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**HARVARD UNIVERSITY  
KENNEDY SCHOOL OF GOVERNMENT**

**BELFER CENTER FOR SCIENCE AND INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

**ENDING TERROR WITHOUT EMBRACING TYRANNY**

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It is an honor to be back here at the Kennedy School. I am grateful to the Belfer Center. I had a wonderful and rewarding experience here last year engaging students and faculty on Afghanistan and related issues. I am especially grateful to Secretary Nick Burns and Professor Meghan O'Sullivan for their support and friendship. I would like to thank every one of you for your interest in Afghanistan and hearing the Afghan perspective.

Ladies and Gentleman,

We entered 2011 with a mixed sense of urgency for planning the transition of security responsibilities and fatigue and impatience for the lack of progress in improving governance. For the first time, preliminary discussions have started here and in Kabul about the end state of NATO engagement in Afghanistan as well as practical parameters of a long-term U.S.-Afghan partnership, while detailed plans are unfolding to reduce the United States' combat role. While degrading the Taliban is the prime objective, where progress has been made, we have a long and uncertain way to go to develop unity of purpose, improve governance and negotiate and reconcile with the Taliban. Much progress has been achieved in economic development, which must be nourished and sustained in light of the upcoming reduction of foreign aid and government contracting opportunities in Afghanistan.

NATO is working on impressive plans for the transition, determining how and where the security responsibilities will transition to Afghans in accordance with the consensus built among Afghans and NATO at the Lisbon Summit. However, such tactical planning will better succeed if it is coupled with a clear strategic vision of the end state of U.S. engagement in Afghanistan. The neighboring countries will begin to positively adjust their attitudes if they become certain that U.S. engagement in Afghanistan is truly long-term. Therefore, I would like to discuss here, from an Afghan perspective, why we need to go beyond the tactical preparation for transition of security responsibilities to Afghan security forces and focus on developing a long-term, clear strategy for U.S.-Afghan relations beyond 2014. Such strategic plans are fundamental for overcoming the uncertainty and insecurity, coordinating our efforts for reconciliation with the Taliban, and engaging the private sector to sustain the economic gains in Afghanistan.

I. Improving Governance

The Afghan Government is still not seriously interested in developing a national plan and a coherent strategy to combat corruption due to the fact that the government is uncertain of the intentions of its international partners and sees current anti-corruption efforts as a politicized campaign against the government. In the past 10 years, our mutual state-building efforts have been uncoordinated and ad hoc, with a simplistic approach for creating new parallel structures, while ignoring the existing and traditional institutions. Therefore, the international community

continues to struggle to add capacity, substance and sustainability to the newly created and improvised government and non-government institutions.

Furthermore, there is no consensus with international partners or a clear national plan to cure the symptoms of bad governance, which is caused by corruption, nepotism and lack of rule of law, and it continues to drive people into shadow government structures set up by the Taliban. Corruption is regarded as a major impediment to stability by our international partners and the Afghan people. However, the government of Afghanistan sees this issue as a U.S. political pressure tool, a double-standard policy and even a conspiracy. Some Afghan officials perceive the current degree of corruption in a post-conflict country to be comparable to neighboring countries and among some other U.S. allies.

The unity of purpose must be restored. On one hand, on the military front, the Afghan war theater has acquired much better unified military command, improved coordination, and proper prioritization for protecting civilians. On the other hand, the Afghan government is drifting apart from its international partners, and our international partners are struggling to find better ways to deal with the Afghan leadership and work with or around the Afghan government. The domestic politics of Afghanistan have become more fractured along ethnic lines and further polarized. While military muscles have been built and the performance of our Afghan national army has significantly improved, governance and the delivery of services by the Afghan state have remained on life support. Afghanistan is going through a critical period of its recent history. However, the Afghan government, the newly created parliament and even the opposition leaders are failing to provide a clear vision about the transition and the future of Afghanistan beyond 2014. Last week, I met with a number of parliamentarians on my last trip. Unfortunately, the quality of the delegates has further deteriorated. The concern is that the current parliament will further paralyze the executive branch and provide a platform for populists and fanatics in Afghanistan.

The Afghan people are resilient, moderate and pragmatic by nature. They expect a clear vision from the country's leadership to guide the country in this crucial transitional period. We must fight to win in Afghanistan. Some of our partners are fighting not to lose. Afghans are tired of conspiracy theories and want to know how Afghanistan will fit in the new emerging Asia and what the nature and depth of our partnership will be with U.S. and NATO allies in upcoming decades.

While Afghans are killed in the front lines, market squares and mosques by the Taliban and terrorists, the brutal enemy is frequently referred to as a brother. The enemy and the Taliban are manipulating our skepticism and ambiguity. For instance, we witnessed widespread violence in the aftermath of the burning of the Quran by a deranged pastor in Florida. The Afghan government took a strong stand against this stupid act, fearing that it may face the anger of the population, instead of providing a clear, unified statement indicating that the actions of one opportunist do not and should not reflect on the American people or government. Our international partners were slow to condemn this publically. This is an example of the Afghans and NATO drifting apart and undermining the success of our shared mission.

## II. Uncertainty vs. Insecurity

The security situation improved at the Taliban heartland. However, it worsened in some areas, especially in the north of Afghanistan. On my last trip, I realized that the main problem in Kabul is not insecurity, it is uncertainty and absence of unity of purpose between the government and its international partners. In the South, the military surge of additional U.S. troops has successfully unfolded. We should keep in mind that the surge that is taking place in Afghanistan is a combined U.S. and Afghan troop surge. The 30,000 NATO troop surge is augmented by a new 81,000 Afghan Security Force. The number of the Afghan National Army has reached 158,000 and 24,000 soldiers are in training every day. The police force has reached 122,000 with an average of 8,500 officers in training every day. There are 70 training sites in 21 provinces and two outside of Afghanistan. The current level of Afghan security forces is 280,000 fighting alongside about 100,000 U.S. troops and 50,000 NATO soldiers.

Additionally, a significant increase in night raids and drone attacks have helped destroy the supply routes and the chains of command of the Taliban by taking out a substantial number of mid-level Taliban commanders and facilitators. A large number of “shadow governors” in 33 out of 34 of Afghanistan’s provinces have been killed or arrested by night raids and surgical military operations in the south and north. These operations have effectively increased tension between them and the leadership living in safe havens outside the country. If sustained, this pressure will help force the Taliban toward accepting the Afghan government’s continued offers to negotiate a political settlement to the conflict.

Furthermore, increased Taliban involvement with criminals and organized crime groups to raise funds and provide protection, coupled with high levels of suicide and roadside attacks in major cities that have caused the killings of many innocent fellow Muslims, have reduced public support for them. People are realizing that while the Taliban may selectively protect both illicit and legal businesses in certain areas, their interaction with civilians is generally predatory in nature through extortion and imposing taxes and protection fees. Indeed, in certain districts, where people have openly welcomed the Taliban as potential saviors from the corrupt and ineffective government officials, the militants are soon perceived as violent gangsters and oppressors. Recent public surveys confirm these accounts. For instance, 90 percent of Afghans surveyed in 2010 by an ABC/BBC News poll preferred the Afghan government to the Taliban, despite all the shortfalls of the government—an increase of eight points over the figure provided a year earlier.

### III. Comprehensive Strategy for Reconciliation

The growing recognition by Afghan and NATO leaders of the need for negotiating with the Taliban and political settlement to complete the counter-insurgency strategy, is supported by the Afghan people.

However, a national consensus has yet to be achieved to reduce the anxiety among Afghans in major cities, as well as women and ethnic minorities, about the price they will be asked to pay to reconcile with the Taliban in light of their dark, oppressive past. Their position is that peace and reconciliation will not be sustainable if it comes at the cost of compromising hard-earned, basic citizen rights. If reconciling with the Taliban is to lead to antagonizing large segments of the Afghan nation, then peace will remain elusive.

Therefore, it is time for the United States and the international community to publically declare its position, beyond the guarded and vague approach of qualified support for the Afghan-led peace efforts, and set forth, in consultation with Afghans, the parameters of the compromise with the Taliban. War in Afghanistan has regional and international dimensions and peace cannot be achieved and sustained without regional cooperation and resolute U.S. leadership.

If such parameters are not set, Afghans will think that our partners are shedding their responsibilities and treating reconciliation as a platform for military disengagement and a premature end to their active combat role. Afghans are pragmatic and know that we live in a volatile region and predatory neighborhood.

Ladies and Gentleman,

While reconciliation has recently gained some traction here, in Afghanistan, the process of talking with individual Taliban commanders has been going on for the past nine years, and some members of the Taliban have been occupying public offices in the government and parliament. For instance, the “Program for Strengthening Peace and Reconciliation” was founded in 2005 and is led by a close ally of President Karzai, President Sibghatullah Mujadedi. This initiative claims persuading 9,000 Taliban fighters to allegedly renounce violence, despite the fact that it is severely underfunded. It is difficult to verify how effective this program has been to continuously keep the Taliban on the government’s side. Some of the Taliban are using this program to gain freedom of movement in Afghanistan while continuing with their terrorist activities, as evidenced by the recent killing of UN workers in Mazar-i Sarif carried out by those who claimed that they joined the government and renounced violence.

Additionally, the “Mecca talks” started in September 2008 in Saudi Arabia and were followed by a second round in January and a third in the summer of 2010. Former Taliban officials Abdul Salam Zaif and Arsala Rahmani spearheaded these talks. Lower level contacts have taken place in Abu Dhabi, Dubai and the Maldives. Arranged by Pakistan, some Taliban leaders have occasionally talked with the Afghan and international communities through Skype. Furthermore, Hekmatyar has submitted a 15 point peace plan that does not demand the immediate step-down of the Afghan government and provides a “safe passage” for foreign forces, a term coined during the negotiation with the Red Army in the 1980s.

Finally, a “Consultative Peace Jirga”, or council, was held in Kabul from June 2 through June 4, 2010 with 1,600 delegates including 350 women. Its effectiveness was questioned by Afghans and the international community since it was an extra-judicial institution. The Peace Jirga came up with a number of recommendations, including support for President Karzai’s call for the removal of the names of certain members of the Taliban from the UN list.

The “Peace Council” was formed on September 5, 2010 with 70 members, including 25 Taliban and Hezb-e Islami members, 53 members belonging to various armed factions involved in the civil war of 1980s and 1990s, and a group of 10 relatively unknown women. The former Minister of the Taliban, Arsala Rahmani, is the spokesman and President Rabani is the President of the Council.

However, there has not been much substance in the Peace Council or referenced meetings. The Council is perceived to be unaware of the real contacts and meetings that are carried out by President Karzai’s older brother and the Deputy Chief of Intelligence. So far, the negotiations are

fear and survival driven rather than being based on a clear vision and calculated plan. There is no formal amnesty in place to deliver some transitional justice or at least forgive the past or help forget the past. Justice has not been delivered; healing has not started.

Furthermore, the Taliban do not feel compelled to seriously engage in the political process. If they are not losing, why should they talk to us? We should not forget that the definition of victory for the Taliban is very simple: victory is their ability to destroy and disrupt. As long as they are able to do so and enjoy access to sanctuaries and funds, they will not feel compelled to reconcile and converse. Public statements over-emphasizing the withdrawal date should be avoided in order to not feed the Taliban propaganda, which is continuously questioning the U.S. and NATO's staying power.

Therefore, we need unity of purpose and an integrated reconciliation strategy adopted collectively by Afghanistan, the U.S. and NATO for selectively eliminating, embracing, flipping or splitting various Taliban groups. To achieve a unified strategy, discussion should start among Afghan and U.S. officials about who should sit around the negotiation table and what role, if any, the UN or a UN official can play. Should the talk be close, intimate and intra-Afghan with UN observers or independent mediators, which is preferred by the Afghan government and the Taliban, or should the U.S. and Pakistan be part of a 2+2 arrangement. The degree of engaging and leveraging certain regional powers should be discussed, especially Saudi Arabia, Iran, and India. Would the venue be in a safe haven in Afghanistan or Pakistan or a neutral venue? Pakistan is not the right venue, even according to the Taliban officials that are in contact with the government. Deleting Taliban leaders from the UN list should not be the starting point but an important bargaining tool. Such permanent delisting should be the last step and conditional upon the Taliban splitting from Al Qaeda, which will be the Taliban's last step, too. Such delisting should only be done when this splitting occurs.

By sustaining military pressure, we are in a better position to develop an integrated strategy and coordinated conduit for talking to the Taliban. Afghanistan is not Iraq, where the population was fed up with occupation and ready to take charge and face all the risks associated therewith. The post-Cold War memories are still alive in our minds. Afghans still fear abandonment and are worried that our internal resources and institutions cannot guarantee our safety and security. The mixed results of the Public Protection Force "PPF", the Afghan Local Police "ALP" (to replace private security companies) and the Arbaki forces in Afghanistan shows that arming tribal militias may not yield the same result as Iraq, due to the fact that the pristine tribal structure of Afghan society has been under attack for the past 30 years by armed factions, warlords, fanatics, narcotic traffickers and the Taliban.

#### IV. Sustaining Economic Development

Afghanistan has experienced remarkable economic growth despite typical war economy impediments. The challenge for the transition is to switch from a dependency on government aid and government contracting to a sustainable, private-sector-led economy. Alongside the government contracting and war economy, new economic institutions are developing with a permanent impact upon the Afghan economy and facilitating a better business environment.

The government's inexperience in restructuring the economy in early 2003-2006 helped certain political elites monopolize major projects. However, the conditions are now improving. These

powerful interest groups formed around senior officials, tribe kinship, regional and other trust networks are now feeling the heat. Better safeguards are now in place to prevent the interest groups from gaining unfair advantages in foreign and government tenders and lucrative contracts. However, the tribal and political elite's capture of foreign contracts and government resources still takes place both on the national level and in the provinces, creating resentment against both the government in Kabul and foreign military forces in the provinces. They undermine the commitment to fight corruption and the sustainability of the political and economic structures on which we all depend. This is a particularly difficult issue in Afghanistan, where political connections are becoming vital in doing business. The international community is perceived as enforcing the anti-corruption drive selectively, as they have limited knowledge about the dark history of some local players and their connections, or they are in a hurry to deliver results.

The potential for economic growth in Afghanistan is much bigger due to our strategic location, untapped mineral resources and the resiliency and entrepreneurship of the people. A specific plan of action is needed to address high and unpredictable taxation, corruption, insecurity and lack of a reliable access to land, energy and capital. Although ransom and kidnapping have been reduced due to better performance of the Ministry of Interior, the private sector still pays prohibitive expenses in seeking private protection and security. Recently, due to political complication of U.S.-Afghan relations, the Afghan government is assessing unpredictable and aggressive "nuisance taxes" and curbing the activity of private security companies. A new alternative must be developed by the private sector, in consultation with the Afghan government, to replace or supplement the crucial role of the private security companies.

Additionally, a new strategy is being formulated to infuse more U.S. private-sector resources and talent to support the growth of the Afghan economy after government contracts are reduced. By creating linkages to multinational firms, this plan is empowering Afghans to increase their access to larger markets, physical and human capital mentorship and business advisory services.

To conclude, transition is successfully underway. Security is improving in Afghanistan and prosperity is increasing. However, recent reversible gains can only be sustained if long-term, integrated strategies at the national and international levels and unity of purpose on reconciliation with the Taliban and continued U.S. and NATO engagement are determined to overcome the sense of uncertainty and the hedging of bets in Afghanistan. Mutual trust and confidence between the Afghan government and its international partners must be restored.

Thank you.