAF – the mission that NATO (at least to some extent) has set up as a test case for itself. And I have been given ten minutes to give a ground level perspective, so I decided to focus on two minor questions: “What does it take to win out there?” and, secondly, “Seen from the ground level, how are we doing?” And this is – as Michael [Wyganowski] mentioned – based on a period of five months as embedded researcher with Danish Armed Forces in Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan.

We already talked about this. What kind of a task have we set ourselves out there in Afghanistan? We have set ourselves the task to build a new state: a stable, democratic, and moderately religious Afghanistan, living in peace with its surroundings – in other words: a state building mission.

Now, state building depends on whether the population in Afghanistan leans towards local warlords, Taliban, narco-networks, or whether they lean towards the new democratic structures that we are trying to set up – meaning that the center of gravity (the thing that we need to hold on to in order to win) out there is a loyalty of the population. That is what the battle is for. That is the center of gravity.

And what does it take to win this center of gravity? Well, when you ask the officers and soldiers deployed out there, they will tell you: “to win the hearts and minds, you have to give people security. Security, security, security. Give them lots of security.” And that is true. Certainly, you have to protect them against militias, warlords throwing their way around, criminals. Definitely. But the research we have – and, admittedly, it is limited – that looks at local perceptions in conflict areas indicates that it is not enough, that very quickly the perceptions of local populations will turn from security towards things like jobs, electricity, improvements to daily life. Very, very quickly. Meaning that to hold on to hearts and minds, security and economic reconstruction have to be pursued simultaneously. There is a brief window of opportunity – at least that is what current research indicates.

But at the same time, the civilian agencies, the civil organizations, the NGOs have become direct targets out there. We saw that dramatically in Iraq in the fall of 2003 with the bombing of the UN headquarters, but it is the same situation in many areas of Afghanistan (and even in the areas where the NGOs are present, arguably, it is a very thin/limited presence). But the key point here is that the civilian actors (the agencies that would normally provide for the economic side of things) have become direct targets and in some areas they are no longer present. Results? The armed forces, the deployed military units are increasingly pressured to take on the task of supporting of reconstruction: state building, capacity building.

Now, the nature of PRTs (the Provincial Reconstruction Teams) in Afghanistan is one example of an attempt to pursue stabilization and economic development/reconstruction at the same. There are also national initiatives. One is the Danish so-called “Concerted Planning and Action Initiative,” through which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs will support reconstruction projects and capacity building initiatives that are implemented/facilitated by the deployed units.

So what are the challenges out there? Very briefly, what is between us and the end state? Well, the Taliban insurgents, the local warlords, the narco-economy, and also non-traditional security problems (or threats) like the fact that we are dealing to some extent with a traumatized society, where engaging and taking initiative/responsibility for decades has been rather futile or outright dangerous. So, clearly, it is a huge challenge to promote local engagement in this process, in moving towards the end state. Almost the total absence of governance capability, ranging from simple things, like people simply not knowing how to hold a meeting, and then to much more serious issues, like corruption. And, finally, of course – priority – Afghanistan is ranking, I think, as the sixth poorest nation in this world. So those are some of the challenges that we are facing out there.

And what kind of instruments do the deployed units have at their disposition when they are trying to overcome/deal with these challenges that lie between us and the end state that we are working towards? Well, again, very briefly. There are four lines of operation (as they would call it in the military). These operations, which can range from taking on the enemy, arresting bad guys, doing weapon searches and sweeps, and so on and so forth, and patrolling of course (showing presence), and down to reconstruction support and governance capacity building. And they are all necessary, as we attempt to move towards a stable and functioning Afghanistan.

And I am going to point to two challenges/problems here, and hopefully that can lead into a discussion. One challenge is that the armed forces will clearly regard line of operation number one as a core competence. We already heard [from Adam Kobieracki] we have not lost a single battle in Afghanistan. True. And the armed forces clearly regard line of operation number one as a core competence. But, going back to the initial remarks, line of operation number four (reconstruction support) is key if we are to win the war. And that is definitely not regarded as a core competence by the armed forces, and you see that in a number of different manners, ranging from the way the units that are assigned to

support reconstruction are trained, and also you see it in the priority that these units are given in the field in terms of access to security, escorts, and so on and so forth. So one challenge here is that the armed forces are reluctant to take on line of operation number four.

And there is one more challenge, which is that, as a matter of fact, to some extent the majority of the resources out there are not – at least at some point in time and in some areas – necessarily invested in any of these lines of operations, but instead go towards force protection (simply protecting ourselves). And that is bad in a sense that it pulls resources from efforts that can actually move us forward towards the end state. It can also – and even worse – have the effect of a vicious cycle, because when we are very, very focused on protecting ourselves and protecting the forces, we do things like driving a little too tactically, a little too fast through the villages, we fly a little bit too low in a helicopter (you fly as low as five meters above ground) and this has effect, of course. Whereas the ride is amazing, it may get unpleasant – and sometimes even dangerous – to the local populations, and then you are in danger of losing the hearts and minds that you really, really need to hold on to in order to complete this mission successfully. So there are a couple of issues there with force protection.

And that brings me to my final remark, which takes us back to NATO: the role of NATO and the Riga Summit. I do not imagine that NATO can tell the contributing nations to lower force protection. I do not imagine that NATO can actually tell the nations to lower force protection. I am not sure we can do anything about that. But maybe NATO could play a role when it comes to convincing national operational commands to take seriously the line of operation number four (reconstruction support, governance, capacity building) – to take it seriously, because – arguably – we are not going to succeed unless we do. And in some areas out there, there is nobody else around, than deployed military units, to take on that task.

So my questions is: is this an issue that is going to come up on the NATO summit (concerted planning and action, enhanced [*inaudible*] – whatever you like to call it)? Is that an issue that NATO will and should try to push vis-à-vis national capitals?

Thank you.