Good evening. I’m really delighted that Ambassador Brahimi was able to come here today, he’s come hotfoot from Pakistan and Afghanistan, where he has been leading and helping to mediate the negotiations towards, maybe, one day a settlement in Afghanistan. I think if anyone at all can help to solve this totally intractable conflict, Lakhdar Brahimi has to be the man. He has spent such large chunks of his professional life dealing with conflict resolution in many parts of the – certainly, the third world. When we first met, which goes back a terribly long time, I hate to say, he was the representative of the FLN, the Algerian Liberation Front and I think he was very active at the United Nations when I was just beginning as a cub reporter but I do remember the day when Algeria became independent by which time he was already working for the provisional government and there were great celebrations at the United Nations. Ambassador Brahimi really has not looked back since that time, always focusing on foreign affairs.

I think for more than 20 years, Mr Brahimi served the Algerian government as foreign affairs specialist in a variety of capacities. He was ambassador in Egypt between 1963 and at the same time Algeria’s representative in the Arab League which was based in Cairo. Then he had a long spell in London as Algeria’s ambassador in London and I remember he lived in a particularly beautiful Regency house where he was very hospitable. And then in 1984, I think you went back to Cairo, at that time as deputy secretary general of the Arab League and in that capacity you helped to mediate and settle the conflict – the civil war in Lebanon – the end of a very long conflict. After that he had a spell as the Foreign
Minister of Algeria and since 1993 although he claims that he's technically retired, he has been a trouble-shooter for the United Nations secretary general. And in that capacity he, I have to look at the list of all the places where he's been, but it includes Zaire before it became the Democratic Republic of the Congo. He was in South Africa leading the UN observer mission at the South African elections which led to the election of Nelson Mandela. Then he mediated in the civil war in Yemen. He was head of the UN mission in Haiti, he has mediated between Nigeria and the Cameroons, he has been in Burundi, Sudan and last, but not least, before Afghanistan, he has more than a passing interest in Iraq and has been in Iraq on various missions. He's been trying to address the Afghanistan conflict since last year and will continue to work on that conflict. Afghanistan poses so many issues, so many questions. There have been so many Special UN Representatives. We're now going to hear whether Ambassador Brahimi thinks that he can bring a solution where so many others before him have failed and we look forward to hearing him on that (applause).

**Speaker:** Thank you very much indeed, Hella Pick. It's a pleasure to be back at London, Chatham House and it is a great honour to speak in front of this audience, where I see so many familiar faces of people I'm really intimidated to speak in front of them. I hope that you, Hella Pick, and everybody else will be indulgent. A lot of people asked the same question Hella just asked. Some are more polite, some less polite than Hella has been saying, you know you are the fifth or the sixth – I don't know I'm afraid how many we've seen – special envoy of the secretary general to Afghanistan. Why the hell do you think you can be more successful than anybody else? And the answer is that I don't – I am not too sure at all that I am going to be more successful. If anything, I have been foolish enough to accept this assignment just because I believe the UN and those who accept work for the UN have to accept this kind of challenges. And it's not terribly easy, but I think it is a big honour and a privilege to serve the international community in places like this. But I wish that Chatham House had invited me long ago to speak about Afghanistan. In particular, I wish I had been here in October. Why October – because a British distinguished diplomat – and I hasten to say, it's not Lord Wright and not any of the other diplomats present here – told me that in the Foreign Office, they have a practice whereby they ask their ambassador to write a report after three months after he reaches the place where he is assigned. And they consider this as the most important report the ambassador sends because after three months, the ambassador has a very clear view of what the situation in the country where he is serving is and therefore his report is full of certainties and definitive truths. After some time spent in that country, then he becomes a little bit
more hesitant because he knows too much, because he hates the damn place (laughter) or because he likes it too much and therefore the reports he sends after that are useless. So had I been here in October, I would have told you some very, very important and final truths about Afghanistan and how the problem should be solved. Now it’s a bit too late (laughter).

Then somebody else, again a British diplomat – and I’ve learned a great deal from British diplomacy in my years here and before and after – warned me about these kind of certainties. And he told me another story of a man who went to bed very late and woke up suddenly and in a flash saw that he understood the meaning of life. And it was just like those very simple mathematical formulas, something very, very simple. So he came out of his bed, went to his desk and wrote this beautiful truth and went back to sleep. When he got up in the morning, he had a headache, but he realised that he had this flash in the evening, so he rushed to his desk and read what he had written. And he found that he had written, I am dead drunk (laughter). So perhaps after all, it’s not bad that I didn’t come in October (laughter) to speak about Afghanistan.

So the subject of Afghanistan has been on the map and in the press for many, many years and as somebody was telling me just before we came down here, there was a great deal of excitement and interest in Afghanistan as long as it was a big struggle in Afghanistan between good and evil, between the evil empire as a matter of fact and those who opposed it. But once the Soviet Union was defeated and expelled, I don’t think that there was a great deal of interest anymore for Afghanistan. And people have got used to seeing small items in the press about the usual in Afghanistan, fighting, casualties and human rights abuses. Afghanistan is indeed, a complex political emergency, as we say these days, but I would be very reluctant to compare it with say, Somalia or former Yugoslavia or with any other situation. If it were absolutely necessary to make a comparison, I would rather mention Lebanon and perhaps Yemen in the sixties but I would much prefer to underline the unique character of Afghanistan and I believe that these situations of so-called failed states are unique, each one of them. No two situations are alike and people like myself, who have to struggle with these situations need to constantly remember that they navigate through the muddy waters of such conflicts with no instruments. I used to say in Lebanon it is navigation by sight. Be that as it may, the breakdown of the state structures and the authority has been accompanied by continuing conflict and civil strife, widespread destruction and violence, large numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons, an overall humanitarian crisis of huge proportions.
The recent World Food Programme Report of starvation in the Hazarajat region in Central Afghanistan is but the last evidence of this human tragedy. The initial response of the international community, as I said just a while ago, to the Afghan crisis was typical of the Cold War era. The Soviet Union and the USA being on opposite sides, the Security Council could simply not touch it. The General Assembly adopted numerous resolutions, which were used as justifications by countries sympathetic to the Afghan resistance and opposed to the Soviet Union for mounting a huge logistical support operation to the Mujahedeen. Billions were spent notably by the United States and Saudi Arabia and Pakistan generously offered its territory to both the refugees and the fighters. The US were fighting the evil empire, the Saudis were helping fellow Muslims and the Pakistanis were all at once helping a neighbour in need and protecting what General Zia ul Haq and his successors to this day call their strategic depth.

The truth of the matter is that Afghanistan has been in a state of war since 1979 when the Soviet invasion occurred. Very few countries have had to endure a conflict of this duration. During the struggle to overthrow the Soviet-backed regime in Kabul, an immense amount of arms and military supplies entered Afghanistan from both sides, both from the Soviet Union and from the parties opposed to the Soviet Union. Quite a few of those arms were ordered by the Afghans and are being used today. With the end of the Cold War, Afghanistan has lost much of its former strategic importance and the interest of the world has lessened. The amount of destruction these arms produced is beyond description and I see that there are some people who know Kabul and the rest of Afghanistan much better than I do and they can tell you how very sad it is to see what has been done. I think, I have read somewhere that the Russians and the fighting, subsequent fighting has led to the partial or total destruction of something like 20,000 villages and the city of Kabul was destroyed by those who had liberated the country from Soviet occupation, taking turns as it were, each one to destroy their share of their capital. During this period, 15,000 civilians were killed in Kabul alone, more than in Sarajevo where at the time, that's between 1992 and 1994, the world's attention was focused.

The Kalashnikov culture still reigns supreme in Afghanistan today and the Ambassador of the United States, Bill Richardson, when he went there told us that he was approached by a boy of 13 who told him proudly that he was the commander of a group of 60 fighters. Alongside this culture of the Kalashnikov, there is also the drug culture which has emerged and today the poppy fields of
Afghanistan constitute one of the largest sources of narcotic drugs in the world. As a matter of fact, Afghanistan has become now by far the biggest producer of heroin in the world and it’s not 10 percent or 15 percent. They produce about 50 percent of the heroin in the world. And it seems that in Britain, 80, 85, 90, yesterday I heard, percent of the drugs sold on the high streets come from Afghanistan, in the rest of Europe its 70, 75, 80 percent. The Afghan State was always a weak one, but under the weight of successive military coups in the seventies and of 20 years of conflict after that, it has now totally collapsed. Routine services generally associated with a functioning state do not exist or are carried out mostly by international agencies. Millions of Afghans rely on external humanitarian assistance and as many as three million remain outside of the country as refugees. Another major consequence of the conflict is that Afghanistan has now fragmented along ethnic lines. The Taliban movement, which now controls 70 percent, maybe more of the territory is primarily Pashtun, the majority ethnic group from which Afghanistan’s rulers have traditionally been drawn. Most of the refugees who fled to Pakistan and many of those who are in Iran were also from this ethnic group. The minority ethnic groups particularly the Tajiks, Hazaras, Uzbekis are concentrated in the north and the centre of the country. They are no longer content to accept Pashtun supremacy and various factions, a total of seven in fact, representing these groups and former Mujahideen parties have formed the Northern Alliance which controls most areas north of the Hindu Kush.

Today, Afghanistan is controlled by these two sides, the Taliban and the Northern Alliance which for the past two years have been engaged in active warfare with one another. There are therefore ethnic as well as other dimensions to the conflict. The Taliban are united by the ideology of a very unique brand of Islamic fundamentalism and their efforts to transform Afghanistan, particularly the role they envisage for women have aroused great controversy. The Northern Alliance contains some elements which espouse an equally militant version of Islam, but it also contains more secular parties. The chief characteristics of the Northern Alliance, however is its instability. With saddening regularity fierce fighting breaks out between different factions and even within factions, often over the control of Mazar-i-Sharif, the last city in the north which is outside of Taliban control. The Taliban by contrast have succeeded in establishing firm control over their areas which are largely safe and free of crime. The Taliban have indeed, been quite effective in collecting weapons from those with no need for them and they bitterly complain that they have received no credit for bringing stability to their areas. They find it difficult to understand why the United Nations refuses to recognise
them and instead allows the previous regime of Professor Rabbani to continue to occupy the Afghan seat at the United Nations.

Afghanistan also has a civil society, both within the country and in exile. We are, of course, in constant contact with many of these groups, ranging from women's associations, to supporters of the former king, to a wide variety of political parties and NGOs. The fervent desire of all of these groups is for peace and the return of normalcy after all these years of continuous warfare. There is no doubt in my mind that the vast majority, indeed, I think the overwhelming majority of the Afghan people, if given a chance, would opt for peace. But peace remains elusive and the people of this tragic country remain hostage to a small heavily armed minority which has the ability to continue their aims through war. The international dimensions of the Afghan crisis are fundamental to understand the past as well as provide an insight into the future. Those who invaded this country and those who spent billions of dollars arming their favourite factions during the eighties have a large responsibility, moral and otherwise for the destruction and devastation that has befallen Afghanistan. But it has proven difficult to maintain the interest and support of the international community for a peaceful settlement of the Afghan conflict. If public statements and various resolutions and recommendations adopted in the UN itself and elsewhere – if many public statements and various resolutions and recommendations have been adopted in the UN itself and elsewhere, the UN has been assigned the lead and the UN has been assigned the lead peace-making role in Afghanistan, it remains however, that not all the members of the international community are really interested in peace for Afghanistan or supporting peace in Afghanistan.

The UN has a long history of involvement with the Afghan conflict and was responsible in particular for the 1998 Geneva Accord which led to the Soviet withdrawal, which was completed the following year. In his report to the General Assembly in November 1997, the secretary general spelt out the doubts we all have about the commitment of the many countries to peace in Afghanistan and bluntly said things to the effect that those countries best equipped to help the UN achieve peace are in fact helping keep the conflict ablaze. Those of us who are directly involved on behalf of the UN are of course guided in the first place by resolutions and decisions of the Security Council and the General Assembly, which have repeatedly in recent years expressed grave concern at the continuing conflict in Afghanistan and have called upon the Afghan parties to cease all armed hostilities, arrange a ceasefire and enter into a negotiating process leading to the formation of a fully representative transitional government of national unity. But
we cannot lose sight of the harsh realities to which the secretary general alluded in his 14th November 1997 report. The wide-ranging consultations with a wide variety of Afghans and other interested parties, which I have conducted myself during the last few months, confirm these assumptions and lead me to believe that peace in Afghanistan will not be possible unless all arms and ammunition supplied to the warring factions are stopped. But an embargo on arms can only succeed if the neighbouring countries actively assist in enforcing it and work together to do so. Furthermore, it is now evident that no single faction can, at the present or in the foreseeable future, govern the totality of Afghan territory by itself. It is equally self-evident that all Afghan factions must make significant progress in the area of human rights, particularly the treatment of women and minority groups, in order to attain a sustainable peace, international recognition and the full-scale resumption of reconstruction and development assistance.

In the case of Afghanistan, the challenge for the United Nations is therefore to garner support from important member states and other groups to use as leverage with the parties. I am convinced that progress will not be made until all of the neighbours of Afghanistan are fully committed to the peace process and this is far from being the case at present. For the past few months, the priority task for the UN has been to try to convince these neighbours, who happen to be those most affected or threatened by the fighting that it is in their best interest to work for peace. Although we have no direct hard evidence to prove it, it is most likely that some groups in all of the neighbour countries benefit, financially and otherwise, from the continuation of the conflict. But it can be demonstrated I think that no great strategic and other benefits can be derived for these nations as such from the pursuit of a military solution. If the modern history of Afghanistan demonstrates anything, it is that this country cannot be controlled by outsiders. The Russians and I think the British one century earlier (laughter) are there to confirm this lesson.

These factors have led the UN to develop a regional approach to the ending of the conflict. Last year, we formed a contact group for Afghanistan consisting of all its immediate neighbours plus Russia and the United States. The group has come to be known as the Six Plus Two Informal Group. The Six Plus Two formula has been only moderately useful. It has not yet yielded all its potential benefits and although a common understanding has now been developed, which is reflected in a common document which was annexed to the most recent report of the secretary general. In this document it is recognised that the war has gone for far too long, that the faction leaders seem unprepared to initiate peace talks, that
involvement of outside powers has exacerbated the situation and that the time has come for all UN members, starting with the members of the Six Plus Two to put pressure on their Afghan clients and friends to encourage a peaceful solution. It is also the common view of the group that Afghanistan needs a single, fully representative government, an improved record in the field of human rights, consideration should be given to ways to curb the flow of arms into Afghanistan and finally it was agreed that the United Nations as a universally recognised intermediary must continue to play a central and impartial role in the international effort towards a peaceful resolution of the Afghan conflict. To date however, only the United States has consistently and aggressively used the points agreed upon in discussions with the Afghan parties and other interested parties. The sad truth is that it is far from certain yet that all members of the Six Plus Two Group are entirely committed to these principles and therefore to ending the war. As the secretary general asserted, as I said a while ago, in his report to the General Assembly in November, the war in Afghanistan could not have continued this long without the active support of outside powers.

The most recent meeting of the Six Plus Two Group took place last week in New York. Discussions there focused on how to make the group more effective and one idea which was floated during this meeting was the convening of a higher level meeting in the region to give impetus to the peace process. There was also renewed consideration of the modalities for an arms embargo. The validity of the regional approach was confirmed during our most recent visit to Afghanistan and the region in March and April of this year. In Uzbekistan, there was great concern about the potential spill-over of the war in Afghanistan. In fact such a spill-over is already evident. Turkmenistan was equally preoccupied and in addition remained very disappointed that construction of oil pipelines in which it has a great interest are being delayed because of the unrest in Afghanistan. Iranian officials are increasingly concerned about the calculation of export of crops from Afghanistan used to make narcotic drugs. In fact, a bumper crop is expected this year and Iranians are affected by the drug mafias and young Iranians are vulnerable to the lure of drugs. As a matter of fact I read only today that just like in Pakistan there is as many as perhaps three million drug addicts in Iran and this is a direct consequence of the Afghan conflict. In Pakistan, which is obviously the most important country, both in terms of influence it can bring to bear and in terms of the impact of the war in Afghanistan on the country, every aspect of society in Pakistan, be it political, economic or social has been and is being profoundly affected by this war. Just one indicator is the drug addiction in Pakistan which seems to be increasing all the time. It is now estimated as I just said that it is
three million. Some people say as many as five million young people have got
this addiction whereas ten, 15 years ago, there was 200,000 drug addicts in
Pakistan.

I think I will not take too much of your time speaking about the meetings that have
taken place in Islamabad of the Steering Committee except to say that these
meetings, first in one year that the two sides have accepted to sit together, were
made possible in the first place thanks to the personal intervention of the prime
minister of Pakistan which shows how influential this neighbouring countries and
in particular Pakistan are. In the second place, the thought that after we took this
over and secured the agreement in principle of the parties to this meeting, the
Americans have accepted to come in, in a highly visible visit to Afghanistan, the
first since the Soviet Union left the country and accepted to support what we were
doing and confirm the agreement of the parties to meet in Islamabad. The
meeting has adjourned without any results and we are not sure whether it will be
resumed or not. We are doing our very, very best to make it restart again and we
are mobilising as much support as we can for that. But at this moment, the last
discussion I had with our people in Islamabad this morning, we're not at all certain
that this effort is not again a false start in this very sad, long conflict.

Is the Afghan conflict ripe for resolution? The simple answer to that question is
that I don't know. But then common sense tells us that no conflict, no matter how
intractable, can continue indefinitely. This ripeness theory, if we might call it that,
holds that conflicts can only be resolved when both sides begin to experience pain
in more or less equal measures. In Afghanistan, neither of the parties is prepared
to abandon the war option nor is it certain yet that those who support the war
effort on each side are ready to encourage seriously their clients to move towards
peace. The Taliban, which has scored remarkable advances in a short period of
time have no inclination to compromise and the Northern Alliance was buoyed by
its success in repelling strong Taliban attacks on its territory and may be tempted
to go for another round to redress the balance in their favour. These equations
may be beginning to change. The intensive fighting among the different factions
of the Northern Alliance have taken severe toll and considerably weakened their
resolve. They are now more interested in talks with the Taliban because they
would have more to gain from a ceasefire and the beginning of a peace process.
As for the Taliban, they continue to proclaim their conviction that they can achieve
military victory, but there are signs that their movement may have reached its
peak and that some of their leaders are starting to have doubts whereas their
troops, mostly volunteers, are starting to show battle fatigue. Be that as it may, it
is the fate of the UN and I think its honour that it shall continue to work for peace and to call on others to join in with the UN to liberate the people of Afghanistan from the terrible burden of this conflict. Thank you very much indeed (applause).

Chair: Thank you very much indeed. I won't keep anybody now and just throw it open to questions except that I forgot to point out before when I introduced Ambassador Brahimi that anyone who wants to read about Afghanistan as well as listen to him should get the new issue of “The World Today” where with Michael Keating has written an article entitled, “Principles Clash in Afghanistan.” I think it's available outside – is it? So anyone who wants to [unclear 37.52], it'll be there. Thank you. Now I'll throw it open to questions. We've got until 6.30, but if there are a lot more questions than we can accommodate in that time or rather answers, Ambassador Brahimi is willing to stay on for a little longer. Obviously anyone who wants to leave at 6.30 is free to go as is the custom here. Thank you. Would you please say, give your name and who you are please?

Question and Answers

Participant: [Unclear 38.23]. From my discussions with Afghanistan – with people we have seen that there is an increasing antipathy to allowing their sons to fight the Taliban and increasing independence from the Taliban on the part of tribal leaders. Can you say a bit more about this and whether you feel that this is a positive trend in terms of the peace process?

Speaker: Yes, thank you very much for pointing that out. We've had several indications that the Taliban are finding it more and more difficult to get young people to join their ranks. And even in Kandahar, which is their birthplace and where the leadership sits, there was open conflict and open confrontation with families of people who didn't want to let their young join them. There are stories, I think very reliable, although of course we have no evidence of it that now many people are coming, the people who are joining the ranks of the Taliban are coming more from the refugees in Pakistan rather than from the villages in Afghanistan. This is definitely an interesting development and hopefully something that will encourage the Taliban leadership to think a little bit more of a peaceful solution as opposed to military victory.

Participant: I'm [unclear 40.15] from Afghanistan and I was for seven years the spokesperson for the [Afghan Mujahedeen? 40.20] here and even if I sneezed, people would say that yes, you're right, we support you. And then, all of a sudden, we lost all the
support and the answer I hear is it’s no more an international problem; it has to be solved by the Afghans. And I don’t think the Afghans can solve it and you very well said it is not an Afghan problem because people do interfere. And there’s a difference between help and interference. But now I see that we talk about the heroin, which is a big problem in Europe. Can’t we do something to encourage European countries to help us solve it because as long as the war continues it is not possible to stop that? And also about women’s problems which is very popular today in the West, it is a direct result of what’s going in Afghanistan and it cannot be stopped without the ceasefire and I would like to—

Speaker:

Well, I’m sure you all know the answer to first part of your question, why people have lost interest. They were fighting the Soviet Union. They defeated the Soviet Union, so they went home. But the problem is that your people continued to fight one another unfortunately and in that people were polit to say that it’s not an international problem. People who were interested in Afghanistan because they would help weakening and helping destroy the Soviet Union were not terribly interested in which Afghans kills which other Afghan. It’s as cruel and as simple as that. There is now renewed interest because of the attitude of the Taliban to women – that is definitely one of the reasons and because of drugs. There is a growing important interest of the international community and of Western Europe. I’m sure you have seen the common position adopted by the European Union with the beginning of the British presidency in January and the British presidency has taken this position, which is very strongly in support of the UN, peace, end of the war, drugs, women, everything. There is everything in that resolution. More important than adopting that resolution, the British presidency has taken that to all the Afghan parties and to all the parties interested, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, India, Uzbekistan and the other northern neighbours of Afghanistan and so on.

The Americans are now very highly visible. The visit of Richardson to the area is but the visible part of the iceberg. There is growing interest because of the oil and gas in Central Asia and the interest in taking this oil out through southern routes rather than through the traditional way, which is Russia, because of the interest in women. You remember the statement made by Mrs Albright in Pakistan about the despicable attitude of the Taliban to women and the very clear statement that we will not recognise the Taliban government as long as their attitude is the way it is. So there is growing interest of the international community. How are you going to translate that into actual clout to make the parties listen? My contention there is that you cannot do it. Even Western Europe, all of Western Europe and the United States cannot do it unless there is strong, committed cooperation from the
neighbours of Afghanistan and in particular, Iran and Pakistan. If these two countries are really committed to peace and work together because if they are committed to peace with different objectives that will not take us very far. But if they work together, I think then we will have a peace process that will work immediately. And what I've been saying is that if I go to Afghanistan as a representative of the secretary general, meaning the envoy of the international community, which is Europe, Canada, Brazil and so on, nobody will listen to me. People will listen to me when I am the representative of Iran, Pakistan and the other neighbours of Afghanistan. And this is what we are saying now very publicly, putting these countries before their responsibilities and we are extremely grateful to Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif for his intervention and we are asking him to stay on. You know it's not going to be solved just because Mr. Nawaz Sharif has asked Mullah Mohammad Rabbani to Islamabad and had made an agreement with him for a steering committee to sit in Afghanistan for one week. It needs much more sustained commitment and support and pressure on the parties from Pakistan. Same thing from Iran because they are supporting the Northern Alliance and [break in recording 46:04-46:09] they will be listened to and if Pakistan and Iran go together and say this is what we want then we will have peace the next day.

Chair: Sandy Gall.

Participant: Sandy Gall. Would you agree that since the Taliban is the most effective military force largely because of support from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, would you think that the main effort must be made on Pakistan and possibly on Saudi Arabia, not to support the Taliban as much as they have in the past, because since they are most powerful, if they stop fighting then the others will stop fighting I would have thought. The others have got their backs to the wall, therefore they're bound to fight. Otherwise if they don't fight, they'll be dead tomorrow. So it would seem to me that the pressure has got to be on Pakistan particularly to persuade the Taliban to get them negotiating.

Speaker: Unfortunately, it's not that simple because there are no good guys among these [laughter] factions and if the other side senses that Pakistan, for example, were putting the squeeze unilaterally on the Taliban, they would not stop fighting, because you know the situation will change immediately. Just as the Taliban took Kabul, Massoud can retake Kabul, if the Taliban weakened just a little bit. And the Northern Alliance or some of them will probably not stop fighting just because the Taliban have weakened. So there are no good guys. These people I
compare to hostage takers, all of them, because they are keeping hostages. There’s a big prison called Afghanistan and each side is keeping one gate closed with the people of Afghanistan being strangled inside. So the effort has to be at the same time from all sides. Hence, the all-important necessity of improving relations, creating confidence and cooperation between Pakistan and Iran, countries that have had very good relations for very long. Nothing separates them except – I think nothing separates them except Afghanistan and it makes sense for their respected friends to tell them to sit down and solve this problem and talk together and act together. Otherwise I don’t think we will get anywhere.

**Participant:** [Unclear 48.45] from the Pakistani Foreign Ministry. I represent a group which can be called the doves in the foreign ministry. As you accurately pointed out, there have been different groups [unclear 48.59] even in the Pakistani establishment who are either for or against continuing the war and I represent the dove element. My only concern with your plan for the arms embargo is that given the [unclear 49.14] given the political instability even on the Pakistan side of the border, this might not be workable.

**Speaker:** Yes, you we have prepared with the support of the US and also a contribution from Russia a document called “Options for an Arms Embargo.” But as a matter of fact we agree 100 percent with you that an arms embargo will not work. It will not work 100 percent; it will not work probably 70 percent if there are people that are willing to send arms [unclear 49.53] but if there are no people willing to send arms, this is where you need this cooperation between Iran and Pakistan. If Iran is satisfied that Pakistan is not going to send arms or will do its very best to prevent arms from going in – the Afghans are past masters in smuggling and some arms will go through anyway. But I think if this signal goes to the parties that Iran and Pakistan are now determined to work together for peace and neither of them is going to support their client one way or the other, then we will not need to impose an embargo. I think we will move and this meeting in Islamabad will work much better than it has during the last week.

**Chair:** So many arms going up at once. This one please.

**Participant:** [Unclear 50.51] from Christian Aid. Ambassador, I wonder if you could take the United States as the major stakeholder [unclear 50.59] some of the pressures on the US from Pakistan and Unocal, the [unclear 51.03] majority and the post-election Iranian [unclear 51.07] and just give us a view of what is moving the United States [unclear 51.11].
No, I would not presume to explain the policy of the United States, even on Afghanistan (laughter). I didn’t mean it that way (laughter). But I will say that we are working with the United States, with the State Department extremely well. I think Afghans are very suspicious people and others too. As you know, a lot of people who are absolutely convinced that the United States was actually supporting the Taliban, the Iranians in particular. The Iranians will not believe you, would not believe six months ago if you told them that what was happening in Afghanistan was anything but the following. Saudi Arabia and Pakistan have helped create the Taliban out of nowhere, just to have a strong extremist Sunni fundamentalist regime in Kabul that would be anti-Iran. But I think now they have seen that the United States has no favorites in this present conflict in Afghanistan and would like to have peace, perhaps to help Unocal have their pipeline through Afghanistan or for some other reason. But I think they have shown and in particular during the last visit of Richardson that they are cooperating with us a 100 percent, as a matter of fact better than anybody else in trying to work out the peace formula for Afghanistan.

John Dickie.

Thank you very much, Chairman. John Dickie from Oxfam.

Very nice to see you again.

As a longstanding observer of diplomacy and the way it is practised, I’d like His Excellency to explain the differences of operating as a member of the United Nations to that of being an envoy of the government and what special skills or resources are more useful [unclear 53:25] being an UN envoy. And in that connection with all due respect to Lord Wright, I wonder if the experience of the wolds of the Foreign Office 25 years ago (laughter) [unclear 53:39-53:44] the Chatham House rule (laughter).

Well, to start with the end of your statement, I’m very proud of the years I have spent here and I have learnt a great deal from my friends including Lord Wright and a lot of others, Michael [unclear 54:05] who is here and I have learnt also from a lot of other people in London including the press and you in particular. So definitely yes, this is a very highly civilised country with an incredible tradition in diplomacy and I definitely have learned very, very much from being here. It is very different to work for one government or 185. So when you are dealing in
these kind of situations, as I told you it is very much navigation by sight. I think I'll have to think about one week or so before I can give you one or two ideas of what you need to do, except that instinctively one remembers what one has forgotten and acts. Sometimes you are right and sometimes you get it right and sometimes you get it wrong. I think we'll have to sit down next time I'm here and maybe you can tell me how – what's the difference between working for the UN and working for a national government.

Chair: Well, it is 6.30 now so if anyone is in a rush to leave, they may but in the meantime –

Participant: This is not a walkout.

Chair: I see a lot more hands up. Yes.

Participant: [Unclear 55:52] from Amnesty International. I welcome and really, it is a great encouragement on the involvement of outside powers [unclear 56:02] and placing really, such an emphasis on the role that they play in the country. If we kind of look at that in a wider perspective, we see that the countries have a direct kind influence over the Afghan actions and there's also a conflict in the region which has risen out of kind of implicated – outlook as well as an international outlook. So do you see your role as having to – well, see something of an end to that conflict in order to – what I'm talking about is the conflict between Iran and the United States. To what extent does this [unclear 56:50] to what extent do you feel that that conflict is going to hamper your efforts in solving the Afghan conflict?

Speaker: That's a very important question, but let me put it this way. We have been very much aware of the sensitivity of that situation. The United States, as the only supporter we have left, has to be involved if we are going to solve a problem like the one in Afghanistan. As a matter of fact, I don't see which conflict in the world can be solved without the United States. I tell my friends in the State Department that these days if one has an argument with his wife, he has to go to the Americans and ask them whether you know they can make it up or not [laughter]. So we were much aware of that sensitivity. And to make a long story short, we are now in a situation where the two sides have no objection to working in the same direction for peace in Afghanistan and they are sitting in the Six Plus Two Committee, which is no secret any more. It has been written about in many newspapers including the “Financial Times.” They are coexisting within this group very well. So the problems or the fears we had are no more on that score.
Chair: I think there are some questions over there.

Participant: [Unclear 58.48] BBC World Service. Do you think there's any chance that the [unclear 58.53] profit from oil and gas might actually be key to solving this? And can the Central Asian states that have these resources and might wish to export them; is there a role for them to play? I mean, in other words, can we find an inducement to people that [unclear 59.08]?

Speaker: Well, you cannot deal with this situation in Afghanistan these days after the end of the Cold War, after the independence of these countries, after seeing that these countries want to get their mineral resources through ways, routes that are different from the traditional routes. So you cannot deal with the Afghan situation without having that in mind. But a chicken and egg situation. Is the solution of the problem in Afghanistan going to make it easier for these riches to be exploited or is the exploitation of this wealth going to solve it? I don't really know and you probably have to work in both directions.

Turkmenistan, who probably has more stakes than anybody else because they built a great deal of hopes on a pipeline going through Afghanistan are very disappointed that it's not taking place and are saying let's do it because this will encourage and make peace more possible and easier to achieve. But then I don't know whether you are going to find many people willing to put in $2 billion to build a pipeline before they are sure that nobody is going to blow it up. Then you have the Iranian dimension. Iran is very suspicious, not of the economic side but of the fact that this is not — from their point of view, this is not seen as an economic alternative but as something to prevent Iran from benefiting from this situation. Hence once more, the necessity for Iran and Pakistan to talk together. If Pakistan goes and signs with Unocal and the Taliban then they have to talk to Iran and make sure that Iran is reassured, maybe interested, maybe participate in this project.

Chair: You have not talked about China.

Speaker: Yes, I will talk about China. You see China has a very small border with Afghanistan, about 70 kilometres or something and they are sitting on Six Plus Two Committee. It's still passive until very recently, slightly less passive now and we have convinced them to give us a military officer to join our group of observers. So we are dragging China in. But they are supportive, but in a
passive way, if that makes sense.

Chair: I think we will have just two more questions. Yes please.

Participant: My name is Eric [Walters? 62:32]. I'm a journalist. I'm wondering if you could - I'm sitting here puzzling, trying to remember which countries actually are [unclear 62:36] kilometre borders (laughter). I wonder if you can perhaps define a little more precisely what the interests are from the various countries because it seems to me that it's the interests which are creating the conflict [unclear 62:47-62:53].

Speaker: These countries, apart from China, if you go clockwise, China 70 kilometres, east, north-east. Then it's Pakistan, a huge border; then Iran, then Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Pakistan has lots of relations with Afghanistan including the ethnic link between the Pashtun or the biggest community in Afghanistan are important - not very big community in Pakistan but important especially in the military. They have economic interests. These borders, the Durand line has never been recognised by Afghanistan and the people there, they consider themselves as one people across the border, a lot of smuggling, a lot of illegitimate interest, if that is the word for it, drugs and so on. Baluchistan is also that people both sides are the same. Iran is the other important country where on the border of Iran, the Shia in Afghanistan are not on the border of Iran. People on the border of Iran are Sunni and on the other side, also the Iranians are Sunni, so that again is a sort of nervousness. If it were true that you want a Sunni extremist regime to create problems to Iran, then the Sunni community in Iran is just across the border. The economic problem about these pipelines, Pakistan and Iran have actually a feasibility study completed for a pipeline going from Iran to Pakistan bypassing Afghanistan. And if you link that to Central Asia it will be longer, but the Iranians say, much safer. Whereas the logical, purely economic considerations would take you from Turkmenistan to Pakistan through Afghanistan. It's about 800 kilometres whereas the other way around I think it will almost double that, if you go through Iran from Turkmenistan to Pakistan.

The Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan in particular, Uzbekistan is a big country, 25 million perhaps more people, with an industrial base and with a large variety of ethnic groups. It's a newly independent country. They are very concerned about fundamentalists. After 70 years of communism, they are terrified concerned about fundamentalists, very, very seriously concerned about fundamentalists coming from - would shake the foundation of their country, especially when they see what has happened next door in Tajikistan where this crisis between the Muslim Islamic
group and the government has really shaken the country, not to say destroyed it. Turkmenistan is a smaller country, more unified in terms of ethnic composition, just four million people. There are less concerned, but also concerned by this. Their economic, they built a lot of hope on this pipeline through Afghanistan and now if they have to start all over again, that will take them a long time. And they were counting on the income from this route, not only gas, but also oil, a rail link. It's terribly important. Further afield, in Kazakhstan people tell us why don't you get us involved in this Six Plus Two and widen it. We have no border with Afghanistan, but we are interested by getting through this route to the south and we are also terribly concerned about fundamentalists and that of drugs. Kazakhstan is already suffering very seriously from the drug problem inside and from crime problem because of drugs again, the Mafia groups and so on. Same thing for Kyrgyzstan. So all Central Asian countries are interested. Hence the interest or the revived interest of the United States, who are now building a policy for themselves throughout Central Asia from geopolitical point of view and from an economic point of view. I hope this is helpful, I don't know.

Chair: This has to be the last question. I think you've been very [unclear 69.02].

Participant: [Unclear 69.03] it's been magic this evening. It's taken me back all those years to those irresistible tutorials which you used to give me as a young minister [laughter].

Speaker: That's very kind of you.

Participant: Could I just ask, you've been firm that the key to the solution is Pakistan and Iran becoming committed and you've added to that that they must be committed together. Can you say a little about how that could be generated?

Speaker: Well, the short answer frankly is that I don't know. But it seems to me that both sides are realising more and more that there is self-interest in getting this problem solved and more and more realisation that this can be solved through this kind of cooperation. This is the best. There are other ways of -- other doors where we are knocking because we are trying to knock at all the doors we can. Saudi Arabia, Saudi Arabia has very close relations with Pakistan. They both recognise the Taliban government and Saudi Arabia is now in the process of working very, very successfully on the improvement of its relations with Iran and one of the problems they are discussing is Afghanistan. So we hope and we are talking to the Saudis that the Saudis will agree with us that this problem has to be solved,
that the Taliban cannot rule the country alone, that they have to agree with the other side and for that agreement to happen, you have to reassure and get the cooperation of Iran. And if that happens we hope that the Iranians are being reassured at least that the Americans are not plotting against them in Afghanistan. Maybe they are doing it elsewhere but not in Afghanistan (laughter). So they are being reassured about that and therefore, we hope they'll be a little bit more relaxed.

As for Pakistan as I told you it's the most important country, it's the closest country to Afghanistan and it is the country that has suffered most from this conflict and it is suffering most from this conflict. I mentioned three million. This time I heard from three to five million drug addicts, one million Kalashnikov in the wrong hands in the city of Karachi alone. You see I'm sure that the Pakistanis like our gentleman from the foreign ministry realise that this has to be solved and understand that Iran, which is a longstanding friend and they have had – the cooperation has resisted to the Iranian Revolution and Khomeini. The big problem there between the two countries is Afghanistan and surely they will come to agree. I hope that they have to work with each other, Inshallah (laughter).

Chair: I know there are still a few who would like to questions, but I think we really have exhausted and exploited your knowledge enough. I don't think you have exactly spread good cheer here and I don't know how many people will walk away from here believing that a solution is somewhere within sight. But at the very least I think we all know that whatever effort is being made is in the most excellent hands and I think the United Nations is very lucky indeed to have you as committed as you obviously are to this cause. So certainly from our point of view, I'm sure everybody here has learnt a great deal.

Speaker: Thank you very much (applause).

[Recording ends]