



Interview with Dr. Barnett Rubin

Jere Van Dyk , Barnett Rubin

March 14, 2006



[Jere Van Dyk](#)

JERE VAN DYK, CARNEGIE COUNCIL: Good afternoon. I'm Jere Van Dyk. Welcome to the Carnegie Council.

Today's program is on **American Military Power: An Ethical Inquiry** (Carnegie Council Public Affairs series). We are extremely pleased today to have with us not just America's but perhaps the world's foremost authority on Afghanistan, Dr. Barnett Rubin, who has known Afghanistan for well over twenty years. After 9/11, he was instrumental in Bonn, Germany, in helping the U.S. government, its allies, and Afghanistan in creating an interim government. He helped write the constitution of Afghanistan. He helped put together the parliament in Afghanistan. He knows everybody of substance and they know him in Afghanistan. We're very pleased to have the opportunity to talk with him today.



[Barnett Rubin](#)

Dr. Rubin, so good to see to see you.

BARNETT RUBIN: Thank you, Jere.

JERE VAN DYK: Now, you travel quite a bit to Afghanistan. In fact, in many cases you almost commute to Afghanistan. How many times have you been there since 9/11 and when were you last there?

BARNETT RUBIN: I believe that I've been there between twenty and twenty-two times since 9/11. I was last there in January of this year, January 2006.

JERE VAN DYK: So you just returned from Afghanistan.

BARNETT RUBIN: Yes. I went from there to the London Conference on Afghanistan, at which sixty countries and international organizations reaffirmed their commitment to Afghanistan for another five years.

JERE VAN DYK: I have something I'd like to read to you. In September 2004, the Defense Science Board of the Pentagon issued a report in which it said, and I quote: "American direct intervention in the Muslim world has paradoxically elevated the stature of and support for radical Islamists. On the war of ideas, the struggle for the hearts and mind, American efforts have not only failed, they may have achieved the opposite of what they intended."

So far as Afghanistan is concerned, are things different now? Are things better now?

BARNETT RUBIN: I think things are very mixed. Certainly, if you asked people in Afghanistan, the majority of them appear to believe that things are better now than they were under the Taliban.

Going back to what the Defense Science Board said, I think that what has happened there is that they have mixed up a number of things and put them all under the category, "U.S. military intervention in the Muslim world."

I think it's certainly true that U.S. intervention in Iraq, which most of the world—not just the Muslim world, but most of the world—perceived as illegitimate and not a response to a genuine threat, has damaged the prestige of the United States, actually not only in the Muslim world, but throughout the world. Whereas intervention in Afghanistan, which most of the world saw as a justified response to the United States being attacked by an organization that then had its headquarters in Afghanistan, has not had the same effect.

JERE VAN DYK: In terms of U.S. military involvement, particularly in Afghanistan, you've read the reports, you've seen the reports on television, you're familiar with them from having been in Afghanistan so much, of secret prisons, detention centers, the video of U.S. soldiers burning Taliban, the reports that have come out recently about torture and murder of two Afghans who may have been innocent in Afghanistan. Yet, insofar as we know, American soldiers have not been punished very much at all. How do Afghans think about this and what do they feel and how does this affect American involvement in Afghanistan?

BARNETT RUBIN: Of course, the decision by the Bush Administration not to abide by the Geneva Conventions, and particularly by Common Article 3, which applies not only to prisoners of war but to any detainees taken in time of war, has damaged the image of the United States everywhere.

I think that in Afghanistan, in addition to these actions by a few U.S. servicemen and also by some CIA employees, there have also been some actions by U.S. private military contractors and security contractors. For instance, one of them apparently murdered his translator and then fled the country. These people also apparently are enjoying impunity. So that, together with a number of other activities, like blocking a lot of roads in Kabul for security reasons, has created some resentment.

I should add that the Afghan government has reflected this resentment. They have raised the issue of the treatment of detainees with the U.S. government. In fact, in response to a demand by [President Karzai](#), the United States has now signed an agreement with Afghanistan under which it will gradually turn over its Afghan detainees to the custody of the Afghan government as facilities become available.

But there is another issue, very important, which derives from the treatment of prisoners as well. The effort in Afghanistan is a genuine multilateral effort, both the assistance effort, the political effort, and also the military effort. There is the coalition, which is led by the United States but in which other countries also participate, notably Britain, Canada, Holland, and others. There is also the International Security Assistance Force, which is commanded by NATO and which operates under a UN Security Council mandate.

Now, for some of the nations that have contributed troops there and who are losing their soldiers, and in the case of Canada also one of their diplomats, they have a dilemma, which is what do they do if they take prisoners. Under their national laws now they cannot hand those prisoners over to the United States, because the United States has a policy of permitting certain types of what they consider to be cruel and degrading treatment or punishment. Therefore, this has created some dilemmas for them.

Instead, they have signed bilateral agreements with the Afghan government under which they will turn over their prisoners to the government of Afghanistan under two conditions: one is that those prisoners will not be executed, because Afghanistan has the death penalty whereas most of these countries do not; and second, that the Afghan government will not turn over any of those prisoners to the United States because of fear by these European and also Canadian governments that they might be mistreated. So we see that this policy on detainees of the Bush Administration is actually harming our ability to collaborate with our own allies.

JERE VAN DYK: Fascinating. What does the American military think of this? What is its response to this?

BARNETT RUBIN: Well, I think that in the American military we can see a kind of differentiation of two kinds of officers. In fact, there is a novel which is required reading for everyone at West Point, called [Once an Eagle](#), which is basically a meditation about different kinds of leadership in the military. The kind of hero of the book is someone who is true to his professional ethic, to patriotism, and who does not bend himself to the wishes of politicians of the day; and the kind of opposite in that book is one who is ambitious for career advancement, and therefore lowers his standards, is corrupted and so on, and is much more successful.

In fact, the protest about the change of rules for the treatment of detainees originally arose from within the U.S. military itself, before civilians were even aware of it. It was the JAGs, that is the Joint Advocates General, of the Armed Forces who first took their concerns directly to the Human Rights Committee of the Bar Association of the City of New York, chaired by [Scott Horton](#). This was before the [Abu Ghraib](#) photos came out and before it became a major public issue.

We also know now from Jane Meyer's article in *The New Yorker* (February 27, 2006) that the Advocate General of the Navy, [Alberto Mora](#), a very conservative Cuban-American Republican, also was very much disturbed by these changes in detainee policy which contradicted our international obligations as well as U.S. law and the U.S. Military Code.

So I think that the professional military officers are more aware than anyone that the humane treatment of detainees is not just a moral obligation or a luxury but is something that we absolutely need to secure the safety of our own soldiers. I know that among many people in the officer corps this is very troubling.

Of course, you also have highly politicized higher officers who are true to their political bosses. For instance, the story has just come out how [General Myers](#), who was the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 2003 during the war in Iraq, actually planned on firing one of the lieutenant generals under his command because the guy told a reporter that he couldn't go right to Baghdad, he had to stay behind to fight some elements of the Fedayeen, or these guerrilla forces.

JERE VAN DYK: General Wallace said that.

BARNETT RUBIN: Yes, General Wallace, that's right. It was in order to assure the safety of his soldiers and to

protect against the potential for future armed resistance and insurgency. But General Myers was very, very close to Secretary Rumsfeld, whose niece has been given a high-level political appointment in the Administration. He was very much politically involved with selling Rumsfeld's plan, or selling a plan that Rumsfeld liked, to the rest of the military, many of whom didn't approve of it, such as [General Shinseki](#), Chief of the Army Staff, who was fired. General Myers is kind of the exemplar of that highly politicized Army officer.

JERE VAN DYK: That leads me to a question. Do you think—and I don't know if one can compare—do you think there are different ways in which the U.S. military operates in Afghanistan as opposed to Iraq? Is it a disservice to one country to discuss similar ways of operating? If so, if there are similarities, how do they affect the Afghans or how do they affect the Iraqis? What is going on that is different in the two countries, do you think?

BARNETT RUBIN: Well, it's the same institution, but the policy of our government was very different in the two countries.

JERE VAN DYK: Explain that, please.

BARNETT RUBIN: Well, first, in Afghanistan the Bush Administration didn't have any plans to invade Afghanistan, they never wanted to invade Afghanistan, whereas they always wanted to invade Iraq from well before 9/11. The leaders of the main faction within the Bush Administration that led this, the so-called neoconservatives, were on the record for years saying that the United States should invade Iraq and topple Saddam Hussein, and we now know that they were planning on doing that from the moment they came into office.

Afghanistan was a response to the attack of 9/11. Furthermore, we had no plan on the shelf for doing it and we had no means of getting a massive military operation into Afghanistan. So basically, we established a very light footprint. It actually was, if you read Bob Woodward's book, *Plan of Attack*, not a military plan. It was a CIA plan, which mainly relied on the use of intelligence agents and some special forces to create a liaison with the actual Afghan guerrilla forces on the ground, primarily [the Northern Alliance](#), to take territory that was freed after the Taliban and al Qaeda fled from U.S. bombing raids.

So the United States sent initially only about 12,000 troops to Afghanistan. That is very low. The population of Afghanistan and Iraq is about the same. We sent 12,000 troops to Afghanistan. It's now up to about 20,000, being cut back. We had nearly 200,000 troops in Iraq, and we went in there by ourselves in Iraq. We actually occupied the country—not adequately, because there were no other forces there to maintain security, which is why you had all of that looting and so on. Whereas in Afghanistan there were local militias and so on which engaged in various forms of pillaging and looting, but that did not allow the kind of rampant public criminality to emerge that destroyed so many institutions in Baghdad.

So the war in Afghanistan was from the beginning a war with allies, with local allies, with other allies, whereas the war in Iraq was very much a unilateral American decision.

JERE VAN DYK: You think the tactics were different in Afghanistan, and particularly in Iraq also, because we had the problem that I'm sure you're very much aware of, that U.S. soldiers would break into houses throughout Afghanistan, breaking one of the most sacred taboos of entering a person's house. There was a story last week of an Afghan woman who was inadvertently shot while soldiers were going in there. This upset, I'm sure, not just everybody in the village, but everybody in the entire area, which hurts the entire American military's ability to work. Is that sort of thing going on, those sorts of tactics still being employed in Afghanistan, and do you think those tactics are different there, the way in which they are employed there are different from those being employed in Iraq?

BARNETT RUBIN: Of course, the way an army behaves is a function not only of its internal structure and rules but also the environment where it is operating. The environment in Afghanistan is a much less hostile environment on the whole than the environment in Iraq. The military is only present in certain areas there.

Now, as far as I know, the United States is still engaging in some offenses against areas inside Afghanistan that they consider to be Taliban base areas, and in those areas they do conduct house searches. But, over time, they have become somewhat more sensitive to these cultural issues and are trying to assure that women are searched only by other women, that women when they are put in a place during a search are always accompanied by some elders, and they have other such rules. I'm sure they don't always manage to abide by them fully, but they are trying to adjust to those things.

But also, I want to just emphasize that the level of violence and resistance in Afghanistan is far, far lower than in Iraq. Most Afghans, whether they like the United States or don't like the United States very much, nonetheless feel that at this point it's necessary, for Afghanistan, for the United States and the other military forces that are there to be present because their experience of the past twenty years is that when they weren't present, the country was torn apart by interference from their neighbors. So at this point they might view the U.S. presence there as the lesser of two evils.

JERE VAN DYK: In terms of the U.S. presence, and particularly U.S. military presence, I think it was in 2002 Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld announced what we now call provisional reconstruction teams, PRTs, where I believe American soldiers, not dressed in military uniforms but in civilian clothes, worked somewhat like NGOs in Afghanistan. The NGO world was very upset at this. Is this still going on, and what do you have to say about American military tactics or this dispute between NGOs and PRTs?

BARNETT RUBIN: Actually, you are mixing up two things that are closely related but not exactly the same. From the very beginning of the U.S. military action in Afghanistan, the troops were accompanied by civil affairs teams. Now, civil affairs teams are teams that try to create a more secure environment for the combat forces by providing some assistance to local communities in order to show that we're there to help you. The most egregious example of this type of civil affairs activity was when they dropped meals ready to eat from airplanes that were in the same color wrapping as fragmentation bombs.

Some of those civil affairs officers early on in the conflict did wear civilian clothes, and the humanitarian organizations protested against that. Now, as far as I know, all military officers that are engaged in any kind of activity in Afghanistan now wear uniforms.

Now, the provincial reconstruction teams are something somewhat different. They are similar to civil affairs teams but they are more structured. Actually, the initiative for the PRTs, as they are called, came from the field commanders in Afghanistan; it did not come from the Pentagon. Because the United States went into Afghanistan really with a single goal, which was to get Osama bin Laden and the other people who had been behind 9/11, and to overthrow the regime that had sheltered them. The idea of setting up another government and so on was really an afterthought, which they assigned to the United Nations. Also, the forces had no mandate whatsoever to provide security to Afghans, who were suffering a great deal of insecurity, partly at the hands of the militias which we armed to fight against the Taliban.

Now, in response to that, and also to the history—as you know, after the fall of the communist government in 1992, these militias came into Kabul, they destroyed much of the city, there was fighting in much of the country between these different groups—the Bonn Agreement that you referred to earlier contains a provision asking the Security Council to authorize a multinational force to provide security in Kabul and later in other areas. The main reason for that is to prevent the militias from fighting each other, to provide a different kind of security. That is, U.S. forces went there to provide Americans with security. The International Security Assistance Force went there to provide the Afghan people and Afghan government with security from the very same people that the United States had armed to fight against the Taliban.

The plan was originally for that International Security Assistance Force to expand to other provincial centers of the country so that the warlords, as they became known, would not take over the power in all the different regions of the country, as they initially had done. So they would withdraw from those areas and the government apparatus could reestablish itself.

Now, Secretary Rumsfeld opposed that.

JERE VAN DYK: At the beginning he did oppose that?

BARNETT RUBIN: Yes, at the beginning he opposed that, because, first of all, the Administration came in with two very important ideas about U.S. strategic policy: one was no nation-building; the second was no peacekeeping. They believed that peacekeeping operations are contradictory in a way to war-fighting operations, and the U.S. military in their view did war-fighting, not peacekeeping. Furthermore, they did not want a second force with a different kind of mandate, a peacekeeping mandate, operating within the same space as their forces who were operating with a war-fighting mandate. Now, by 2003, they realized that in most of the country there was no war-fighting going on and they relaxed that.

What happened in 2002 was that the commanders on the ground saw that this counter-terrorist war-fighting mandate was not going to succeed, because what they actually were facing was an insurgency. As big a threat to the stability of the government—that the United States had helped the UN install—as the Taliban and al Qaeda, was that government's own weakness and the control of all the areas of the country by warlords, drug traffickers, and so on, all of whom were reestablishing themselves very easily because we weren't doing anything against them. The military wanted NGOs and others to come into those areas in the countryside to provide benefits to people to help win them over.

Now, first of all, the NGOs said, "Our job is not to help the military win them over." But also they said, "It's not secure there." So the term the military was using at this time was to "create the ISAF effect"—that is, the effect of the International Security Assistance Force—without ISAF. So that was the goal of setting up the PRTs, to, in a sense, set up a military unit in which you could embed aid providers. It was done mainly by the United States, but also by Britain, by New Zealand. And now that ISAF under NATO command has expanded throughout much of the rest of the country, many other countries—even Lithuania, Canada, Britain, the Scandinavians, Germany, and so

on—have established PRTs in different parts of the country. Their main mission is defined as helping the central government to extend its authority over the rest of the country.

JERE VAN DYK: Two questions. One, are they being successful? Two, the United States is now moving—you made reference to this—the United States is moving out, it appears, from south and southwest Afghanistan somewhat, and NATO is starting to move in; why is the United States moving out and NATO going in? Will that make a difference insofar as the people are concerned? Will NATO operate differently? And will these PRTs be able to function better down there as a result?

BARNETT RUBIN: On the first question, whether the PRTs are being successful, I think the record is very mixed. First of all, they are not structured in any uniform way. In a sense, that's appropriate, because the situation is not the same all over the country. But the problem is that still they are predominantly military, and yet they have primarily a political and developmental task. That is not what the military really knows how to do. So until there is more of a civilian presence in those areas, more capacity building of the Afghan government, they won't be able fully to carry out their mandate.

Nonetheless, I would say that most of them are fairly popular in the areas where they are operating. There are some models that work better than others, but we don't have to go into that.

JERE VAN DYK: NATO.

BARNETT RUBIN: The issue of NATO expansion. First, to look at it very roughly, in northern Afghanistan, which is far from Pakistan and which is not predominantly Pashtun—that is, it was not an area that the Taliban came from—

JERE VAN DYK: Primarily that would be what, Tajik and what we call the Northern Alliance?

BARNETT RUBIN: Yes. Well, most people there don't belong to the Northern Alliance or any other political group, but they are from those ethnic groups. There are a lot of security problems. There is fighting over resources. There are various armed groups and so on. But there is no organized military political insurgency against the government, so the security threat in that sense is somewhat less, although there are often clashes and other sorts of problems there.

Initially, NATO, most of whose members do not want to engage in combat, started developing their PRTs in that area of the country. Now they have started to move also into the southwest, Helmand and Kandahar, which is a very large opium-producing area and is also a part of the original heartland of the Taliban, and where the Taliban are still active. It is also on the border with Pakistan, where the Taliban have sanctuary, and actually where they have a bigger military presence and control more territory than they do in Afghanistan.

JERE VAN DYK: We could talk about that.

BARNETT RUBIN: Yes. Now, it's a little bit misleading, however, just to talk about NATO going into those areas, because NATO does not have any troops. NATO does not have any rules of engagement. NATO is an alliance of countries, each of which deploys its own forces under its own rules. Now, they can agree, if they want to, to common rules of engagement and so on, and some of the NATO member countries have agreed to do that and have agreed to engage in combat operations. That is, in particular, Britain, Canada, and, after quite an intense internal political battle, Holland have agreed to do that. Therefore, it is those countries that are taking over the PRTs—or the command of the PRTs, because there are still soldiers from different countries there—in those areas.

Now, the Afghans are somewhat concerned about that because, of course, everyone knows that the U.S. military is, from a professional point of view, the most competent in the world. But I must say the British have a good deal of experience in counterinsurgency and may be better at that than the United States. And Canada—this is something not well known in our country — has shown a tremendous commitment to Afghanistan, and the current head of the Canadian armed forces was one of the commanders of ISAF and he knows a lot about the country. They have been taking risks that U.S. soldiers did not take in order to go out to the villages, take off their helmets, sit with the people, and so on. So I think there is a chance they might do a good job.

However, at the same time, this is happening in part because the U.S. military is tremendously overstretched because of the war in Iraq.

JERE VAN DYK: That's why they're pulling out?

BARNETT RUBIN: Yes. Well, first we shouldn't exaggerate what they're doing. They are not pulling out. What they are doing is reducing the number of their troops from 20,000 to 16,000, which means from the level they have now for the parliamentary elections back to the level they had in 2004 or 2003. It's not a radical reduction.

But it is having a psychological effect. I don't know that it will have that much of a military effect, because, as I say, we have very good troops from the United Kingdom and Canada coming in. But it is having a psychological

effect on the Afghans, because the thing that they are most afraid of is that the United States will abandon them, as they see it, again, as it did after the withdrawal of the Soviet Union. They perceive that the Bush Administration sees and always has seen Iraq as a higher priority than Afghanistan, which certainly is borne out both from the amount of troops that they have devoted to it and also the amount of money that they have devoted to development assistance in the two countries. Therefore, this signals to them that the United States may be lessening its commitment.

Equally important is that it might be signaling that to the neighboring countries, all of which have interests in Afghanistan and all of which have maintained their ties with various armed groups in or around Afghanistan. I must say particularly they are concerned about Pakistan, because Pakistan still has its own allies and clients within Afghanistan against the day that the United States may withdraw, and that is something that Afghans are very much afraid of.

JERE VAN DYK: They're more afraid of Pakistan rather than the Iranians or the Russians? Pakistan seems to be in your view the most important country that borders Afghanistan?

BARNETT RUBIN: I wouldn't say it's the most important. But, first of all, it's the country with the longest border. It's the country which has the closest relations with Afghanistan, in the sense that the Pashtun ethnic group is on both sides of the border. Millions of Afghans live in Pakistan. Millions more fled there as refugees, as they also did to Iran. The border between Afghanistan and Pakistan is not demarcated and has never been recognized as an international border by Afghanistan, which creates a whole unique set of problems.

But I think most important is to understand that Afghans see Pakistan as the main threat to Afghanistan. There are public opinion polls that show this. When you ask people in Afghanistan what are their views of various countries, the country toward which there is the most hostility among all ethnic groups, in all regions of the country, is Pakistan—not Russia, not the United States, not Iran; it is Pakistan. When President Karzai talks about threats to Afghanistan, it is always Pakistan that he is talking about.

They find it strange sometimes, from their point of view, that the United States treats Pakistan as a part of the solution of the war on terror, because they think that it is part of the problem.

JERE VAN DYK: You said earlier that there are more Taliban there, or perhaps they have a sanctuary in Pakistan, they are operating in Afghanistan. The United States is allied with Pakistan. What is the U.S. military doing in this? How do they respond to this, particularly along the border?

BARNETT RUBIN: First, we have set up an institution, called the Trilateral Commission, which consists of the military and security agencies of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the United States, that meets regularly to try to resolve problems along the border area. Now, that's not at the political level; that is at the military or professional level.

The U.S. policy on Pakistan has been from the beginning, basically right after 9/11—I believe it was Secretary of State Colin Powell at that time who went to Pakistan, and the message that he basically took to Pakistan, which of course was the big supporter of the Taliban and the country to which all the al Qaeda people transited to Afghanistan, was: You have a choice: you can be our ally or you can be our target. Certainly, the United States was not going to allow a country that was allied with the Taliban to have nuclear weapons, which they had, and which their nuclear program had proliferated.

[General Musharraf](#) decided that he would be an ally of the United States and not a target. And certainly there was a faction in the Pakistani military—which is all that counts, unfortunately, in making such decisions in Pakistan—that was in favor of that.

But there are other factions that were not and are not in favor of that. It has been their long-term policy to support Islamist groups in Afghanistan and in Kashmir, because Pakistan is faced with what they see as an existential threat from India, which is eight times larger than Pakistan, much more technologically advanced. They counter this threat asymmetrically, that is to say by arming unofficial guerrilla groups to fight against this much larger power. They have been doing it since 1947, and then we taught them how to do it much better during the course of the war against the Soviet Union, which of course is when you and I first came in contact, and both of us went into Afghanistan with those people who were being trained by the Pakistani intelligence with aid from the United States at that time to fight against the Soviet Union.

So they changed official policy, but there is a huge infrastructure, and huge economic interests that have grown up around that, in addition to which, as a part of the legacy of this historical problem of the border area—I alluded to that, saying that Afghanistan has never recognized it as an international border.

JERE VAN DYK: [The Durand Line](#).

BARNETT RUBIN: Yes. The parts of Pakistan directly abutting the Durand Line are not governed by the laws of

Pakistan. They are the so-called federally administered tribal agencies, where the tribes supposedly rule themselves and Pakistani law does not apply. Now, this means there is an area which is not under Pakistani government administration, which can produce difficulties for Pakistan, but it is also very useful if you are running a covert action program over which you want to have deniability, because anything that goes on in those tribal territories you say, "We don't control those areas."

Now, what has happened since 9/11 is that much of the Taliban force was pushed out of Afghanistan. The al Qaeda people who were not killed or captured were pushed out of Afghanistan. Many of them have ended up in the tribal territories.

In the last two weeks, just actually at the time of President Bush's visit to Pakistan, which was, I believe, March 6th of this year—

JERE VAN DYK: One day. I think he spent twenty-four hours there.

BARNETT RUBIN: That's right. The day before that, Pakistan started an offensive in one of the tribal agencies, in North Waziristan. Actually, the main town of that tribal agency was under control by a group of people who call themselves Taliban, and there are a lot of foreign jihadis there, so-called Chechians—they call them Chechians; I don't know if they're really from Chechnya—Uzbeks, and so on. They had a pitched battle there, there were at least 100 people killed, and I think they're still fighting there.

Now, there hasn't been a battle of that size anywhere in Afghanistan. There is no town the size of Miran Shah, which is the town they took back from them, in Afghanistan that is controlled by Taliban. So they chose that. The Taliban actually had a more secure base area inside Pakistan than they now do in Afghanistan. That is one reason that President Karzai is calling on the United States to concentrate their efforts against Pakistan, not against Afghanistan.

Now, what is the military doing about it? Some of our military people in Afghanistan —

JERE VAN DYK: U.S. military people.

BARNETT RUBIN: Yes.

— they find it very frustrating, because they encounter Taliban or al Qaeda fighters, they fight with them, and then the fighters flee back into Pakistan. They are under orders not to cross the border, but sometimes they claim that they see the Pakistan forces giving sanctuary to those people instead of capturing them. In at least one case I know of, a rather high American officer gave hot pursuit across the border and was reprimanded. Now, of course, these are because of political considerations.

In addition, the United States on at least one occasion—I think maybe more—has fired air-to-ground missiles from unmanned Predator aircraft into locations in Pakistan in order to try to hit what we claim are targets, even though the Pakistanis are not hitting them on the ground, which both destroys the target and also sends a message to Pakistan. Of course, unfortunately, our intelligence is often not very accurate, and a lot of civilians—or a number of civilians, anyway—have been killed in those incidents.

One of the results of this now is that there is a really escalating conflict, at least a war of words, between Afghanistan and Pakistan, which so far the United States does not seem to be doing much to calm.

JERE VAN DYK: That's true. And then the Predator missile—I think the most recent one was in the village of Damadola, when they tried to hit [al-Zawahri](#) and instead killed a number of women and children, which increased more problems for the United States, and particularly the U.S. military. Many people feel that the U.S. government and the Pakistani government are together fighting people in Waziristan, that they are against the Pashtuns there. Do you think that's true? Do you think that that sentiment is true?

BARNETT RUBIN: I think people have that sentiment, yes. What some people in Pakistan say is that whenever the high-level American visitor comes to Pakistan, some poor villagers have to be killed to make a show on their behalf, but that the military and intelligence people keep up their main policy.

One interesting point about that particular strike. General Musharraf, the President of Pakistan, does claim that five foreign jihadists were killed in that as well.

What's also quite interesting is just a couple days later a suicide bomber came across the border from Pakistan into Afghanistan, into the town of Spimboldak, right on the border near Kandahar. You probably passed through there in 1984, or something like that. He blew himself up and killed twenty Afghan civilians. The Taliban said they didn't do it, so someone else probably did.

JERE VAN DYK: I do want to come back to Afghanistan a bit. We're talking about Kandahar. You mentioned drugs, poppies. What should the United States do about the poppy issue in Afghanistan, and what should the

military do and what should it not do? What are your thoughts on that?

BARNETT RUBIN: First, we have to understand what is the nature of the problem and what is the magnitude of the problem. The value of narcotics produced in Afghanistan last year, the value at the border where it's exported, was about 37% the size of the total GDP.

JERE VAN DYK: Of Afghanistan?

BARNETT RUBIN: Of Afghanistan, yes.

Now, the reason that it is so large is, one, because Afghanistan is the world's largest opium producer; but it's also because it's one of the world's smallest legal economies. The people there are desperately poor. Afghanistan is one of the five or six poorest countries in the world. It is as poor as Sierra Leone and Burundi. It's in a tie for last place with five other countries, all of which are the poorest countries in sub-Saharan Africa.

Now, it was a poor country twenty-five years ago, and during those twenty-five years outside powers have spent billions and billions of dollars destroying whatever assets Afghanistan had, from its educated people, to its roads, to its water management system, its electricity—everything. So now, in this very-high-risk and impoverished environment, farmers turned to poppy as an alternative, which was brought to them by drug traffickers and political leaders who wanted to use it to fund their operations.

Now, if we are talking about replacing, say, something like a third of the economy of what is essentially the poorest country in the world, or one of the poorest countries in the world, you cannot do that by law enforcement. You cannot do it in one or two years. What we are talking about is a development and security effort that will take over ten years to eliminate drugs.

I believe that it is doable, but you do not start by the kind of photogenic type of activities, which unfortunately the U.S. Congress seems to think are necessary, and that many others do, such as destroying the farmers' poppy fields. When you do that, you almost inevitably end up attacking the poorest and weakest farmers. Then the price goes up and the traffickers have more money, because they have inventories. This is what happened when the Taliban banned the growing of opium poppy but not drug trafficking in 2001: The traffickers actually became richer and more powerful, and then they made a big comeback when the United States destroyed the Taliban, and also with all the money that we've poured in there to the warlords, who used it to finance the drug trade.

So now what we have to do is start, first, attacking the leaders of the drug trade—and I know that people in the U.S. government are starting to do that, or hoping to do that, in collaboration with the Afghan government—and second, help the farmers. But that doesn't just mean make-work; it means invest in agriculture so that they can actually produce a decent livelihood for themselves.

JERE VAN DYK: So it sounds like it's not necessarily a military problem, but far more a political problem.

Now, unfortunately—we are running out of time—I am only going to have the chance to ask you one or two, very quickly, more questions.

One, the United States went to Afghanistan, as you said, primarily to find Osama bin Laden and the leadership of al Qaeda, and perhaps the leadership of the Taliban. We've been there over four and a half years, yet we have not captured any of these people. Why not?

Number two, because we are almost out of time, do you feel, in all of the years now that you've been working and involved deeply in Afghanistan, that as we sit here now in March 2006 that things are better?

BARNETT RUBIN: I can't say exactly why we haven't captured Osama bin Laden, and I don't know that if everyone did exactly what I want that we would have captured him. But I do know that it appears to be true that we did not send enough troops to surround all of the al Qaeda people who were in Tora Bora in December 2001, and they were allowed to escape, and that in the course of 2002 we removed the intelligence people from Afghanistan who were tracking them and sent them to Iraq because the Bush Administration always put a higher priority on invading Iraq and getting rid of Saddam Hussein than they did on dealing with al Qaeda and dealing with Afghanistan.

When people ask me to compare Afghanistan with the past, I say there are so many tremendous problems in Afghanistan today that it's very difficult to be optimistic. But five years ago we could never have imagined having the good fortune to confront the kind of problems that we are dealing with today.

JERE VAN DYK: Thank you very much, Dr. Rubin. It's a pleasure to see you again.

BARNETT RUBIN: Thank you.