
AFGHANISTAN: ENSURING SUCCESS

14-15 March 2009, Dubai

In the name of God, the most merciful and compassionate

Verily, never will Allah change the condition of people unless they

change it themselves (013,011)

Afghanistan faces a dangerous and challenging time. Our people long for security, economic empowerment and political stability. While these goals seemed within reach in the years immediately after the fall of the Taliban, the progress we have made is being seriously threatened today. Some voices around the world are saying that we -- Afghans -- are not capable of building an effective state, that we are not ready to pursue a democratic order, or that we are not prepared to join the modern world. We reject these fallacies, but they are a clear sign that the world is beginning to lose patience with us. The situation is serious -- and we must acknowledge our shortcomings, seek to learn lessons, and respond promptly and appropriately.

The international community has worked with generosity and great sacrifice to help and support us. As with all grand efforts, they have made their share of mistakes. International military forces have yet to find the right organization, strategy, plans, and capabilities to create security for the people of Afghanistan. The problem of foreign sanctuaries used by terrorist and other anti government armed groups did not receive timely and correct attention. Rising civilian casualties, injudicious alliances and insensitive raids antagonized some of our people. Similarly, the international civilian effort has not been well coordinated and too little a share of the funds appropriated to help Afghanistan have effectively reached its people. Some Afghans have started to become disappointed and disillusioned. Yet it is possible and indeed imperative to do better. The United States and the international community are reviewing their Afghanistan policy. This is an opportunity for invigorating their commitment, improving international strategy and plans and from our perspective, to find more effective ways to work together for the outcome that is in everyone's best interest: a stable, democratic and prospering Afghanistan that does not harbor regional and international threats, and is a responsible contributing member of the international community.

From the Afghan perspective, it is also necessary to look at the mistakes we ourselves have made. Poor governance, corruption and the unwillingness of our leaders and elites to rise above their individual ambitions or the interests of parochial groups and friends undermine the legitimacy of the new order with the Afghan people. These unwelcome

factors have also caused some in the international community to start becoming disenchanted with the goal of helping build a democratic and functioning Afghan state. To preclude mutual disillusionment, we Afghans need to review our performance and make the necessary changes. We must rise to the challenge.

The danger is that we might falter. In the coming weeks and months, there is a risk that unfortunate decisions and dangerous agendas may take us further into the abyss. There are some who elevate the struggle for trivial personal and group interests above national survival and public welfare. This would escalate both the Afghan and international disappointment with our political process. The failure of our government and political elite to rise to the occasion may lead the international community to conclude that Afghans “cannot do peace.” The world might pack up and leave. In that event, the chaos and bloodshed that marked the civil war likely will return. Our country will be divided into zones controlled by armed militias, with continued fighting because of their struggle for domination. It will then be entirely possible that international terrorists hijack our land once again, using it as a training ground for hostilities around the world. Neighbors would likely seek their aims by supporting their favorite militias and, this time around. Our people would have lost a golden opportunity. And we may never get such a chance again.

These opportunities and dangers demand that we --Afghans-- put our house in order. Our people believe in justice, peace, and the building of a modern Afghanistan. We seek an Afghanistan in which every citizen is equal before the law, everyone’s rights are protected, and every citizen -- regardless of ethnicity, gender, sect or wealth -- has equal opportunity to survive and prosper. Every one of us who yearns for such an Afghanistan must step forward and do his or her part. To achieve this goal also requires that our international partners correctly plan, configure and resource their efforts.

The present and future of over thirty million of our people and regional and international security demand success in Afghanistan. It is in this spirit of urgency, clarity, resolve and focus that we -- the participants of “Afghanistan: Ensuring Success” -- with commitment to the Islamic Republic Afghanistan and the values set by Afghanistan constitution, affirm the following:

- **Our political leaders must work to earn the trust of our people.** Public confidence in the leadership and direction of the country is essential to undoing the dangers currently posed to our security, stability and progress. This demands prudent and accountable national and local leadership, responsive institutions, and a leadership that is confident of its own intellectual, popular, and international base. Afghanistan’s current and emerging leaders need to see their tasks as that of the founding fathers and mothers of a new and virtuous order. This is no time for enriching oneself, for once this precious window of opportunity has closed, no amount of personal enrichment can make up for the disasters that are likely to follow.
- **Our leaders must articulate clear visions and a strategy for Afghanistan’s future.** This will be imperative to reengaging and recapturing our people’s confidence. Our

politics cannot be focused on individuals alone. Rather, it must focus on ideas, visions, and national programs.

- **We are committed to security, democracy, human rights and the rule of law.** We are fatigued by war. We yearn for the basics of a dignified life, education for our children and health services for our families. We seek the foundations of prosperity, infrastructure such as roads, electricity, and connections to world markets. We aspire to create a vibrant civil society for our nation and a transparent political process. In this respect, our hopes and dreams are no different from those of any other people in the world.
- **We reject terrorism and insurgency.** Defeating the terrorists and insurgents is essential to putting Afghanistan back on track for prosperity. It is also essential for the world. As past events have illustrated, if terrorism, poverty and lawlessness prevail in Afghanistan, the threat will not be “containable” within our borders.
- **We require a capable national government.** Despite the false perception of some in the west that Afghans never had a functioning central government and do not seek it, we desire an effective and capable central government that serves Afghan citizens across the country. Subcontracting Afghanistan to unaccountable local actors is injudicious and will be rejected by most Afghans. A capable and effective central government is entirely compatible with the desire for capable, representative and accountable government at the local level. We recognize that a legitimate and functioning central government in Afghanistan can be built and sustained only if it is based on a dynamic and healthy fusion of central and local management. We support the creation of mechanisms that provides efficient budgeting authority to the local officials while holding them accountable. To achieve this goal it’s vital that in the long term the senior local administrative offices become elected post.
- **We recognize the direct link between good governance and security.** Merit-based appointments of rigorously vetted and accountable local administrators can enhance the provision of services and undercut a key factor that sustains the insurgency– the fact that the quality of life of ordinary people in many areas has gotten worse because of the abuse inflicted on them by corrupt and exploitive government appointees.
- **We honor the sacrifices of all Afghans.** We salute those who have give their lives for Afghanistan’s freedom. Afghans bravely fighting on the frontlines against a brutal enemy, and daughters and sons of Afghanistan who endure dangers to educate themselves for a brighter future, leave us all in great debt. Their sacrifices should not be in vain; we owe it to them, and to those whom we have lost in this struggle, to go on striving for a better future.

- **We honor the sacrifices of our international partners.** For the service of the brave men and women from our partner nations, we owe gratitude, and we extend assurances that a stable Afghanistan will play its role in a peaceful regional and international order. We welcome the deployment of more international troops -- Afghans do not view the international troops as occupiers. And, while Afghanistan recognizes that it still needs international help, we seek ultimately to become a self-reliant member of the international community. We therefore favor training, equipping and sustaining more Afghan security forces to deal with threats to our security and stability.

- **We favor reconciliation.** While military action alone is not enough for defeating the insurgents and ending the war in Afghanistan, reconciliation with the insurgents should be pursued very carefully. Reconciliation should not come at the cost of backtracking on fundamental achievements of the past seven years: an enlightened constitution and the long-overdue recognition of women's rights. Talks with the insurgents can produce desirable results only once we have regained control of the situation. We can benefit when talking from a position of strength, but we will get nowhere if we talk when the insurgents are confident that they have the upper hand.

- **We stress nationally balanced development.** While southern and eastern Afghanistan demand special focus because of their geographic proximity to Taliban safe havens and their subsequent vulnerability, this should not come at the cost of neglecting central and northern Afghanistan. Resources allocated for, and revenues generated in Afghanistan should be shared equitably among all the people of Afghanistan.

- **We need a capable police force and a strong judiciary to deal with widespread criminality.** Our national army is turning into a reliable institution, but our police force still remains in an unacceptable state. The answer to the inadequate police force is not rushing to recreate and rebrand the disastrous militias of the 1980s and 1990s. This would backfire. The successful development of Afghan National Army (ANA) should be used as a model for training police. Afghanistan can no longer bear the burden of organized crime, nor can its economy develop, unless it deals with the widespread de facto impunity. We support fair judicial processes to establish the rule of law and to apply the law to everyone, no matter how powerful.

- **We need to create jobs and better utilize our labor.** Over sixty percent of Afghanistan's population is under the age of twenty five. A majority of this demographic and other population groups are unemployed. Recently demobilized former militias have been promised work, but few have jobs. Unless we find ways of utilizing the available labor in the country, the insurgents will continue to gain ready recruits.

- **We emphasize investment in human development.** Not enough has been invested in higher and technical education. A consortium of international organizations and aid missions, local and foreign private firms, and relevant Afghan government agencies should work together on this sector to: elevate standards, create more opportunities, better equip—intellectually and materially—current and new facilities and match institutions

with employers. Better inducements, as well as fair standards of evaluation are needed to turn the ever-growing pool of high school graduates into the employable professionals needed for the building of a modern and prosperous society and state. Agriculture will require special attention.

- **We seek a healthy and collaborative relationship with our neighbors.** Afghanistan's interests lie in a secure, stable, and economically integrated South and Central Asia. We want our neighbors to recognize that in their prosperity, we see our own progress. An unstable Afghanistan, mired in internal violence, cannot be in any neighbor's interest. As history has proven, the snakes charmed on Afghanistan can sting many others. We expect our neighbors not to see Afghanistan as a ground for playing out rivalries and fighting for shares of influence, but to consider us a bridge to regional prosperity that needs to be built together, through sincerity, faithful cooperation and frank pursuit of our peoples' mutual interests.

- **We advocate a more equitable pay-scale for civil servants.** It is imperative that the pay-scale of government employees, specifically teachers, police and civil servants, be reformed to reflect the living expenses in Afghanistan. Any new government can court goodwill from the public if it moves away from the current stagnant and unjust gap between the salaries of a select few and the mass of civil servants.

- **We favor a reorganization of the command structure of the international military presence in Afghanistan and adjustments in military operations and tactics.** The model of provincial deployments led by single countries and therefore following varying rules of engagement, is causing local confusion and impacting national-level performance. There needs to be a unified approach to dealing with insurgents and terrorists.

Furthermore, operational approaches that result in excessive civilian casualties and that utilize insensitive house-raids need to be rethought. We recognize that the insurgents actively exploit civilians as shields and put them in peril by operating from civilian areas, and that the international militaries are not deliberately killing civilians. Jointly, we must find ways to develop tactics and strategies that allow extremists to be targeted while avoiding these deaths.

- **We need to secure the nights.** Afghan and international forces need to develop and implement a strategy to secure contested areas during the night. Often, insurgents are reluctant to venture out during the day when international and local patrols are active. However, in many villages—in the South and Southeast—they own the night. Unless we secure areas after dark, it will be hard to capture public confidence in the new order.

- **We need to target the narcotics traffickers.** In the counter-narcotics struggle, the focus of our efforts should shift to intercepting trafficking rather than debating the merits and risks of aerial spraying and ground eradication. Increasing the number of poppy free provinces every year is a misleading metric. In most 'poppy-free' provinces, other illicit

crops have taken root. We need to raise the opportunity cost of the drug trade for the traffickers. This is the most effective way to reduce illicit narcotics production and trade in Afghanistan. Coercive force targeting major traffickers is essential.

- **We ask that our international partners enter into discussions to develop a joint strategy for success.** In the past, we have too often worked in separate spheres instead of planning and executing our efforts together. Afghans recognize that we cannot succeed without international support and resources. We also believe that the greatest successes to date in Afghanistan have come when the international community has invested in Afghan capability. It is only through joint strategy; planning, programming, and execution that we will be able to best realize our common goals.

The way for Afghanistan is not backward but forward. As the international community reassesses its posture, it should not lower its expectations, but should work with us to achieve the aspirations and goals that remain as valid today as they were on the eve of the Taliban defeat.

God bless this endeavor, protect the people of Afghanistan and all those who stand beside us in these difficult times, and crown our efforts with success.