

## Experts Assess the Security and Reconstruction in Afghanistan

Since 2001, NATO- and U.S.-led coalition forces have battled Taliban insurgents in Afghanistan with mixed results. In 2007, an estimated 2,600 people have been killed, a 50 percent increase over last year. Martin Howard of NATO and Barnett Rubin of New York University answered your questions.



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**GWEN IFILL:** Welcome to this week's Insider Forum, produced by the Online NewsHour. I'm Gwen Ifill.

This week, we are taking a look at the situation in Afghanistan. Recently, I interviewed General Dan McNeill, the commander of NATO Forces in Afghanistan, about efforts to fight a resurgent Taliban force in the region for the broadcast NewsHour.

Violence in Afghanistan has increased since 2001, when U.S.-led coalition forces drove the Taliban from power. This year, though, more than 2,600 have died, a 50 percent increase from last year. And Afghanistan's production of poppies, a main ingredient in opium, is at an all-time high. More than 93 percent of the world's opium is produced there.

Here to answer your questions on the reconstruction and security situation in Afghanistan are two guests:

First, we are joined by Martin Howard. He is the assistant secretary general of operations for NATO, a position he assumed in August of this year. He supports the North Atlantic Council and the Secretary General of NATO, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, in the management and political direction of NATO operations.

Also joining us is Barnett Rubin, director of studies and a senior fellow at the Center for International Cooperation at New York University, and director of their program on the reconstruction of Afghanistan. He has also advised the United Nations on the drafting of the Afghan constitution.

Welcome, to you both.

**MARTIN HOWARD:** Thank you.

**BARNETT RUBIN:** Thank you.

**GWEN IFILL:** We want to start out with a -- thank you both -- we want to start out with a question drawn from this morning's headline. We have heard that the Defense Secretary, Robert Gates, has been very critical of NATO's role, Mr. Howard, in Afghanistan, saying that it has not joined with U.S.-led intent in trying to beef up forces and provide more helicopters and more support. I don't know if you've heard about Secretary Gates' comments, but I wonder what your response is.

**MARTIN HOWARD:** I had heard of Secretary Gates' responses, and I haven't actually seen all the detail in the course of the day. I think it's not so much a question of what Mr. Gates saying -- or Secretary Gates saying about what NATO is -- I think NATO itself, its headquarters, feels there are still, you know, some significant gaps to be filled in the -- what's known as the Joint Statement of Requirement set up by our military authorities.

I mean, in true terms, something like 90 percent of that requirement is filled, but the 10 percent that's missing is actually quite crucial, and the elements would include -- be included within that are things like training teams, which are essential to help build up the capacity of the Afghan security forces; infantry battalions to provide extra maneuver forces for Commander ISAF; and, crucially, helicopters. So, in calling for those gaps to be filled, Secretary Gates -- I think he's simply, in many ways, reflecting what the Secretary General has been saying on many occasions. He may have said it very forcefully, but the essential message is the same.

**GWEN IFILL:** Mr. Rubin, what do you say to that?

**BARNETT RUBIN:** Of course -- excuse me -- it's true that the NATO member countries have not met all of their commitments, and that NATO does need to supply more forces. But Secretary Gates is engaging in a blame game on the part of the Bush administration, and trying to shift the blame for their own negligence in Afghanistan onto the Europeans. And that is their political strategy.

Just yesterday -- there was a report in the Los Angeles Times this morning quoting the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff of U.S. military, General Mullen, saying that, "Our main focus is, rightly and firmly, in Iraq. It is simply a matter of resources of capacity. In Afghanistan, we do what we can; in Iraq, we do what we must." And this has been the situation for Afghanistan ever since 2002, because the Bush administration has never

considered it a priority.

Second, while the troops are important, I think we focus too much on the troops. I spoke to a former NATO commander a few days ago, and he said that, while it's true that we need more troops, that isn't a problem. The main problem in the operation in Afghanistan, from the beginning, has been the failure to focus on the political operation and on economic reconstruction and development. Now we are behind in that, partly because we have underinvested in security, but also, we do not have the ability to control areas that we clear of the Taliban, afterwards, because we have so much underinvested in the administration of justice and other aspects of civilian political power.

GWEN IFILL: Well, it sounds like everyone's at least agreed that things aren't going the way they -- everyone would hope, in Afghanistan. Let me get to some of our viewer questions.

The first is from someone in Springfield, Mo., name of J. Saxton. The question is, "Why aren't more NATO troops available for dealing with the mounting problem, the Marines being shifted there? It would have been a good thing."

Mr. Howard?

MARTIN HOWARD: Well, I -- in a sense, I've, sort of, answered that in the -- in the previous question, of -- what we have in NATO is a Joint Statement Requirement, which is a -- the military requirement, as defined by the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, who is the overall commander -- and that is -- is about 90 percent filled. And we've got about 44,000 troops on the ground in Afghanistan. And there has been an increase of about, I think, 10,000 in the last 12 months. But, nevertheless, there are some significant shortfalls, and I described them earlier. We talk about a lack of mobile infantry battalions, a lack of helicopters

But perhaps I could just emphasize the particular importance of actually filling these -- the gaps we have in training teams. And, in a sense, it relates to what Barney said about building Afghan capacity and building the ability of the Afghans to take responsibility. NATO can't do all of that, but one of the things it can do is help build up Afghan army units. So, in many ways, that's the area that I'm most concerned about filling. I mean, obviously we'd like more troops. It's a big country, and 44,000 troops don't go all that far. But we need to, sort of, make sure we calibrate it correctly and recognize what the key priorities are.

## Deaths of civilians in Afghanistan

GWEN IFILL: Mr. Rubin, let me follow up on that with another question from Granville, Ohio, from our viewer, Brendan, who asks, "There are reports that the U.S. and NATO have killed more Afghan civilians this year than the Taliban and al-Qaida. Is the reason for so many so-called 'collateral casualties' the overuse of air power because of the lack of troops on the ground? If not, what is the reason?"

BARNETT RUBIN: First, just with response to the previous question, very briefly, the questioner, while he did mention NATO troops, also asked about shifting marines from Iraq to --

GWEN IFILL: That's right.

BARNETT RUBIN: -- Afghanistan. The decision not to shift Marines from Iraq to Afghanistan was not made by NATO headquarters in Brussels, it was made by the Department of Defense in Washington, D.C., and Arlington [...] Maryland.

Now, as far as this question is concerned, of course I'm not a specialist in military affairs, but I have heard, from military people, that that isn't, in fact, true. In counterinsurgency, of course, in a way, the more -- the more force you have, the less you have to use it, because you get more information and you are able to be present on the ground and target more carefully; whereas, when you don't have enough force on the ground, you may compensate for that with air power, which, by its very nature, is going to be less discriminating.

I think another reason, however, is also that NATO, this year, went on the offensive in Afghanistan, as General McNeill said on your program the other night, and engaged in some areas where, previously, neither NATO nor the coalition had gone, and you've had some much heavier fighting as a result of that.

Finally, the Taliban have learned that Western military forces have rules that prevent them from -- they're -- let me put it this way -- put limitations on their ability to attack targets where there are civilians present; they have to make some kind of calculation about that. And I believe -- I understand from the military that they have systematically started to use "human shields," in a way, knowing that that makes it more difficult for the other side to attack.

Nonetheless, not -- while it's extremely important that NATO and the U.S.-led coalition do as much as they can to lower these civilian casualties, because they are one of the principal recruiting tools of the Taliban.

GWEN IFILL: Mr. Howard?

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BARNETT RUBIN: Also because, of course, they are wrong.

GWEN IFILL: OK. Mr. Howard?

MARTIN HOWARD: I agree with almost everything that Barney says on this subject, except perhaps for the first point, where he implies agreement with the suggestion that somehow we're overusing air power.

I think, as I said, bearing in mind that the large nature of the country and the fact that, actually, we're trying to build up indigenous Afghan capacity to hold things, the use of air power is inevitable and, indeed, is an important part of NATO's concept of operations, and has been from the outset. And as -- and as Barney says, the fact that we have taken the initiative over the last year or so has inevitably meant that there have been clashes and that, occasionally, civilian casualties occur.

I would -- I'd also challenge, I think, the point raised by your questioner which suggests that somehow more casualties -- more civilian casualties have been caused by NATO activity than by terrorists. I don't -- I don't think anyone accepts that as a -- as a fact -- what is true is that no NATO soldier or pilot or anyone else actually deliberately targets civilians in the way that the Taliban has. And that's a separate point from the point that Barney rightly raised, is about the fact that the Taliban have used human shields to deter attack, or, indeed, even, if attack -- if an attack happens, to be able to use that as publicity to damage NATO.

GWEN IFILL: We have talked -- tossed around the term "Taliban" and "al-Qaida" here, and I -- and I -- this leads to our next question. I think, for a lot of viewers and people who have been following this, there's some question about the interrelatedness, if it exists. And this question comes from John Beaudry, in Media, Pa., who asks, "What is the relationship between the Taliban and al-Qaida in Afghanistan?"

Mr. Rubin?

BARNETT RUBIN: Well, first, al-Qaida is an international organization, headed by Arabs from the Middle East, whose headquarters currently is not in Afghanistan, it is in Pakistan, in the federally administered tribal areas. That is where Osama bin Laden and Ayman al-Zawahiri are.

Taliban are a two-nation organization that is -- the Taliban arose in Afghanistan with Afghans largely from -- who had been refugees in Pakistan, and there are now also Pakistani Taliban who are fighting in Afghanistan, in the Pakistan tribal territories, and also now in the settled areas -- that is, the regular administrator -- administered areas of Pakistan.

These organizations do not have the same agenda, but sometimes they collaborate. What -- of course, the al-Qaida originally found refuge in Afghanistan, not with the Taliban, but then, for various reasons, developed a close relationship to it. There is still a distinction between them, but in some areas they collaborate very closely. Al-Qaida provides some, shall we say, technical support and training; and, in particular, we can see their effect in the -- in what Martin said about the much-improved information strategy of the Taliban, something they did not have previously, which they appear to have learned from al-Qaida. Nonetheless, al-Qaida's goals are global, they involve the entire Islamic world, and, in fact, they have a strategy of directly attacking the U.S., Great Britain, and so on.

The Taliban remain a local organization -- in Afghanistan and Pakistan -- who have primarily local aims, but who have been somewhat radicalized by the experience of the last several years; in particular, I might say, by the invasion of Iraq, which tended to prove al-Qaida's point, that the invasion of Afghanistan was not really about terrorism, but about something else.

Nonetheless, the Taliban are not a homogeneous organization. It's a misnomer to call everyone fighting against the government and the coalition and NATO in Afghanistan "Taliban." There are many people fighting for different reasons, and the Afghan government has been recently placing a higher priority on trying to negotiate -- in particular, with some of the not -- less radical and more localized elements of the Taliban insurgency. And it's seen some excess -- some success there.

GWEN IFILL: Mr. Howard, how complicated is it to try to figure out who the enemy is, whether it's Taliban or some subset of the Taliban; al-Qaida, some subset of al-Qaida?

MARTIN HOWARD: Well, I think it is complicated. I thought the analysis that Barney just set out was spot-on. And if you had asked me the same question, I would have said the same thing, but probably not as eloquently.

I mean, as an intelligence target, as an opponent you have to deal with, this is a very difficult organization, or, indeed, set of organizations, as Barney says. When we talk about the Taliban, that tends to encompass people who are very hard-line, who are dedicated terrorists, some of whom have close links with al-Qaida, at one end of the spectrum; and, at the other end of the spectrum, are just people who have been asked to, sort of, pick up -- take up arms for -- perhaps for money -- for a short period of time. I mean, we tend to lump them all together as "Taliban"; whereas, they're very different. And trying to identify who is what, and who are the -- is the real enemy, the most important enemy, is extremely difficult.

I mean, I think that we've got better at that, or NATO has got better at that, over the last few years, because, by



Martin Howard  
NATO

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having people on the ground, the level of tactical intelligence has improved. One of the problems that my own country, the British, had when they moved into Helmand in 2006 was, we had quite a good strategic intelligence picture, but not a very good tactical intelligence picture, because the -- you know, we didn't have any people on the ground. As people have moved in, carried out operations, gained experience, our intelligence has improved. But we shouldn't underestimate the very significant difficulty of identifying who the enemy is in this -- in these circumstances.

## The role of Pakistan

GWEN IFILL: We have alluded, a couple of times in our conversation so far, to the role that Pakistan plays, which leads us to a next line of questioning from -- this one, from Fred Hurley, in Fort McMurray, Alberta, Canada. His question is, "As the father of a Canadian soldier heading to Afghanistan, I am very frustrated by the lack of any coherent strategy by ISAF/NATO to deal with the root causes of this issue, which is Pakistan sanctuary and the support of the Taliban. What is NATO prepared to do about this situation, or is it just more of the same until we get disgusted and go home?"

Mr. Rubin?

MARTIN HOWARD: Sorry, he had --

BARNETT RUBIN: Oh, I thought you had addressed that to the NATO spokesman.

GWEN IFILL: I would have directed it to whoever was next, but I'll go -- I'll go [to] the NATO spokesman; that makes sense.

BARNETT RUBIN: OK.

MARTIN HOWARD: OK. Well, you know -- thank you for that, Barney, yeah.

Yes, I can see where your question was coming from. I mean, there is a definite issue about some areas of Pakistan being sanctuary for some elements of the Taliban. And we're using the word "Taliban" in the shorthand which we're -- to describe this whole complex group of people we talked about earlier.

But at -- that doesn't necessarily imply that this is with -- is with Pakistan complicity. As we speak, at the moment, the Pakistanis are engaged in major operations to deal with militants across their whole border area, and many Pakistani soldiers have been killed, kidnapped, or injured in both these operations and in earlier operations.

In terms of what NATO is doing about it, obviously, NATO's primary focus is inside Afghanistan, and that's absolutely right; but we do have close military links between the Pakistani authorities and the Afghan authorities. And, more generally, we very much encourage the political links between Afghanistan and Pakistan; for example, the recent peace jirga was an important initiative which tried to deal with some of the differences between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which have been very sharp over the last couple of years.

GWEN IFILL: Mr. Rubin, would you like to weigh in on that?

BARNETT RUBIN: Yes. Well, the United States and NATO have not had a coherent policy on Pakistan, starting with the United States, which, from the very beginning, did not prioritize the struggle against the Taliban in Pakistan, and put pressure on Pakistan only to go after al-Qaida, and did not really start analyzing the problem of the Taliban sanctuary in Pakistan until several years later.

The Pakistan military has had a quite complex -- and, at times, confusing -- policy, because, on the one hand, they used the Taliban and other Islamic militant groups for their own purposes in the region, but, at the same time, they also knew that they could be threatened by them. They're now caught in this right now.

What we need right now is -- there's a political turning point in Pakistan that is in the process of going on.

GWEN IFILL: Can I step in --

BARNETT RUBIN: We --

GWEN IFILL: -- and just pose this question to you from one of our viewers? Because it's --

BARNETT RUBIN: Yes.

GWEN IFILL: -- on the same point. She asks, "Why are we focusing on democracy measures instead of putting pressure on Musharraf to go after the Taliban and other violent --"

BARNETT RUBIN: I think the -- it -- there's a very good concern behind that question, but it's mistaken -- but, actually, we're -- improving -- let me -- improving democratic politics in Pakistan, strengthening democratic politics





Barnett Rubin  
New York University

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in Pakistan, would have some very concrete measures in improving security there, and particularly security cooperation with Afghanistan, because the Pakistan military has been the source of the problem in Afghanistan, much more than it has been the solution. Let me explain that a little bit.

There is a whole network of support infrastructure for the Taliban inside Pakistan. While, at this point, it is no longer, as it used to be, run directly by the Pakistani intelligence services, it is run by political parties, with their connected madrassas, who receive the political support of the Pakistan military and intelligence services.

There are now indications, coming from reports in Pakistan, that the military intelligence agency, the ISI, in Pakistan is preparing to rig the elections to assure that those Islamist parties, which have been the military's internal and external allies, will have the balance of power in the next parliament; whereas, a fair and free election would actually marginalize those parties considerably.

In addition, the democratic parties in Pakistan are committed to bringing the federally administered tribal agencies under the control of the regular government and administration of Pakistan rather than leaving them as areas which are really subject to indirect military control and are used as a platform for covert operations against Afghanistan and in Kashmir, as well.

So, I think that it's wrong to think that we can pressure Musharraf into doing more right now, with a military that is quite ambivalent about it, and our best hope in Pakistan is not putting more pressure on them for military action, but on improving governance and enabling a Pakistan government led by civilian political leaders to actually control their own territory.

GWEN IFILL: Mr. Howard, I want to get back to Afghanistan with you. This question comes from Linda Gamso, Leawood, Kan. She references the interview that I did with General McNeill, "The military commander interviewed said that training the Afghan police was a weak part of the work in Afghanistan. Several months ago, a report on Iraq said the same thing, that the police were the weak link in U.S. efforts. Why is the problem with the police? Is it because they interact more directly with the people, who are, themselves, ambivalent about what we're trying to do here?"

MARTIN HOWARD: Well, I think it's an extremely good question, and a -- in -- you know, I think that your correspondent has come up with part of the answer. I mean, it is interesting that the issue of training the police has been a common problem in Afghanistan and Iraq -- and, I would argue actually, going further back in the Balkans, as well.

I think there are a number of reasons for it. One is the reason that's already been mentioned, that, unlike the army, which tends to carry out operations and then goes back into barracks, the police have to operate within the community on a continuous basis. That's much more difficult, to generate that kind of capacity. It leaves individuals, perhaps, more open to intimidation if there are criminal elements or terrorists around, leaves them much more exposed. And, as a result, you know, those individuals need more training, they are not acting -- they're acting not in groups of, like, platoons or companies, but on their own. So, I think that's part of the problem.

A related part of that is that these people are generally more part of the community which they serve. That has advantages, it also has disadvantages if there are criminal elements or if there are -- if there are problems of intimidation within those -- within those tribal structures, for example.

The other part of the problem is, the international community as a whole has got itself quite well set up to support the training and mentoring of armed forces -- I mean, NATO, as an example, had many years -- has had many years of experience at that through working in Eastern Europe, for example, although that's very different from Afghanistan. But there is no real equivalent expertise and experience in building up police forces.

So, I think your caller has put her finger on a very important point for all parts of the international community to improve it.

And I'd go, maybe, one step further and pick up something that Barney said earlier about the importance of developing the justice sector. This seems to me to be very closely related to building up police forces. There's no point in building up a police force if there isn't an adequate justice sector for them to actually relate to.

BARNETT RUBIN: If I could add to that --

GWEN IFILL: Please.

BARNETT RUBIN: -- everything that Martin said is true, but what is also true is that President Bush ran for President in the year 2000 on the platform of "no nation-building," and he adhered to that for quite a long time. Therefore, after a quick military victory in Afghanistan, the United States decided to invest a lot of money and effort in training the Afghan army, which it saw as its partner in counterterrorism, and in training the Afghan intelligence services, which we don't talk about that much, in which it has invested several hundred-million dollars, and it just -- it basically asked other countries to do the nation-building activities that it considered to be less important and not the role of the United States.

As a result, there was no coordinated approach to the security sector, really, for the first five years, and we are



As a result, there was no coordinated approach to the security sector, really, for the first five years, and we are just catching up, very badly -- we're catching up very, very late as a result. General McNeill, in your segment the other night, said that the police are two to two-and-a-half years behind the army. I've heard estimates three to three-and-a-half years. But it's something that is more difficult, for the reasons Martin said, that requires huge investment, and that the U.S. administration neglected for many years.

## Problem of using money effectively

GWEN IFILL: Well, can I follow up with you, Mr. Rubin, on a -- on a spending -- priorities question from David Anderson, in Barrington, N.H.? He asks, "I recall reading a Government Accountability Office report that contained information about the amount of money being spent in Iraq and Afghanistan. There was a real difference in the amount being spent on reconstruction efforts and the amount being spent to finance military activities in the two countries. Should the U.S. be spending more on reconstruction in Afghanistan? And, if so, how would doing so change the situation on the ground?"

BARNETT RUBIN: Well, first, there's always a disparity between how much you spend on -- for military operations by a developed country and how much you spend on development. We don't have to look at Afghanistan, we can just look at the budget of the United States government. We have that same problem domestically. It's just a matter of cost.

In Afghanistan, certainly everyone who's looked at it -- at it in comparative terms has seen that Afghanistan has been the most under-resourced nation-building or peace-building operation of the entire postwar era, and this in a country which actually, although very few people know it, is one of the five or six poorest countries in the entire world. Like -- and -- like -- there's an article in the New York Times this morning about the health conditions in a part of Ghazni, and it's comparable to an area in the poorest parts of Africa; it's not like anywhere else in Asia. And the government is weak for -- similarly weak, as in those countries.

Now, right now I would say the problem is not need for more money. They do need more money. The problem is that the money is there is being used extremely ineffectively, it's being -- most of U.S. aid, for instance, is delivered through contracts with U.S. corporations that have no experience operating in Afghanistan, use their money very wastefully, and it is not part of any strategic plan.

I think this interview is not the place to go into it, but there are some institutions that have been designed by the World Bank, the United Nations, and others, and the Afghan government, that would lead to a much more effective spending of aid, that would be tied much more to developing Afghanistan according to Afghan needs, and that would be tied less to the need of the United States to have its flag -- and other donors, as well, not only the United States -- to have their flags flying on projects that are not actually part of any development plan.

GWEN IFILL: Mr. Howard, I have a question for you from Tim, in Clifton, Va., who asks, "It seems to me that Afghanistan rapidly became the forgotten war, both by the Bush administration and the public. If we can't remember why we went there in the first place -- namely, to capture or kill Osama bin Laden -- then why shouldn't we declare the same victory as in Vietnam, and leave?"

MARTIN HOWARD: I'm not sure I entirely agree that it was the forgotten war. I mean, I'm speaking from my experience here, not only in NATO, but from three years of dealing with Afghanistan, working in the U.K. Ministry of Defense; and I'm -- it didn't seem very forgotten then, I have to tell you.

I think there is a problem, that people forget -- sometimes forget why the -- why the mission in Afghanistan is important. And it wasn't so much about going to capture Osama bin Laden, it is mainly to find a way of ensuring that Afghanistan doesn't become the kind of haven for terrorists and terrorism that it was before the end of 2001.

And so, the mission -- you know, very simply stated -- is about building stability, and building stability through helping establish Afghan institutions and Afghan authority. And that's what -- you know, NATO is making a contribution to that. I mean, ISAF stands for the International Stability Assistance Force. I mean, in a sense, the answer is in the title of the force.

So, I'm not sure I agree it's the forgotten war. But what we do need, I think, to -- or -- is for governments and organizations like mine to continue to explain the underlying reasons why we're there and the underlying rationale for NATO's presence.

GWEN IFILL: We got several questions about the poppy crop and how one deals with the production of opium based in Afghanistan, which I mentioned in the introduction. I'd like to direct this question first to Mr. Rubin, from William Gocella, I believe, in Crossville, Tenn., who asks, "In 2001, the U.S. coalition, or NATO, removed the Taliban from their rule in Afghanistan. The Taliban had forbidden growing and harvesting the poppy plants, as they believed it to be evil and demeaning. After NATO forces secured Afghanistan, ridding them of the Taliban, the people were once again allowed to grow the plants. Why, if this is allowed to happen -- why is this allowed to happen, and why isn't the removal of this drug a NATO and Afghan priority?"



Martin Howard  
NATO

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BARNETT RUBIN: Well, first -- I think there are a number of misconceptions in the question -- first, any -- the problem in Afghanistan is not poppy cultivation. The Taliban are not financing their activities by running a flower shop, and people are not bribing government officials by giving them bouquets of flowers. What -- the cause of the problem is that poppy produces opium, which is transformed into heroin in Afghan, and 80 percent of the money in the drug economy in Afghanistan does not come from growing flowers, it comes from the trafficking in heroin. Therefore, whatever armed groups control the roots of trafficking -- and that includes Taliban in some areas and government officials in other areas -- is able to make huge money in bribes.

Now, it's not true that after the -- first, the Taliban got rid of opium cultivation, they did not get rid of drug trafficking. And, in fact, because they stopped poppy cultivation, drug trafficking became much more valuable, because, when the supply goes -- when the, you know, supply goes down, the price goes up. So, they continue to make money from drug trafficking. As a result of their ban, however, the price of raw opium went from \$40 to \$400 a kilogram, and the Taliban would never have been able to enforce that ban at 10 times the price.

As soon as the coalition forces came in, destroyed the Taliban, it's not true that they allowed people to do it; they had no capacity to stop anyone from doing it, bear in mind -- and it's the same problem with -- actually, as -- previous question about terrorism -- people have a misconception that the way to deal with terrorists is to -- is to go and use military force to capture them, or that the way to deal with the drug economy is to go and destroy the drugs. Both of those are wrong.

The way you eliminate terrorism, and the way you eliminate a drug economy, is by providing rule of law and an effective government so the country can police its territory, and then you don't need to use a military force to arrest a few individuals, and you don't need to use force to stop people from doing things that are illegal, economically, like growing poppy.

So, the fundamental problem in Afghanistan is -- as I said before, it is one of the five or six poorest countries in the world. The one advantage it has over many other countries is that it is better able to produce illegality and insecurity very cheaply; and, therefore, drug production has migrated there. The way to attack the problem is not by attacking the drugs directly, but by integrating the marginalized portions of the Afghan population into a government that is able to offer them security and means to participate in licit economy.

## Turning the illicit into the licit

GWEN IFILL: Michael, in Mosier, Ore., has a follow-on to that question for Mr. Howard, "Why would not it be prudent for the coalition to purchase the poppy crop, as much as it can? This would deprive the Taliban of a major revenue source."

MARTIN HOWARD: Yes, I mean, this, I think, comes down to the idea of somehow making the production of poppy legal, you know, to provide medicines and so on, so forth. And -- Council has made proposals like that. I mean, NATO is not a sort of a drug eradication agency.

And, incidentally, can I say, I've -- I mean, I fully share what Barney says about the rule of law being the key to dealing with the -- with the -- with this issue. That, I think, is a point that's worth repeating.

And I -- the -- all the experts -- and that includes the U.N. -- says that, sort of, actually buying the -- these crops for licit purpose, as opposed illicit purposes, does not actually prevent illicit growth. And what it does, it just encourages people to grow more for both purposes. And it's not really a situation -- the situation in the country is not such that you could organize it effectively, anyway. So, we don't actually think this is a very practical proposition.

BARNETT RUBIN: Could I say, there's a problem of people, especially in developed and rich countries, understanding the situation in a country like Afghanistan, because they do not understand that there is no government in most of Afghanistan. They think that, because Hamid Karzai was elected president, that there's a government in Afghanistan. But, actually, in most of Afghanistan, you cannot find the government, even if you look for it.

Now -- so, if you -- if you -- the -- licensing opium is not just legalizing it for some people, it also means preventing people from growing it who do not have the license. If you say, "We're going to buy the entire amount of poppy that was produced last year as legal opium," there is still absolutely nothing to prevent people from growing all of that and selling it legally, and then, on the side, growing the same amount, or more, and selling it illegally. There's plenty of land for that. Poppy only takes up about 3 percent of the agricultural land in Afghanistan.

The power to license is the power to ban. So, actually, if you want to give people legal crops in Afghanistan, that's an excellent idea, and if there's legal economic activities -- it doesn't have to be opium; you can -- you can buy their cotton, you can put textile factories there. It's not just a matter of agriculture, it's a matter of jobs and incomes.



Barnett Rubin  
New York University

“ They think that, because Hamid Karzai was elected president, that there's a government in Afghanistan. But, actually, in most of Afghanistan, you cannot find the government, even if you look for it. [ ]

GWEN IFILL: I do have a final question, for both of you, which also does speak to this question of what is happening with individuals' lives. The question is, "Is life -- is life improving for the average Afghani on the ground? Can they get work, education, food? Do they have a reason to support NATO efforts? Or is this just the latest army to come in and try to impose rule?"

Mr. Howard?

MARTIN HOWARD: Well, this is a difficult one, because sometimes people's lives are impacted by their perception of security. And the switch, for example, to asymmetric tactics by the Taliban -- suicide bombings, roadside bombings, et cetera, et cetera -- you know, have that -- have that impact.

I think there are -- there are figures out there which have been -- before. I don't have more to hand. But my understanding is that, you know, since 2001, you know, access to health care has, sort of, gone from around about 8 percent to 80 percent of the population, and that the number of children in schools is -- has gone up sixfold. I mean, these are important points. There have been something like -- I can't remember the exact numbers, it's between -- I mean, you know, 2 or 3 million refugees have returned to their homes.

Now, this isn't necessarily all in -- evenly spread across Afghanistan, there are some places where it's more difficult than others, and some places where there's a perception of insecurity which is greater. But, you know, when looked at in those terms, you know, life has improved. And I don't think, if I can turn the question around in another way, that there is any major constituency among the Afghan people for the return of the regime that was there in 2001.

GWEN IFILL: Mr. Rubin, time a brief response.

BARNETT RUBIN: The insurgency is not a referendum. It's true that the national indicators are up, but there are areas -- in particular, the areas where the Taliban are active -- where those services have not been delivered. Again, I recommend looking at the New York Times article this morning about this area of Ghazni, where there are no medical services, no schools, and so on, because the Taliban have been active there and kept the government out, and where they threaten anyone who even accepts that kind of aid.

So, in that area, the people have not benefited from it, even though the national indicators are going up, and they are threatened by the Taliban if they try to benefit from it. So, security for that area has to come first.

GWEN IFILL: This has been a fascinating conversation. I want to thank both of our guests, Martin Howard, of NATO, and Barnett Rubin, of New York University, for helping us shed more light on the situation in Afghanistan.

I also want to thank all of our viewers who took the time to submit a question. We can't get to all of them, but hope that many of them were answered.

Be sure to check back later on our Web site for next week's Insider Forum and your chance to submit questions.

Thank you for listening. I'm Gwen Ifill.