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TRANSCRIPT

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Analysis PART 2 of 2

Analysts Examine Security, Rebuilding in Afghanistan

This year has been the most violent in Afghanistan since the Taliban fell, with more than 130 suicide bombings and more than 2,600 dead. Two analysts discuss the security and rebuilding prospects for the country.



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JIM LEHRER: Judy Woodruff takes the story from there in a discussion that was taped on Friday.

JUDY WOODRUFF: For more on all this, we turn to Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani author and journalist based in Lahore. He writes for the International Herald Tribune and the Washington Post. His latest book is "Jihad: The Rise of Militant Islam in Central Asia."

And Norine MacDonald is the founder and president of the Senlis Council, an international security and development think-tank. She lives and works in southern Afghanistan.

Thank you both for being with us. And Norine MacDonald, to you first. You heard what General McNeill told Gwen about the state of the security situation in Afghanistan. Does that square with what you know it to be?

NORINE MACDONALD, Afghanistan Analyst: Absolutely. What we've seen in the last while in southern Afghanistan is a really dramatic deterioration of the situation. The Taliban now control vast, unchallenged portions of southern Afghanistan, district centers, road networks. In some areas, they have radios, and they have clear control over the opium economy there.

So we've really seen a situation where we're calling on NATO to double their troops, the NATO countries to double their troops on the ground in southern Afghanistan and, in fact, to start moving into Pakistan to get at the al-Qaida and Taliban bases in Pakistan.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Mr. Rashid, how do you see the security situation in Afghanistan?

AHMED RASHID, Journalist-Author: I think the security situation has deteriorated enormously. The Taliban this year have adapted different tactics from last year, and that has bamboozled NATO, in a way. We've got far more suicide bombings, roadside bombings, and attempts to capture remote district towns. And some of these have been very successful.

And I think the main problem that NATO is now facing is that they're not able or they haven't yet devised a way in which how, in the midst of an insurgency, you can carry out development and reconstruction work. The point is that the war is going on, but not sufficient development work is going on. And how do you do this?

An increase in Taliban activity

JUDY WOODRUFF: Ms. MacDonald, we heard the general say that one of the main reasons things have gotten -- the violence has gotten worse is that he said NATO, the NATO troops, are taking the fight to the Taliban and the other insurgents. Is that how you read this?

NORINE MACDONALD: Well, it's going both ways, unfortunately. And what we've seen, for example, is the fight is moving much closer to Kabul. We plotted the area within Afghanistan that the Taliban have been active, and we find a permanent Taliban presence in 54 percent of the country. That's a dramatic increase.

One of the things the general mentioned is the problem with what is, in fact, a U.S.-lead counter-narcotics policy of poppy crop eradication. That's undermining the United States' own military efforts there. And they've really got to rethink and completely overhaul their counter-narcotics strategy in southern Afghanistan to support their own



Norine MacDonald
Afghanistan Analyst

military effort.

JUDY WOODRUFF: And we want to ask you about that in just a moment.

But for right now, Mr. Rashid, let me come back to you. What's your overall sense of why the Taliban is stronger? What are they doing right?

“ We plotted the area within Afghanistan that the Taliban have been active, and we find a permanent Taliban presence in 54 percent of the country. That's a dramatic increase. ”

AHMED RASHID: Well, I think it's very difficult to defeat an insurgency, a guerrilla movement, which has a safe sanctuary. And the Taliban leadership has a safe sanctuary in Pakistan. They're able to bring in new weapons, recruits, ammunition, money, supplies.

And until the Pakistan government shows more determination in ending the sanctuary, I think Afghanistan is going to suffer and NATO troops are going to suffer.

And I think even in the midst of the present political crisis in Pakistan, there has been insufficient American attention and insufficient American pressure on the Pakistani military to end this sanctuary for the Taliban leadership.

I think most people know very well that the Taliban leaders are ensconced in Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan province, just across the border. And until these Taliban leaders are rooted out and this kind of support network that exists there, we're not going to see progress inside Afghanistan.

Life under Taliban rule

JUDY WOODRUFF: Ms. MacDonald, what is life like for those Afghans who are living now, more of them, under Taliban rule? How much freedom to move around do they have?



Ahmed Rashid
Journalist/Author

NORINE MACDONALD: Well, it's a very frightening situation, that's for sure. And some of the locals have told us that they feel compelled now to put one son in the Taliban and one in the Afghan army because they don't know which way this is going to go. And they've told us they feel like they are in the hands of God.

You know, the Taliban have been very clever. The Taliban -- and let's say al-Qaida, as well -- have been very clever. And they've taken advantage of our mistakes in southern Afghanistan, the lack of development and aid, this inflammatory counter-narcotics policy, and, as was mentioned, the civilian casualties from NATO's own bombings.

So we're making mistakes, and they're being very clever. It's a deadly combination.

JUDY WOODRUFF: If all this is the case, Mr. Rashid, what needs to be done?

AHMED RASHID: Well, I think the issue of Pakistan needs to be resolved by NATO and by the American government. I think the international forces in Afghanistan have to find ways and means to carry out development work in the midst of insecurity and an insurgency.

I think there has to be a proper counter-narcotics strategy. In fact, I don't believe the American Army has one at the moment, and the West is divided on what exactly that strategy should be.

And I think what President Karzai needs to do is to improve the performance of his administration. There's enormous Afghan criticism now...

JUDY WOODRUFF: You mean of his administration? Are you referring to the security forces or the civilian...

AHMED RASHID: No, to the civilian administration. There's enormous public criticism in Afghanistan now against the corruption, against incompetence by the Afghan civilian administration, the fact that governors and police chiefs and district chiefs are not working properly, they're not working for the people. And Karzai really needs to tighten this up.

“ There's enormous public criticism in Afghanistan now against the corruption, against incompetence by the Afghan civilian administration [...] And Karzai really needs to tighten this up. ”

Solving the poppy problem



JUDY WOODRUFF: And what would you add to that, Ms. MacDonald? I know a moment ago you brought up the poppy eradication program. What is your plan? We know that your organization is pushing a particular proposal.

NORINE MACDONALD: That's correct. The United States has in front of it a very simple solution to this: The Afghan poppy farmers can continue to grow opium poppy, but for the medicine morphine. There's a global shortage.

The United States has implemented this policy in Turkey and India before, and this could really jump-start a legitimate economy and put the Afghan farmers in a positive economic relationship with the Karzai government.

At the moment, they're in an economic relationship with the Taliban and al-Qaida. And on top of it, this is financing Taliban/al-Qaida operations in the south.

So we're seeing a separation where the United States own failing counter-narcotics policy is undermining the American military effort in Afghanistan. So the president's really got to turn this around, and he's got to do that in the short term.

JUDY WOODRUFF: So explain to us, in a nutshell, how that would work. You're saying you would legalize, you would have them legalize the growing of poppies, but then it would become a crop, a morphine crop?

NORINE MACDONALD: Absolutely, a legitimate pharmaceutical industry. We propose that the Afghan farmers have a village-based license, so if anybody in the village allows their opium poppy to be diverted for heroin, the entire village would lose their license, so they're co-policing each other.

And they'd also have small-scale pharmaceutical-led industry at the village and regional level, so that's a spin-off of other economic value, and moving things up the value chain.

We've been wanting to run pilot projects to test this in the south. We're willing to do that. And this would send a really dramatic, positive message to the locals that the international community is not there to plow up their poppy crops so they can't feed their families, but we're really there to help them, and let us get closer to the people, and make sure that they see our commitment to peace and prosperity in Afghanistan and our commitment to the Karzai government.

JEFFREY BROWN: Mr. Rashid, how would that work, in your view?

AHMED RASHID: Well, I think, you know, the problem is that, yes, she's absolutely right. I mean, it has worked in some countries. But it's worked in countries where there is more state control.

Now, the problem is that in Helmand province, for example, which grows about 60 percent of the poppy in Afghanistan, there is no state control in almost three-quarters of the province.

Now, the question is, I mean, licensing villagers, legalizing the crop, you've got to have an element of state control and order, security forces, police, people who can administer this. And the problem right now in Afghanistan is that there's no such thing.

So I fear very much that those people who would be licensed, but there would be people outside that who would still be growing opium, and you would not be able to do anything about them, because you don't have the security to cope with that.

JUDY WOODRUFF: Well, Ahmed Rashid and Norine MacDonald, we thank you both very much for being with us.

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