

Toward a Secure, Stable and Prosperous Afghanistan

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After a decade of effort and tremendous sacrifice by Americans, Afghans, allies and partners, we have made progress toward the goal of disrupting, dismantling, and defeating al-Qaeda. Osama bin Laden is dead. Al-Qaeda is weaker. As a result of this effort and sacrifice, we can now enter a new phase of our engagement in Afghanistan defined by the plan set out at the NATO Lisbon Summit in November 2010. The Afghan government is systematically taking responsibility for Afghanistan's security; half of the Afghan population today lives in areas where the Afghan government has the lead responsibility for security. By the end of 2014, all of Afghanistan will have transitioned to Afghan security lead.

The transition envisioned at Lisbon is not only a military matter. At a major international conference in Bonn in December 2011, Afghanistan's leaders outlined a series of economic, political and security plans to carry their country through the Lisbon transition phase, which lasts until 2014, and to prepare for the "Transformation Decade" that will begin in 2015. Over 100 countries and international organizations underscored their continuing commitment to Afghanistan and pledged support for both security and economic development after 2014 to secure the gains of the last decade. Afghanistan has also received the support of its neighbors and near neighbors. In Istanbul in November 2011, regional leaders agreed to specific confidence-building measures to embed a secure, stable and prosperous Afghanistan in a secure, stable and prosperous region.

Enormous challenges remain. Afghanistan, its neighbors and the international community have a clear path forward. The next step will come in Chicago, at the NATO Summit in May, where Afghans, NATO allies, and International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) partners will make additional decisions about the international community's support to Afghanistan's security, including funding for the Afghan National Security Forces after the transition ends in 2014.

Looking Back

To understand how far we've come and where we're headed, we need to return to February 2011, when Secretary Clinton outlined our national strategy in a speech in New York. The Secretary described the success and the need to continue to support the military and civilian "surges" in Afghanistan and challenged us to try to create a third one—a diplomatic "surge"—to see if it might be possible to find a political settlement to 30 years of war in Afghanistan. In the past year, we've seen progress in each of these three reinforcing tracks.

With our **military surge**, announced by President Obama in December 2009 at West Point and supported by NATO allies and troop-contributing nations, we continue to deal blows to al-Qaeda and insurgents, while Afghan forces grow in size and capability.

This has allowed us to begin bringing home our surge forces; 10,000 came home in 2011 and another 23,000 will return by the end of September 2012.

The **civilian surge** has focused on helping Afghans build a better future for Afghans. While life remains difficult, there has been progress: increased access to health services, increased life expectancy, more investments in infrastructure, important advances by women in the public sphere, huge increases in the number of children—especially girls—in school, and growth of media and access to information. You can be proud of our diplomats and civilian experts who contribute to these successes. They have volunteered for service in Afghanistan under difficult circumstances; some have paid the ultimate price to help make life more free, safe and prosperous for the people of Afghanistan.

Finally, the Secretary charged us with implementing a **diplomatic surge** to see if we could help facilitate an Afghan peace process to bring an end to 30 years of conflict. Since last February, we have been using our broad contacts in Afghan society and throughout the region to try to open the door for an Afghan peace process that would reconcile those insurgents willing to meet the three redlines the Secretary has outlined as the end state for negotiations: breaking ties with al-Qaeda; renouncing violence; and accepting the Afghan constitution, including its protections for the rights of women and ethnic minorities.

This effort has been the subject of debate among those who worry that we will compromise our achievements and our values in order to achieve a political settlement. I offer here three truths about pursuing an Afghan peace process based on the three redlines mentioned above:

- ◆ Insurgencies like the one in Afghanistan generally end with a political settlement—we can either shape it or be shaped by it. As Secretary Clinton has said, “Diplomacy would be easy if we only had to talk to our friends. But that is not how one makes peace.”
- ◆ There can be no successful negotiation among Afghans without continued military pressure. Secretary Clinton has called this approach “fight, talk, build.”
- ◆ The larger picture matters. Our efforts are designed to see if we can open the door for Afghans to talk with each other about their future. Reconciliation is about reconciliation among all Afghans—all ethnic groups, men, women, civil society, government, fighters—not about the Afghan government making an agreement with one or another insurgent group.

This doesn't mean that Afghans should be alone in this effort. Regional support is a foundation of the larger picture. A key element of our diplomatic surge has been to work with Afghanistan's neighbors to secure their support for an Afghan peace process. Pakistan, India, Russia, Iran, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan would all benefit from a secure and stable Afghanistan. Last November in Istanbul, Afghanistan, its neighbors and the wider region announced an ambitious set of

confidence-building measures and a process of continuing dialogue to support Afghan reconciliation, transition to Afghan security leadership, and regionally integrated economic development.

Economic development—also part of the larger picture—will be critical to ensuring the stability of Afghanistan and providing alternatives to fighting for those who wish to reconcile. In July 2011, Secretary Clinton laid out a vision of a “New Silk Road”: a network of economic and trade linkages along historical trade routes that would connect Afghanistan with its neighbors—a vision the region supported at Istanbul and Bonn. Private sector investment will be key to making this vision a reality.

The Way Forward

We must focus our collective efforts on ensuring that the progress we have made can be sustained during the transition. We are realistic about the challenges that remain between now and the end of 2014. The World Bank projects Afghanistan will face economic hardships if new sources of growth and revenue do not develop as ISAF leaves and if international assistance declines. Afghans have more work to do to strengthen their democratic institutions and reform their economy; President Karzai and his team need to meet their commitments on further reform. And the United States and the international community will need to support them.

At the NATO Summit in Chicago in May, we will refine planning for the next phase of the security transition and solidify international support for the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) after 2014. A sufficient and sustainable ANSF is the linchpin for Afghanistan’s long-term security. As Afghan forces assume responsibility for security across the country, international troops will focus more on training, advising and assisting. The international community’s financial support to the ANSF beyond 2014 will be a demonstration of our enduring commitment and collective support for security in the Transformation Decade.

The Istanbul process will continue in June as regional foreign ministers meet in Kabul to make progress on concrete measures to expand regional cooperation. All of Afghanistan’s neighbors and near-neighbors—especially Pakistan—have a stake in Afghanistan’s future, and much to lose if Afghanistan again becomes a source of international terrorism and instability. Prime Minister Gilani’s recent call for insurgent groups to enter intra-Afghan peace talks is very welcome. Islamabad can further demonstrate its support by ending safe havens for terrorists and limiting the capacity of Afghan insurgent groups to operate inside Pakistan.

Japan will host a ministerial conference in July to coordinate long-term support for Afghanistan’s economic development. The Afghan government is working to enact a series of economic reforms to promote sustainable growth, crack down on corruption and spur private sector investment, especially in key sectors such as mining. These reforms are vital as Afghanistan cannot rely on donor financing forever; sustainable development will require private investment and improved regional connectivity. Though many of us now face

serious fiscal challenges of our own, as Afghans take responsibility for their own future, the world's continued investment, including from the private sector, will be essential.

Pakistan

Our relationship with Pakistan faced difficult challenges in 2011, but it is key to our national security interests and to the stability of the region. We continue to work with Pakistan to try to identify shared interests and act on them jointly. As of early March, the Pakistani parliament is debating what they want from our bilateral relationship. We respect this democratic process.

We cannot protect our homeland or ensure Afghanistan's stability without the close cooperation of Pakistan. Pakistan faces internal challenges, with an economy still struggling to produce enough jobs and sustainable growth. Deadly attacks against Pakistan's leaders, its security forces and innocent civilians have killed and injured 35,000 Pakistanis in the last ten years and underscore the threat extremism poses to Pakistan.

People-to-people aspects of any relationship are essential, so with Pakistan we have built one of the largest educational and cultural exchange programs in the world. We also support a "trade not aid" relationship to promote private sector economic growth and improve livelihoods for Pakistan's growing population, especially young people. We support health, energy and stability programs—not just because they are good for Pakistan but because a strong and prosperous Pakistan will be a better partner.

Conclusion

America has expended enormous military, civilian and diplomatic efforts in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Much work remains. But here is another truth that guides our policies: While we are proud of our support, Afghanistan belongs to Afghans. Pakistan belongs to Pakistanis. Americans cannot make decisions on behalf of Pakistanis and Afghans about their own societies.

This has been a long and challenging decade. There will be tough days ahead. Our national strategy offers the best chance of securing America and helping create a more secure, stable and prosperous region.