

AFGHANISTAN AT THE CROSSROADS OF HISTORY

Had the international community not intervened, Afghanistan would probably have further deteriorated as a breeding ground for terrorists and drug-traffickers, and it could well have become a powerhouse generating constant instability not only to its neighbours, but also the world at large. Although military victory was secured in a swift fashion from an operational perspective, our multi-faceted involvement in Afghanistan still continues. A successful completion of engagement in Afghanistan will be closely linked to the success attained in the certain milestones upcoming for Afghanistan in the coming months.

Hikmet Çetin*



* NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan. Hikmet Çetin is a former Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs (1991-1994), and a Speaker of the Turkish Parliament (1997-1999).

It is a well-known postulate that democracies do not wage war against each other. Today, this proposition applies to NATO's engagement in Afghanistan: Our commitment to assist the Afghan Nation to transform their country into a self-sustaining, stable and prosperous democracy while reintegrating Afghanistan into the democratic order.

Our collective efforts with the Afghan Nation started in the aftermath of an unexpected tremor across the Atlantic, with Afghanistan at its epicenter. Suffice to remember the terrorist atrocities of September 11, the shockingly graphic images every television station around the world captured and broadcast round the clock. These very images signaled the nascent beginnings of a new era, laden with a new threat at our doorstep: Terrorism at its full speed, prepared and willing to strike at anywhere, at anytime.

The intransigence of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in complying with demands of the international community to hand over Osama Bin Ladin, master mind of the September 11 atrocities, paved the way for a military intervention in Afghanistan. The US-led coalition's response to Taliban was a swift and decisive military operation leading to the fall of the House of "Ameer al-Momeneen," Mullah Mohammad Omar, the runaway leader of the Taliban movement.

The terrorist attacks of September 11 had, in fact, set the winds of change in motion in Afghanistan, although it was probably not the intention of the perpetrators. A country left in oblivion in a remote part of our globe following the withdrawal of the occupying Soviet forces in 1989, had now become the test-bed of a new concept the world soon became familiar: "The war against terrorism." We all quickly revisited the opening proposition of this article suggesting that peace would prevail among the democracies regardless of the pressing circumstances since they were akin to each other. Terrorism emanating from a different corner of the world, however, posed a genuine threat to our values, thus empowering the democratic states to stand on high moral ground to employ military force to counter terrorism and to defend themselves. Terrorism, especially now in its internationalized and more than ever unpredictable form, was to be dealt with urgently in order to prevent a snow ball effect. International terrorism was posing a direct threat in such graphic proportions that we could not turn a blind eye on its scope and imminence. Nations did not feel compelled to remain on the defensive and decided to take the fight where terrorists were being harbored in order to seek out and destroy them. Afghanistan soon became a solid example of this new doctrine in the fight against terrorism. So did the efforts of the international community to transform Afghanistan into a stable and democratic country.

Although military victory was secured in a swift fashion from an operational perspective, our multi-faceted involvement in Afghanistan still continues. The involvement is not only a military operation to stabilize a country and create the conditions for peace and security, but also a tremendous collective effort of the

international community combined with the vigor of the Afghan Nation to reconstruct and restructure this decades long war-torn country taken hostage by international terrorism, factional fighting and narcotics. At the center of all these efforts, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization plays a vital role together with the US-led international Coalition by providing the much-needed security environment, indispensable for the reconstruction of Afghanistan. There is no room for doubt: Our success will not only bring a dramatic change in the lives of millions of Afghans, but it will also set a norm for the future. Therefore, we should not fail in this noble cause.

Afghanistan: The Scene of Change

In the span of a few short years, Afghanistan, with the help of the international community, has gone from being a failed state ruled by extremists and terrorists, to a country with an emerging economy and democracy. Had the international community not intervened, Afghanistan would probably have further deteriorated as a breeding ground for terrorists and drug-traffickers, and it could well have become a powerhouse generating constant instability not only to its neighbors, but also the world at large.

The symptoms of a failed state are scary enough. Lack of authority and effective governance, failure to maintain the rule of law and to promote fundamental human rights, inability to guarantee the security of its citizens, failure to deliver public goods and services, and as a consequence of all these factors a transformation into a ground for extremism of every sort. It is important to bear this scenario in mind as we look at the transformation of every layer of the Afghan society over the last couple of years.

Constant warfare and the ensuing political turmoil over the past two decades have created a sense of regional autonomy in this once peaceful country. The disenfranchised groups developed their autonomous self-ruling structures, set centripetal forces in motion, and created military organizations of their own. A direct consequence of this situation was emergence of self-made provincial power centers accountable only to themselves and willing to extend conditional support to the central governance only when they saw fit. This anomaly further weakened the already fragile run-down national institutions, and paved the way for a decentralized and fragmented power structure. The outcome was an overall power vacuum.

This was the scene for almost a decade during the 1990s when the ‘Agreement on Provisional Arrangements in Afghanistan Pending the Re-Establishment of Permanent Government Institutions,’ or the so-called *Bonn Accord* was reached among the Afghan factions in the closing days of the military conflict in Afghanistan on 5 December 2001. The *Accord* foresaw a two-to-three year timeline to steer Afghanistan towards “national reconciliation, lasting peace, stability and respect

for human rights in the country” until the goal of a “fully representative government” was in place. Since then, this agenda has remained in the center of the efforts of the Afghan nation and the international community. This framework also set the background for creation of a political space whereby the political actors could interact in a secure and stable environment. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) undertook the mission of providing security, which up until now remains an essential ingredient for maintaining a democratic inter face among different groups in the country.

The tireless efforts of the international community laid the basis of a cohesive and representative system addressing the needs, expectations and concerns at the grass roots level. Although the democratic process is now on track, there is still a significant amount of work to be accomplished.

With the subsequent establishment of the Afghan Interim Authority (AIA), the governing structure under the chairmanship of Hamed Karzai for the next six months was in place on 22 December 2001. Benefiting from the creation of an essential political space, the Emergency Loya Jirga (a grand council specific to Afghanistan which is traditionally formed to solve conflicts, resolve disputes, or deliberate on decisions affecting the community) was convened from 11 to 19 June 2002. The number of delegates present at this grand council amounted to some 1,600 representatives, two-thirds of whom were chosen from electoral districts and the remaining one-third selected through a process consultation. The Jirga established the Afghan Transitional Authority(ATA), and elected Hamed Karzai as President of the Transitional Authority.

In a final step, following a nationwide election of delegates, the Constitutional Loya Jirga (CLJ) was convened on 14 December 2003, and it was concluded on 5 January 2004 by unanimous adoption of the new constitution. 502 delegates, of which 103 were women, were present at the Jirga. The ATA, based on the momentum created by the successful completion of the CLJ, set sail towards establishing a new structure where rule of law and national unity would once again preside in Afghanistan. The new constitution articulated a series of norms and values shared not only by vast majority of the Afghans, but also by the international community.

Against such background, a broad participation in the emerging political and administrative structure became essential. The factional fragmentation, regional and ethno-religious tensions severed throughout the civil war years can only be overcome and reversed by establishing a broad-based governance. Thus, every segment of the society should assume responsibility to secure the success of this effort.

Providing Security at a Time of Change

ISAF was created in accordance with the Bonn Accord in the wake of ousting

the Taliban regime. In line with the agreements reached at the Bonn conference, a three-way partnership was established among the Afghan authorities, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) and ISAF. Hence, the establishment and mandate of ISAF as the principal security provider to execute its mission under Chapter VII of the United Nations Charter (Peace Enforcing) in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions 1386, 1413, 1444, and 1510. Upon its inception on 20 December 2001 (UNSCR 1386), ISAF's role has been envisaged as to assist the Government of Afghanistan and the international community in maintaining security within its area of operations. While carrying out its tasks, ISAF supports the Government of Afghanistan in expanding its authority to the rest of the country, and in providing a safe and secure environment conducive to free and fair elections, the spread of the rule of law, and reconstruction of the country. It is important to note that ISAF is a security assistance mission and not a peacekeeping mission.

At the early stage, individual nations volunteered to lead the ISAF mission every six months. The first ISAF mission was assumed by the United Kingdom in January 2002 (ISAF-I), which was followed by other national commands by Turkey in July 2002 (ISAF-II), and by Germany-The Netherlands in February 2003 (ISAF-III). NATO assumed the command, coordination and planning of ISAF on 11 August 2003. Thus, ISAF became NATO's first mission outside the Euro-Atlantic area. NATO's role in assuming the leadership of ISAF overcame the problem of a continual search to find new nations to lead the mission and the difficulties of setting up a new headquarters every six months in a complicated environment. Currently, there are approximately 6,500 troops from 25 allies, eight partner nations and two non-NATO/non-EAPC nations serving under the NATO-led ISAF flag.

Initially limited in its Area of Operations (AOO) to Kabul, ISAF's role has been widened to support the Government of Afghanistan beyond the capital city by Resolution 1510 passed by the UN Security Council on 13 October 2003. In the wake of UNSC Resolution 1510, NATO-led ISAF extended its support to the ATA through its first Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Kunduz on 30 December 2003. Subsequently, The North Atlantic Council (NAC) decided to expand ISAF in a flexible fashion to include creating or taking over existing PRTs.

Meanwhile, the NATO-led ISAF signed a Military Technical Agreement with the Government of Afghanistan on 9 December 2003 with a view to support the efforts of the Afghan Ministry of Defense to carry forward the cantonment of heavy weapons outside Kabul city limits, as a prerequisite for holding the elections in a safe and secure environment. The cantonment process in itself has another merit, i.e. further development of a capable Afghan National Army (ANA) by eventually using the cantoned armory to equip the ANA units.

While NATO performed a military role in Afghanistan, it quickly realized that this also entails incursions into the political fields. While the NAC provided political direction and coordination from Brussels, it was deemed necessary after a while to have a political representative on the ground. This would not only relieve COMISAF of some political obligations but also allow the NAC to have its interests represented directly in theatre. Hence, the post of a Senior Civilian Representative (SCR) was established on 19 November 2003. This post was deemed essential in order to create a direct political link with Brussels while complementing the role of COMISAF. The two are in fact separate but not separable NATO entities in Afghanistan. By virtue of this understanding, the SCR was mandated to assisting the Afghan government in fulfilling the Bonn Accord commitments in close coordination with the United Nations (UNAMA) the Afghan Transitional Authorities, and other bodies of the international community present in the country, such as the European Union. Nominated and designated for this post, I assumed the office in my capacity as the SCR in Kabul on 26 January 2004.

NATO is not a lone actor in the field of security and share the stage with others. The Security Sector Reform (SSR) is a point in case. The reform process, implemented in 2003, is comprised of the so-called “five-pillars” which represent individual avenues for the reconstruction process in Afghanistan. In this respect, creation of the ANA is undertaken by the United States as the lead nation; the Afghan National Police is sketched out and sponsored by Germany with assistance in some instances from other nations; the judicial sector reforms are carried out under the supervision of Italy; the Disarmament, Demobilisation, Reintegration (DDR) project is under the responsibility of Japan; and, the counter-narcotics strategy is sponsored by the United Kingdom in support of the efforts employed by the Afghan government.

Since security is key in enticing voters to exercise their right, more attention is focused on the DDR pillar as elections near. Due to the fragmentation and polarization of the country, a direct outcome of the long years of occupation and civil war, securing success in the DDR project has an importance second-to-none in the immediate term, among all “pillars” of the SSR process. Expansion of effective central governance will only take place in parallel with the disarming, demobilization and reintegration of the local commanders and the militia, who are believed to exceed a figure of 50,000 countrywide. Thus far only a modest figure of six thousand militiamen has been covered by this process. It is only once the process is fully completed that establishing physical security and stability as well as securing the reach of the central governance in the provinces will be possible. In this process, however, it is important to ensure that the Afghan security forces take heed and no security gaps occur in the interim.

In a parallel positive note complementing the DDR process, more than 300 heavy weapons in Kabul, out of an estimated 500, have been cantoned in line with the

Heavy Weapons Cantonment project. Furthermore, heavy weapons surveys have started in the major Afghan cities after completion in Kabul.

It is noteworthy to mention that the Afghan National Army (ANA) is currently deployed, albeit in modest numbers, in some parts of Afghanistan. This is a strong signal of reversal of the fragmentation trend witnessed in the country over the last two decades. Currently, the ANA is comprised of 11 Kandaks (battalions) in full strength, and six more are under training. The total strength of the ANA is expected to reach ten thousand by the end of June 2004, ultimately reaching seventy thousand later this decade.

Afghanistan in a New Political Environment

As pointed out earlier, enormous progress have been made in Afghanistan in terms of establishing the essential components for a nation-building agenda as well as laying the basis of a government structure, cornerstones of which are outlined below:

- The Civil Service Commission was established by a decree on 21 May 2002, which in turn, provided a reform structure for the ministries,
- The Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) was established by a decree on 6 June 2002,
- A new central bank to take over ‘Da Afghanistan Bank’ has been established with 35 provincial branches,
- A new currency was introduced on 7 October 2002 for implementing an effective monetary policy,
- The constitution-making process was undertaken by a drafting committee in Autumn 2002, which, following extensive consultations, produced a final draft text on 3 November 2003 consequently submitted to the CLJ.
- A new Political Parties Law was also accepted in late 2003.

In the wake of holding the CLJ, there was a surge in the establishment of new political parties. The number of the newly established political parties stands at 41 as of late-May 2004, and this development represents a first-time-ever phenomenon in Afghanistan which has previously not experienced a genuine pluralistic society based on a multi-party parliamentary system. As of late-May 2004, the number of political parties registered as eligible to enter into the elections due to be held in September 2004 had already risen to 13.

The essential element of the elections, i.e. the Voter Registration and Elections (VRE) process was launched on 30 November 2003. The main aim of the process is to register eligible voters in the country who are estimated to stand in the range of 10,5 million. The Voters Registration is essential in providing a solid conceptual framework for a future population census as well, since none has been carried out in the country for several decades. By late-May, the number of the registered stood at the range of 3 million, of which 30 percent was represented by female

voters. The Afghan government further reached a decision in principle, with the governments of Pakistan and Iran, to carry out an out-of-country registration for Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan and Iran.

Finally, the government embarked on drafting an Electoral Law to provide the legal framework for holding the parliamentary (Lower House) elections which are expected to be held in September 2004 along with the Presidential elections. (The Upper House elections are anticipated in 2005 along with the provincial elections) The Electoral Law was signed by the President on 27 May, and is now in force.

PRTs: An Essential Component of the New Environment in Afghanistan

Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) are joint civil military units deployed throughout Afghanistan. As an interim mechanism, their objective is to strengthen the reach and bolster the legitimacy of the central government in the regions through improved security, and the facilitation of reconstruction and development efforts. This is especially important given that Taliban insurgents, warlords, drug traffickers, corruption and lawlessness still threaten investment and reconstruction efforts, and that instability poses the biggest obstacle to development in Afghanistan.

In view of these considerations, the first PRT was established by the United States in the Gardez province in December 2002. There are currently 12 PRTs, nine led by the United States, and one each by the United Kingdom (Mazar-e Sharif), New Zealand (Bamyan) and NATO (Kunduz).

PRTs are envisaged to play a leverage role in NATO's expansion beyond the present Area of Operations (AOO) which comprises Kabul and the Kunduz PRT in the northeast.

The PRT expansion scheme is overseen by the PRT Steering Committee (PRTSC) which has the authority, based upon its multinational and inter-agency membership, to provide guidance for all existing and future PRTs, including the NATO PRTs. In this respect, the PRTSC is responsible for recommending the PRT sites, under the leadership of the ATA, as well as providing guidance to ensure that PRTs achieve their strategic and operational goals.

The Reconstruction Agenda

To assist the new Afghan government in rehabilitation, recovery and reconstruction of the country, an international conference was organized in Tokyo on 21 and 22 January 2002. More than 61 countries and 21 international organizations participated in the conference which was held under the co-chairmanships of Japan, the US, the EU, and Saudi Arabia. The donor pledging exceeded \$5 billion over a six-year period.

This first international donors conference organized in the wake of the Bonn Accord and the establishment of the Afghan Interim Authority brought a wave of optimism in terms of reconstruction. Gradually, economic growth took off, a consolidated national budget – comprising national governance and development components – was produced, a new currency was introduced, schools reopened with a vast number of boys and girls enrolling back into schooling, and a major road reconstruction program was embarked upon benefiting the increased international investment. As a result of the National Solidarity and Employment programs aiming the return of the refugees once forced to settle in Pakistan and Iran, 2.3 million refugees returned to Afghanistan.

In follow-up of the Tokyo Conference, the second International Conference on Afghanistan was held in Berlin, on the initiative of Germany, and co-chaired by Germany, Afghanistan and Japan on 31 March-1 April 2004. This successful and productive initiative provided a fresh impetus reconfirming the international community's engagement towards Afghanistan. While providing a vision for Afghanistan, the Conference presented an invaluable opportunity for the international community to reiterate its commitment to the long-term security, stability and reconstruction of the country, as pronounced in the Berlin Declaration. The satisfactory financial and political outcomes and the pledges are largely viewed as an instrument of financial comfort to the Afghan government for the next three-year period.

The Conference yielded donors' pledges at the level of \$4.5 billion for the fiscal year 1383 (March 2004/ March 2005), slightly exceeding the target of \$4.4 billion, or 102 percent of the target. Against the three year-target of \$11.9 billion for the fiscal period 1383-1385 (2004-2007), donors' pledges reached \$8.2 billion (70 percent of the envisaged target), which was very satisfactory to the Afghan government. Equally important was the Afghan Transitional Authority's ambitious program to bolster good governance, rule of law, and regional security, through the empowerment of the Afghan society at large in shaping its own future. To this effect, a "Work Plan of the Afghan Government" formed an Annex of the Berlin Declaration. Another Annex of the Declaration entitled "Progress Report-Implementation of the Bonn Agreement" displayed the responsible approach of the Afghan Government for furthering the democratic accountability.

Finally, the "Declaration on Counter Narcotics within the Framework of the Kabul Good Neighbourly Relations Declaration" provided a very important basis for future regional cooperation against drug trafficking.

On 17 April 2004, a major foreign direct investment endeavor took place by the groundbreaking ceremony of Hyatt Regency Kabul Hotel. This represented a visible investment of \$40 m in Kabul where efforts of reconstruction are concentrated.

Following the footsteps of the Berlin conference, Kabul hosted the first international meeting in decades by organizing three integrated meetings of the ten-nation Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) from 18 to 22 April. This certainly allowed the ATA to showcase Afghanistan's economic potential and to seek out prospective investors. There were suggestions that regional trade and cooperation as well as foreign investment could turn land-locked Afghanistan into a regional hub or a land bridge between the Central and South Asian regions.

As land-locked country, Afghanistan has a high interest in maintaining the standard in overland corridors and the airport facilities. In this respect, the Kabul International Airport (KAIA) assumes an unprecedented significance, since it serves as the nation's gateway to the world. NATO has assumed an all-important role in this field as well. It has signed a Letter of Understanding (LoU) on 27 February 2004 with the Afghan government for the rehabilitation of the KAIA. NATO provides a framework under which the international organizations such as ICAO, IATA, the World Bank meet to discuss amongst themselves, and with the ATA, to prioritize and monitor the rehabilitation projects. The bulk of the work is conducted by a Steering Committee which was established to oversee the rehabilitation progress under the co-chairmanship of Foreign Minister Abdullah and the NATO SCR. The plan for rehabilitation envisages turning the KAIA into an all-weather capable airport, operational round the clock, seven-days-a-week, around-the-year transportation hub for the country.

Narcotics: Legacy of The Civil War Attrition

For the foreseeable future the cultivation, processing and trafficking of opium will probably remain the chief source of income in Afghanistan. This is a multi-faceted phenomenon with economic and social dimensions. The poor performance of the country in socio-economic terms is reflected in the current level of poverty. The rise of opium as an unprecedented source of black economy highlights this situation. Furthermore, opium represents a source of income difficult to substitute by traditional agriculture-based revenues.

Afghanistan is a country with a rudimentary industrial base due to under development and decades of warfare (80 percent of Afghanistan's population is employed in the agricultural sector). The arable land does not exceed 12 percent of the total land area, which undergoes traditional extensive agricultural methods. Similarly, only 2 percent of the land area accommodates forests, and at the current rate of erosion, no forest will remain in the country in twenty-five years' time. This situation is further exacerbated by the almost decade long drought forcing 48 percent of the population to live in hunger, if not starvation.

This graphic picture is better understood by employing the macro economic figures. The estimated GDP figure of \$4 billion increases by half when the estimated 2 billion opium income is added. (According to some observers, the opium-based income could be higher in 2004 due to extended cultivation –currently, in 30 out of 34 provinces- and recovery from drought.) In a parallel vein, the

GDP per person, currently standing at the range of \$180 rises to approximately \$280 when opium income is added. Such is the dramatic reflection of the “poppy-effect” in the economy of Afghanistan, which provides 60 to 70 percent of the global opium output.

Therefore, development of alternative livelihoods to replace the endemic poppy cultivation across the country remains a priority along with implementing a comprehensive education program in support of the eradication and interdiction efforts. This approach does not diminish the importance of counter-narcotics efforts based on better policing and prevention programs, on the contrary, it ensures sustainability.

In this background, the Afghan government adopted a five-year “National Drug Control Strategy” in May 2003. This provides a valid basis for a comprehensive long-term strategy.

Afghanistan’s Foreign Policy: Forging Good Neighbourly Relations

Although a land-locked and a distant country at first sight, Afghanistan cannot be treated in seclusion from its neighbours. Hence it is necessary to create a constructive dialogue between Afghanistan and its neighbours. It is noteworthy to emphasize that all neighboring countries, and their populace, have political, ethnic and religious ties with the segments of Afghan society that make up the population in Afghanistan. Furthermore, all are concerned about the impact of the refugees, terrorism and illicit trafficking of narcotics emanating from Afghanistan.

Over the last two years, the improving stability and security within Afghanistan has fostered good neighborly relations. The Interim and Transitional Administrations sought an active diplomacy around the world, particularly on a regional basis. Afghanistan participated in the “six plus two” group meeting on 11 March 2002, along with the neighboring countries, as well as the United States and the Russian Federation. Although it was established long ago, the “six plus two” group meeting provided for the first time a meaningful conclusion which led to the signing of the “Kabul Declaration on Good Neighbourly Relations” in Kabul, on 22 December 2002, with the governments of the People’s Republic of China, Islamic Republic of Iran, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Turkmenistan, and Republic of Uzbekistan.

This first step was followed by “The Declaration on Encouraging Closer Trade, Transit and Investment Cooperation Between the Signatory Governments of the Kabul Declaration on Good Neighbourly Relations” signed in Dubai, on 22 September 2003. Finally, “The Berlin Declaration on Counter-Narcotics Within the Framework of the Kabul Good Neighbourly Relations Declaration” was signed in Berlin, on 1 April 2004 by the governments who were parties to the previous two declarations.

The establishment of a Tripartite Commission among Afghanistan, Pakistan, and

the United States has also contributed to a better understanding and mutual confidence between Afghanistan and Pakistan by establishing a mechanism whereby the parties identify problems and address issues of mutual concern.

These instruments herald the establishment of the foundations of a fresh beginning amongst the regional actors in central and south Asia. By virtue of having a close interaction through Afghanistan, they share similar concerns about resurgence of the dark forces of terrorism, extremism, and drug-trafficking. Furthermore they have a common interest in achieving stability and security in the region.

Future Prospects

NATO's strategic objective in Afghanistan is to assist in the creation of a stable and secure environment within which the ATA and the international community can work to build a better and democratic country for the people of Afghanistan. Much has been achieved in this path. However, a successful completion of this engagement will be closely linked to the success attained in the milestones of the coming months.

Afghanistan is still exposed to the twin sources of instability: terrorism emanating from al-Qa'eda, Taliban and HIG (Hezb-e-Islami Gulbiddin), and to a lesser extent but still present, the potential for factional fighting. Against this background, the country needs a strong central government more than ever.

Afghanistan will experience democratic elections in September this year. Ensuring a free and fair election exercise with the largest possible electorate participation is crucial to solidify a legitimate basis for the future governance. NATO-led ISAF together with the US-led Coalition provide a pivotal support for Afghanistan's security forces during this period in safeguarding the political momentum built up until now.

Successful implementation of the SSR and particularly the DDR process, coupled with efforts to integrate the regional leaders, warlords and commanders in the new governance structure system, as well as extending the reach of a broad-based central governance authority will remain the desired end products of the political timeline.

The presence of the international community provides a positive influence and it is largely viewed as an historical chance for Afghanistan. Our current level of engagement should be sustained as required, in terms of financial and security provisions, as well as political engagements.

NATO's crucial role in delivering security and stability should comply with the Alliance's track record displayed by its 55-year history. Now that Afghanistan is identified as NATO's priority mission, we should honor this goal. We are cognizant that our security depends on Afghanistan's security, and if we want to win the war against terrorism, we must first win the peace in Afghanistan. And lest we should forget, security is a necessity, not an option in the 21st century.
