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Center for Strategic and International Studies

“Security and Governance in Afghanistan: Needed Actions and Foreign Limitations”

1800 K St, NW, 8 October, 2008, 2pm

The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) hosted the Honorable **Ronald E. Neumann**, former U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan (2005-2007), and **Arnaud de Borchgrave**, Senior Adviser and Director of the CSIS Transnational Threats Project, to discuss the current state of security and governance in Afghanistan. The event was moderated by **Gerald Hyman**, Senior Adviser and President of the CSIS Hills Program on Governance.

Ambassador Neumann began by prioritizing the challenges facing Afghanistan. He said that security is inextricably linked to governance, and cannot be dealt with in isolation. **He said that the security situation has deteriorated significantly in 2007 and 2008.** He noted how easy it is for insurgents to destabilizing certain provinces with little or no U.S. or Afghan troop presence. Also critically important to Afghans is a sense of justice and fairness. **He said the judicial system is woefully underdeveloped, and corruption and cronyism are endemic.** As security and justice improve, development and services will become more important.

Amb. Neumann said there is broad consensus about what needs to be done in these areas, but practical means of implementation are always ignored. He noted there has been much progress in passing judiciary legislation, writing constitutions, and building courthouses, but the impact of these measures on the ground has been negligible. The lack of trained personnel, the massive corruption, and the killing of judges have made implementation impossible. He said that President Karzai has learned to rely on a small group of traditional, familiar actors. To make change palatable, the U.S. must help prioritize the agenda for Karzai and focus on one piece at a time. He said that implementation should be less about strengthening non-existent Afghan institutions and should focus instead on strong competent individual leaders.

Amb. Neumann said the proposed increase of troops to Afghanistan from Iraq does not constitute a ‘surge’, but rather a marginal reinforcement to prevent complete disaster. He said that this year will be a status-quo year, as more troops and equipment arrive and the Afghan army and police force are bolstered. Any positive effects will not be seen until next year.

He noted that the military apparatus is well-resourced, but there is a large deficit on the civilian side. He said we are using valuable military personnel to do civilian development. He called for correcting this imbalance, and having aid and development experts in the field to run their own programs with the authority to contract out work. **He concluded by saying that the Afghans do not like the Taliban; their support for the Taliban has not increased, rather their support for the government has gone down.** He said the U.S. is much more popular in Afghanistan than it is in Iraq, and though we may not succeed, there is no reason at all to be

hopeless. **He described ‘victory’ in Afghanistan as a government with a broad popular base of support that is able to sustain itself in a long conflict.** He said Afghanistan has never had such a government, and it may prove impossible.

Arnaud de Borchgrave said that the basic problem remains the privileged Taliban sanctuaries in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas. The war is unwinnable as long as these persist. He said the transfer of troops from Iraq to Afghanistan is putting good money after bad. **He questioned whether we should commit money and troops for the next 10 years when victory is highly dubious even then.** He noted recent comments by British officials that the war is unwinnable, and said that NATO credibility is at stake if the U.S. cannot convince member states to expand the scope of their missions. De Borchgrave also agreed about the problem of corruption. He said that all Afghan ministers are on the take and have updated U.S. visas in case they have to flee the country.

He then discussed the role Saudi Arabia is playing in mediating high-level meetings between the Taliban and Kabul. **The Saudi initiative would include moderate elements of the Taliban in a coalition government, in exchange for their renouncing support for al-Qaeda.** He believes such an initiative is critical because the Saudis have the rare dual commodities of money and influence.

Ambassador Neumann responded by saying that any negotiated sharing of power with the Taliban would be rejected by both the U.S. and a large number of Afghans. He also questioned whether such a deal would hold, given the record of negotiation betrayal in Afghanistan. However, he said that there is a broad spectrum of views within the insurgency. **Those foot soldiers whose grievances are based on tribal, financial, or other resentments can be dealt with.** He also said he was “highly unimpressed” by the recent British comments, and said the British have not been of considerable help in dealing with the Afghans. Neumann also agreed about the critical need to help Pakistan deal with the tribal sanctuaries.