



Select Committee on International Relations and Defence

Corrected oral evidence: The UK and Afghanistan

Wednesday 21 October 2020

10 am

Watch the meeting

Members present: Baroness Anelay of St Johns (The Chair); Lord Alton of Liverpool; Baroness Blackstone; Baroness Fall; Lord Grocott; Lord Hannay of Chiswick; Baroness Helic; Lord Mendelsohn; Lord Purvis of Tweed; Baroness Rawlings; Lord Reid of Cardowan; Baroness Smith of Newnham.

Evidence Session No. 9

Virtual Proceedings

Questions 72 - 84

Witness

I: Dr John Manza, Assistant Secretary-General for Operations, North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO).

USE OF THE TRANSCRIPT

1. This is a corrected transcript of evidence taken in public and webcast on www.parliamentlive.tv.

Examination of witness

Dr John Manza.

Q72 The Chair: I welcome to this meeting of the International Relations and Defence Committee Dr John Manza, Assistant Secretary-General for Operations of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, commonly known as NATO. You are most welcome. Thank you for coming to this meeting to share your expertise with us, as we continue taking public evidence for our inquiry, the UK and Afghanistan.

At this stage, as ever, I remind our witness and our Members that this session is on the record, transcribed and broadcast. I also remind both witness and Members that, if they have any relevant interest to declare on this inquiry, they should do so when answering or asking a question. I will ask a rather general opening question to set the scene. I will then turn to my colleagues, who will ask more detailed questions. If there is time at the end of that run of formal questions, I will ask my colleagues if they wish to put any supplementary questions. For each of our sessions today, we need to finish promptly at the appointed hour, which is 11 am for this session.

The first question is: could you give us your overview of NATO's Resolute Support mission? What do you identify as the most significant successes and what have been the principal challenges?

Dr John Manza: Thank you, and good morning to everyone from Brussels. The Resolute Support mission, in its basic form, is to train, advise and assist. It is not a combat mission. The mission has five framework nations that provide training, advice and assistance throughout Afghanistan—Italy in the west, Germany in the north, the United States in the east and south, and Turkey. I am sorry; I said five, but there are four framework nations. I am accustomed to including the UK in that list of primary participants in the mission.

On our most significant successes, it is sometimes difficult when you look at the press and reporting from Afghanistan, but we have made significant progress with the Afghan security forces over the last five years. They are much more professional now than they were five years ago and are capable of leading combat operations throughout Afghanistan. You see them doing this all the time. Of course, there are occasions when the insurgents gain the initiative briefly, in a local area, but we consistently see the Afghan security forces regaining control of contested areas—in particular, urban areas.

The Afghan national defence and security forces are more streamlined and, with advice from the Resolute Support mission, have reduced the number of officers—in particular, general officers. This was a great initiative of President Ghani over the last years. The forces still need support, though. When you talk about challenges in the years ahead, the cost of this conflict, in maintaining forces in the field, requires NATO and other nations to continue to support the government of Afghanistan, including in funding their security forces, in the years to come. I am sure

you are aware that allies have committed to supporting the Afghan security forces at least until 2024.

The greatest challenges are common to other places, such as the capacity of the Afghans to absorb training. We have done better on this in the last years. It is a difficult place to train and advise. It is remote, so the distance and terrain make it difficult to sustain operations in Afghanistan, as well. You will be happy to know that one of the places where we have had the greatest success has been the Afghan military schools, in particular the Marshal Fahim facility. This effort has primarily been led by the UK. It has become a strength for the UK and this alliance, in my view, in our ability to set up structures that allow a nation such as Afghanistan to begin training, especially their own officers, from the strategic down to the tactical level.

The Chair: Dr Manza, thank you very much for setting the scene for us. I now turn to Baroness Smith for the next question.

Q73 Baroness Smith of Newnham: I am sorry; my technical skills are so bad that I find it almost completely impossible to unmute myself. People who know me in real life realise that this is impossible, but I just sit mutely, mouthing things.

Dr Manza, thank you so much for those opening remarks. In many ways, you have stolen the thunder of my question, but could you elaborate more on the state of the Afghan military and civilian forces? You have been quite positive so far, but what further support is needed? Would you like to go into any specifics?

Dr John Manza: Funding support is essential. Look at the size of the Afghan economy and the challenges that President Ghani has in providing goods and services to his people, across government. They will continue to need a significant amount of financial support in the years to come, as long as this insurgency is at its current level.

I do not want to overplay it, but the forces themselves are quite capable. As I said, it is difficult when you look at the news, because you see reports of casualties, but they always find a way to come through. The number of casualties and the brunt of the fighting that the Afghans have taken on over the past five years is incredible. I am considerably impressed by their ability to endure and come through, despite these challenges.

The hand-off or transition from the ISAF mission¹ to the Afghans leading the fight across the width and breadth of their country was no small task. At the beginning, they had more trouble but, over the years, they have become more confident and capable. It is well known that their special forces are some of the best, not just in that region. They are excellent special forces. Their air force is now online and able to provide close air support for their own troops, and that was a long effort.

¹ The International Security Assistance Force, which ended in 2014.

It is emblematic of the challenges in Afghanistan. This was something that the United States took the lead on, and it was not easy. There were many occasions when they took steps in the wrong direction in developing that air force but, eventually, by sticking with it and working with the Afghans, they were able to deliver. It is now a capable air force supporting their operations around the country.

They have had challenges with attrition for years, which I do not think is surprising, considering the nature of the fighting and the challenges that they have as a society as a whole, but I can honestly tell you that they are significantly better than five years ago. They fight with very little support from the Americans, who have a different mission than NATO, and they have responded quite well to the Resolute Support mission.

The challenge for us is to keep that mission strong. The allies have been very good about that; they recognise the need to maintain the Resolute Support mission in response to Afghan needs, both politically and militarily.

Q74 Lord Hannay of Chiswick: Thank you very much for your testimony so far, which has been very useful. This is a bit of a compare-and-contrast question: how does NATO's training mission in Afghanistan compare with training missions in other countries—for example, Iraq? Are there special features that single out the Afghan mission? Secondly, would NATO be able to sustain its training mission if the United States withdrew its troops? How does your training mission fit in with the counterterrorism operations that are undertaken by both the Afghan government and the US?

Dr John Manza: That is a lot. How does the mission compare with others? Having spent a lot of time in both those conflict zones, I am constantly making these comparisons. There is also a tie to the development of these two countries. Generally, things have been more difficult in Afghanistan, especially because, when the Alliance first went in, the levels of education of the population as a whole were very low. That makes it more difficult to train soldiers and officers. In Iraq, to use that as the other element of the comparison, levels of education have remained quite high despite the conflicts that it has had over the last 20 or 30 years, which makes it easier to develop the capacity of its fighting forces. Both nations suffer from corruption, which has made it difficult to ensure that support for the forces, particularly financial support, is put to good use, although President Ghani has made a concerted effort to ensure that he is a good steward of our funding. A similar problem exists in Iraq.

The one difference right now is that, despite there still being elements of Islamic State in Iraq, they are not facing a day-to-day insurgency at a level of intensity like you see in Afghanistan. For the Afghan forces, especially since about 2006, this has been a constant fight that involves pretty intense combat nearly every day. That is a long time to sustain that level of combat. Iraq has been more of a sine wave of civil conflicts, on top of our capacity-building efforts there.

So there are comparisons, which we look at every day. We also look at what we have done right and wrong in those countries. One thing that I have sought to do, based on the lessons of Afghanistan, is to ensure that our NATO mission in Iraq does not overreach, and we have very carefully set up that mission in concert with the Iraqi authorities themselves; one of the critiques of both those theatres of operation is that we did not listen to the host nations in the development of their forces. We have very carefully sought to have a more minimal footprint in Iraq and have developed our plans in very close co-operation with the Iraqi security authorities.

On your second question, about sustaining the NATO mission in Afghanistan following a potential US withdrawal, this is certainly the talk of the town here in Brussels every day now. The US-Taliban agreement has set 1 May as the time for the withdrawal of all foreign forces. We are constantly monitoring the Taliban's compliance with that agreement. In particular, you will have seen statements and concerns in the news about the levels of violence, which are quite high on the Taliban side, and that is not helpful. We remain concerned about their breaking ties with al Qaeda in particular and the slow pace of progress in the inter-Afghan peace talks that are under way right now.

We continue to look at this as a conditions-based withdrawal. I cannot speculate here about how that will end up on 1 May, especially in Washington. I am not working for the United States in my current position, but decisions will have to be made in close concert with President Ghani: have the Taliban met their side of the agreement, and does that mean that we will withdraw before 1 May? I will not speculate about what it would mean for NATO to attempt to stay there after that time, because we would need a new agreement in effect that would cover NATO's role after 1 May.

On counterterrorism, as I said, we have achieved great success in developing the counterterrorism forces of the Afghan security forces. Their special operations forces are excellent and work in very close concert with American and other counterterrorism forces in Afghanistan. I am confident that, whatever phase is next for NATO, those forces will continue to be the some of the most effective forces in the Afghan military structures.

The Chair: Dr Manza, thank you, particularly because that was rather an extended question. Lord Hannay has taken some of the opening part of the question that was to be put later by the noble Baroness, Lady Helic, but I reassure her that most of her question is still relevant and I am sure she will want to go into greater detail now than she might otherwise have had time to do.

Q75 Lord Reid of Cardowan: Good morning, Dr Manza. You outlined for us the four main nations in the support mission. You also touched upon the UK and its role. Could you say a little more for us, since our study is about the UK and Afghanistan, and elaborate on your assessment of the UK's present role in the NATO Resolute Support Mission? What would you

identify as its key contribution? Would it be the one that you have already mentioned of training and so on? What is the integrated nature of the relationship between the UK and the other member states, which you mentioned as playing an important role in this mission?

Dr John Manza: The greatest contribution since the start of the mission has been in professional military education, although much less in tactical training and more in the development of war colleges, command staff colleges and training for a company grade or new officers. Not to appear like I am kissing up to this Committee, but this is something that the UK just excels at. You should be proud, as this has been difficult. It is similar to what I described with the development of the Afghan Air Force: it was not easy or cheap. Education based in Afghanistan was not ideal to support such a project as professional military education, but your Government have stuck with this and seen it all the way through. The crown jewel of our work in Afghanistan is the Afghans' ability to train their officers throughout their career. The professionalisation of the force, particularly the officer corps, is very much due to the work of your Government and military forces.

Other significant contributions include the headquarters itself. You have a very professional officer corps; I personally served with Nick Carter and Tim Radford when I worked in the Resolute Support headquarters. They provide a lifetime of professional expertise in the planning of the Resolute Support Mission and the day-to-day activities. The leadership role of your flag officers in the headquarters is certainly noteworthy.

You folks also integrate the political and military quite well. The role your ambassador plays in the headquarters and in Kabul are mutually supporting. This is where it ties with those other nations in particular. Normally, when we have a meeting of framework nations at the headquarters, the UK is at the table just because of the political and military role that you play.

Q76 Lord Alton of Liverpool: Thank you, Dr Manza, for such a comprehensive overview. Building on what you said to the noble Lord, Lord Reid about the Resolute Support mission, I invite you to delve a bit deeper into the NATO-Afghanistan Enduring Partnership, whose achievements you talked about at the outset. At the 2016 Warsaw summit, NATO allies decided to strengthen and enhance the partnership within and alongside the Resolute Support mission. That sounds like an admirable objective, but what does it actually amount to? What does it mean in practice?

Dr John Manza: Thank you for this question. I was very much involved in this effort as the Deputy Senior Civilian Representative when we did this. At the time, we were seeking a transition from the Resolute Support Mission to a normal partnership relationship with the government of Afghanistan. In my mind at the time, and I still think I was right, the projected decline from maybe 12,000 NATO troops to a much smaller troop presence, or even zero at the time when President Obama was leading the US effort, was too stark. The Afghans needed some kind of a

bridge from Resolute Support to a normal partnership relationship. When I say "normal", NATO has dozens of partnership relationships of various sizes, but most of those do not involve a troop presence on the ground. We were seeking a bridge with which we would continue to do some things, but it would not require troops across the country and tactical training in particular. In a lot of programmes, such as the defence education programme, we would be able to work a transition from a lot of work in the field to the more traditional partnership work that is done out of my division and other divisions here in this headquarters.

The trouble that we have had with this—"trouble" might not be the right word—the difficulty has been that the Enduring Partnership has been on the shelf and the activities that we have been carrying out have always been dwarfed by the Resolute Support Mission. So the plan on the shelf was to have this bridge, but until we move to ending the Resolute Support Mission it is difficult to get traction when you have this giant bowl in the room of the Resolute Support Mission, because the programmes that I am talking about are pretty small in comparison.

Here I am talking about the defence enhancement education programme, which is run out of my division and that would continue the work that you have done in professional military education and make sure that the Afghans continue those programmes. It provides them with a link back to our professional military education programmes and best practices for the education of officers, and links for those officers and their staff to attend some of our schools to continue to learn how we train and prepare officers throughout their career. The building integrity programme is part of that; it emphasises our best practices across the civilian side of the Ministry of Defence in procurement, human resources and those types of things.

In the enhanced Enduring Partnership, we are also looking at the possibility of some continued ministerial advice to help them in the day-to-day development of the Ministry of Defence and particularly the office of the National Security Adviser.

We are looking at all these things again now, of course, but need to see what comes out of the inter-Afghan peace negotiations before we can move forward. Rest assured, we have a plan agreed by Allies on the shelf for an enhanced Enduring Partnership, and we simply need to modify it for the conditions that will exist after the peace negotiations are completed.

Q77 Lord Grocott: I turn to the peace process, as it has come to be described. Can you give us your assessment so far—I know it is early days—of the peace process between the Afghan government and the Taliban? What are the main challenges and implications of the process, from NATO's perspective?

Dr John Manza: Thank you for that question. For many who have been following this conflict for the last 20 years, this truly is a historic moment. Finally, we have the government of Afghanistan literally sitting at the

same table as the Taliban. The Allies are 100% behind this process. Last Thursday we had Ambassador Khalilzad here, giving us an update on the process. He has been here consistently; I think this was his fourth or fifth time briefing the Council on the development of the peace talks.

The talks are proceeding slowly, and there is some frustration on both sides. We had to get over some humps initially, especially the prisoner exchanges, before we could bring the parties to the table. Now they are at the table and working through some modalities of what aspects of Islamic law in particular will be used. You are probably aware of these issues.

We should be prepared for all these types of things. These are not unique circumstances in the settlement of a civil conflict. Whenever parties come together—you can look back to similar circumstances over the last several decades—it is not quick or easy. You bring them to the table, but they may step away and then come back together, and compromises are reached. We should expect a lot of friction in the months ahead before there is significant process in the peace talks. Allies are 100% behind it, both here and in Kabul. The diplomatic efforts that are under way continue to support it and encourage both sides to continue.

The fighting talk of the Taliban is also difficult. The extraordinary levels of violence carried out by the Taliban to increase its leverage at the table of the peace talks is not helpful. It is something that you would see in other civil conflicts over the past decades.

I am convinced that, in typical Afghan fashion, they will find a way to muddle through and come up with a solution at the end. That would be a much better outcome for Afghanistan.

Lord Grocott: What are the implications for NATO?

Dr John Manza: The best way in which we can support these talks is to stay strong in the Resolute Support Mission. We are maintaining our basic structure. We still have about 12,000 troops there. As I described before, the hub-and-four-spokes set-up, with the framework nations deployed around the country, helps in the peace talks, because it increases assurances to the Afghan government and the security forces that we are there with them while the talks are under way.

The Chair: You have covered a lot of ground and given us some idea about supplementary questions that we would like to ask. At this stage, before I turn to the next questioner, who will be Lady Helic, it looks as though there will be time for supplementaries from my colleagues, so I invite them to contact the clerk of the Committee to indicate if they would like to ask questions. I will do my best to call colleagues in the order in which they contact her or indicate to me. I come now to Lady Helic.

Q78 **Baroness Helic:** Good morning and thank you, Dr Manza, for the inspiring and encouraging information that you shared with us on what is

possible in Afghanistan. I am a bit more sceptical. I was reading this morning about the latest reports of Taliban advances in Helmand and the impact on civilians. Some 35,000 families are on the move and fleeing to neighbouring Kandahar and Kabul. That speaks for the situation in the country. I am encouraged by the way you speak about it, because you have a steadfast and focused agenda of bringing this to an end. You also referred to similar circumstances elsewhere in the world over the past few decades.

I am interested to know what preparations have been made to have a smaller force, over the horizon, which would be able to intervene, if necessary, to support what continues to be very vulnerable Afghan military capability. There are a lot of structures, but we all know that, for this to be developed, sustainable, strong and resilient, it takes much more than the good structures that have been put in place. They will draw confidence from the NATO and American presence on the ground, which might be challenged when, next spring or whenever, those numbers come down substantially. As the NATO Secretary-General said, we went in together and will come out together. That will be a shock, not only for the Afghan people who look up to a Western presence as the last line of defence, but also for the capability and resilience of Afghan forces on the ground.

Dr John Manza: This is a tough question, especially in a public forum. I emphasise that the Resolute Support Mission, which allies have agreed to and are carrying out, is a non-combat mission. There is no speculation about how we would come back in the horizon, as you describe, to support Afghan forces.

There is frequently some confusion between the Resolute Support non-combat mission and the American mission, which is not a non-combat mission. When you see the use of force in Afghanistan in particular by the United States, it is important not to conflate it with our non-combat mission.

I cannot speculate on what will happen in the future. I can give you only the dissatisfying answer that the mission that Allies have agreed to right now is the Resolute Support non-combat mission. We do not have another mission or operation that we are ready to provide to the government of Afghanistan or the Afghan forces.

Baroness Helic: I fully understand and am sorry for taking up time. From personal experience of observing the withdrawal of NATO troops from Bosnia and their replacement with a very small EU mission, of about 800 non-combat troops on the ground, it hardly had any capability, but it provided some eyes on the ground and reassurance.

Even such a small number of troops from different countries—a hodgepodge really—provides a psychological level of security that may have more impact than thousands of troops on the ground. That is what I am talking about. I am not talking about anyone going into battle, but about the necessity of having some connection with those who used to

provide security, because it has a psychological impact, both on the population and on the military in the country. There is much to be learned from this.

Dr John Manza: I have certainly looked at these issues. I spend a good amount of time looking at other civil conflicts over the last 40 or 50 years and how they have been resolved, and I agree with your statement. But what we need is the resolution of these peace negotiations. The Taliban position, as expressed in the US-Taliban agreement, is hard-line about the presence of foreign forces. They may, in the end, be more pragmatic, but we have not yet seen an outcome that could determine a course of actions as you just described.

The Chair: Dr Manza, thank you. For the last of our formal questions, I turn to Lady Rawlings.

Q79 **Baroness Rawlings:** There have been several summits on Afghanistan but, at the 2018 Brussels Summit, allies and partners agreed to extend their commitment to supporting the Afghan national defence and security forces financially until 2024. You have given us a very positive and interesting explanation but, from all that one reads about the violence and instability at the moment, what is your assessment of the adequacy of this support? What are the associated conditions, and are the Afghan government meeting them?

Dr John Manza: Thank you for that question. On Monday, we had the Afghan National Army Trust Fund plenary session here, at which the Allies reaffirmed their financial contributions for next year, 2021. As part of that, we also had representatives from the UN discussing the Law And Order Trust Fund for Afghanistan, which is the UN-led effort that provides funding for the Afghan police forces, in particular. What I saw at that plenary session was Allies absolutely continuing their commitment. They recognised the need to continue funding these security forces. I think the funding is quite adequate. From what I have seen, the Afghan forces are not starved of resources, and Allies have been generous in providing the resources that they require.

There has been a lot of trouble in the past. When I was in Afghanistan five years ago, the Afghans had some trouble being good stewards of the funding, but they have developed the mechanisms required to maintain control of it and are not shy about seeking our help in areas where they need support. Procurement, for example, is a challenge for them. When I worked at the Pentagon, we had hundreds of people working in procurement including long-term civil servants. This is hard to develop in a place like Afghanistan.

The Afghans are doing quite well in maintaining, paying, equipping and sustaining their forces for their operations in the field. The real challenge for Allies, for your Government and all our governments, is the recognition that this will continue for quite some time. As long as this insurgency is under way, we will have to continue to provide funding support for those forces. When I started to work in Afghanistan, we used

to discuss the Russian mistake, which was not leaving Afghanistan but stopping paying the security forces. That is when things collapsed. That is always at the back of my mind when we talk about funding those forces.

The Chair: Dr Manza, thank you very much for that pragmatic cautionary note at the end. We have recently seen some written submissions that raise that point.

We now have time for supplementary questions. I have an indication from Lord Alton, so I am calling on him and waiting to see if there are any further questions from colleagues. I will hold back, but I will ask one if necessary and if colleagues do not exhaust the time.

- Q80 **Lord Alton of Liverpool:** Dr Manza, can I take you back to the Enduring Partnership? Yesterday, on the Floor of the House of Lords, our Defence Minister Baroness Goldie was asked a question by one of our Members who is a Sikh, Lord Singh, about the contribution to Armed Forces personnel from Commonwealth countries and particularly about their protection. Some of them are unable to leave Afghanistan, having settled there.

Interpreters often fall into this category, too. We have been given some evidence about the situation for interpreters, some of whom have been sent to third countries, where they are still unsafe. I wonder if you could say what will happen, not so much to the Afghan security forces, which you have said a lot about, but to people from overseas in the Enduring Partnership, whose lives may subsequently be at risk for serving in Afghanistan.

Dr John Manza: I am certainly aware of this issue, but it is technical, legal and not in my wheelhouse. In my time there, I would be approached by Afghans who had helped us as interpreters and in other ways, who were seeking asylum or had other issues. This is a national issue. NATO does not handle those requests; they go to national authorities. I am sorry to give you a dissatisfying answer, but it is simply not my area of expertise.

- Q81 **The Chair:** I will ask a question, which has been at the back of so many of the answers you have given, on the regional aspect to the conflict in Afghanistan. How does NATO engage with Afghanistan's neighbours, such as India and Pakistan? What contact is there and what is the feedback from them?

Dr John Manza: This is a multi-layered effort, with Pakistan in particular. Our NATO senior civilian is especially well suited to deal with Pakistan. He just came from being the Italian ambassador to Pakistan, so he has good links there. The commander of the Resolute Support Mission is a frequent visitor to Pakistan in dealing with their authorities. Also, your embassies in Kabul and Pakistan are part of a larger diplomatic effort by many allies to ensure that Pakistan and other regional actors play a helpful role in bringing this conflict to an end. I have participated in various settings, in Uzbekistan and Kabul, with these actors. Through defence diplomacy and normal diplomatic procedures, we are

continuously engaging with these actors to get them to play a helpful role.

Some actors just outside the region are often not helpful, so we do what we can to influence them as well. But, at this point in the conflict, everybody is interested in seeing a peaceful resolution and a secure and stable Afghanistan, especially one that is not an exporter of international terrorism. Again, this may not have been the most satisfying answer but, believe me, we are fully engaged in efforts with the regional partners.

- Q82 The Chair:** You mentioned the major issues of the Russian mistake—not that they left, but how they left—and security. You talked about the determination of people to work together, to some extent, to achieve a resolution in Afghanistan. Each of them will perhaps describe what resolution means and what the result should be.

Against that background, we have had a lot of evidence about those groups that are perhaps not as committed to a peace process as some would hope. I phrase that cautiously. My final question is: what is your assessment, at NATO, of the role that regional actors play in security issues within Afghanistan?

Dr John Manza: The long-standing role of Pakistan as a safe haven has been a primary concern in Afghanistan for 15 years, as well as its influence on the Taliban and the Quetta Shura itself. In my appraisal of the situation now, the government of Pakistan have become more helpful in this process and have helped to foment the talks that are going on in Doha. There is still friction, of course, between the government of Afghanistan and the government of Pakistan, particularly along the border, but in general I would say that they have been more helpful.

What is tough, looking at similar conflicts in past decades, is that the role of spoilers in these peace processes has always been something that we have to endure. There are spoilers in the region as regional actors and in Afghanistan proper; Islamic State Khorasan is certainly a concern. It is easy to disrupt these peace processes through the actions of a small group of people. We need to be mentally prepared to see through those actions by spoilers in pursuit of the greater goal.

- Q83 Lord Reid of Cardowan:** I go back to the NATO Resolute Support Mission. You have spoken in some depth about professional training—officer training, strategic issues and professional aspects of it—but I assume, although perhaps wrongly, that the Afghan national army, whatever its successes, still has some weaknesses in a number of areas, perhaps in logistics and other operational areas. Who undertakes the training for the tactical and operational aspects of the Afghan national army? Is the UK involved—indeed, is NATO involved—or is that left to the Americans? I am not talking about logistical support, for instance; I am talking about the training to offset any deficiencies that are still there in the Afghan national army.

Dr John Manza: There is a pretty intensive advisory effort at the Ministry of Defence and Interior at the highest level, and then working

through the lower levels of the ministry, to tackle this issue. It has been going on for quite some time, but there are people working with them every day on issues of logistical sustainment, procurement and how to support operations at a really strategic level.

In the field itself, the training-and-assist commands led by the Germans, Italians, Turks and Americans provide much more day-to-day operational and tactical advice to the core headquarters in the conduct of their operations, the maintenance of their equipment and such matters. They get a lot of assistance; there is a lot of looking over their shoulders in some of these day-to-day activities.

Over the last five years, however, the Afghans have been doing more and more of this on their own. When they started five years ago in the transition from ISAF, they really were not well-equipped to plan and sustain their own operations. Now they are quite good at it. As I said before, if there is insurgent activity in a certain area or a surge of activity, the Afghans are able to get their act together and put together and sustain a plan at the tactical level to recapture territory or whatever they have to do. It is not always smooth and might not be how we would do it but, thanks to the advice that they get from allies and your nation in particular, they have improved significantly over where they were five years ago.

Q84 The Chair: Earlier you mentioned what might happen after any agreement, or indeed what might continue to happen now in support, with advice to ministerial positions and to Ministers—I am thinking here of the defence ministry—in Afghanistan. What would be your assessment of the professionalism of the defence ministry? We have had some written evidence providing a critique of this that expressed some concern.

Dr John Manza: It is a huge project. They went from having no Ministry of Defence to where they are now. We need to keep that in mind. We need to look at it across the broad spectrum of their society. These problems are not unique to the Ministry of Defence and Interior; they are problems of good governance and of developing a civil service that is competent and capable of carrying out routine government tasks. This goes to levels of education and the brain drain that they have endured over the past decades. To my mind, they will need continued advice in the years ahead to continue this effort to professionalise the Ministry of Defence and Interior.

Again, though, I do not know what will come out of the peace negotiations and whether they will result in a new government who will invite international organisations such as NATO to continue that work. We simply do not know right now. Of course, we are thinking about it and doing prudent planning to support something like that, but we will not know for several weeks, or even months, where this potential new government will stand on welcoming such advice and training.

The Chair: Dr Manza, thank you very much for giving us such detailed answers to our questions and taking so many supplementaries. You have

already heard thanks from my colleagues. I add mine for the work that you are doing at NATO; we all appreciate and value its significance.

Dr John Manza: Thank you, and thanks for the support your Government provide. I hope this session has been helpful.

The Chair: Indeed it has. Thank you.