



# BUILDING SELF SUFFICIENCY

The international community will continue to play a role in stabilizing Afghanistan

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Afghanistan entered a new chapter in its history in 2001 and has come a long way since. The Afghan people – together with their international partners – have made tremendous progress in education, freedom of speech and media, health care, economic growth, technology, regional cooperation and democracy in general. Of course, there are issues that should be addressed concerning security, good governance, rule of law, corruption and development. But a country that has experienced more than three decades of war cannot resolve its problems in a decade.

We started from scratch in 2001, and today we are fortunate to be talking about good governance

and stability. Ten years ago, there were talks about building Afghan government institutions, the Army, and police. But today we are talking about the rule of law, human and women's rights, and the sustainability and ability of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police. We are talking about development, economic growth, higher education and regional cooperation. That we are now talking about these long-term and strategic objectives is a sign of progress.

Afghanistan is not the same country it was 10 years ago when it was an international threat. It was a destroyed country torn by civil war and lacking a real government. Today it is a country

Afghan commandos stand in formation during a graduation ceremony in Kabul in April 2012. Troops such as these will play a key role in providing security for the country once NATO troops leave.

with a recognized elected government and parliament, a constitution and institutions. There is now a democratic system, where people talk about and debate social and political issues, which was not the case before. Afghanistan also possesses mineral and energy resources, which can help secure the nation's economic future. The mineral and energy wealth of the country is estimated at \$1 trillion, which could make Afghanistan one of the richest countries in the region. But, extracting this wealth from the earth and using it to benefit Afghanistan and the world will require good management. Afghanistan will continue to need the expertise and assistance of the international community.

Of course, there is a long way to go; Afghanistan is still not a perfect country, and nation building is a long-term process. Many things are new for this country. Democracy is not very mature in Afghanistan and concepts like human and women's rights are still not well-developed after more than three decades of dictatorship and extremist and communist regimes. So it will take time for the people of this country to adopt the new culture of democracy, peace and stability.

### INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the international community and NATO came to Afghanistan to fight terror and help the Afghan people rebuild their war-torn country. I am not sure if 10 years ago anyone could have imagined that Afghanistan would reach a stage where it would have powerful Western countries as partners. Afghanistan has signed partnership agreements with France, Italy, Germany, Australia, the United Kingdom, the United States, India and NATO, and there are many other countries with which Afghanistan will sign bilateral agreements. These agreements clearly show the progress of the last 10 years, because before 2001, Afghanistan was not recognized by many countries in the world, but today is a partner in the fight against terrorism with countries that had been considered enemies. Afghanistan is no longer a failed state, but is recognized around the world. Afghanistan has achieved all this during the last decade, together with its international partners.

After the November 2010 NATO Summit in Lisbon, Portugal, Afghanistan entered yet another chapter in its history. At the summit, the government of Afghanistan reached agreement with NATO to transition the leading security role to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) by the end of 2014, marking another sign of progress. There was a lot of



Afghan artists discuss their work at a studio in Kabul in May 2012. Reforms have brought vast improvements in women's rights, allowing women to pursue professional and educational avenues previously closed to them.

debate and criticism when the Afghan government asked to take leadership in the country's security. Naturally, the decision to take on these responsibilities was not an easy one for a country that had relied for a decade on the international community. But today, many Afghans believe that they are ready to take responsibility for their own security by the end of 2014 or even earlier.

Afghans are confident in the strength and morale of their Army and police, which have successfully demonstrated that they are capable of assuming security responsibilities from NATO troops. The transition is successfully under way, and ANSF are providing security for the majority of the population. More than two years remain to complete the transition, and Afghans are confident that, if the process continues as is, the transition will be a success and Afghans will defend their land from terrorist and insurgent attacks.

For three decades, terrorists, extremists, warlords and communists have undermined the hopes and dreams of the Afghan people. Now, some again want to spread pessimism by trying to sabotage the transition process and spread fear about the process and the post-transition security environment. Their propaganda raises concerns among some people about the future of democracy in Afghanistan and the threat of civil war. But strategic ties with organizations such as NATO and countries like the U.S. will assure the security and political stability of the country.

The transition process also sends a good message to neighboring countries, which were concerned about the presence of large numbers of NATO troops in Afghanistan – numbers which will be significantly reduced during the next two years. Meanwhile, the transition process will take away the insurgents' false legitimacy, and the peace and

A UK Ministry of Defence police official conducts firearms training with an Afghan police officer in November 2011 at the Lashkar Gah Police Training Center.



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A Turkish soldier talks with an Afghan civilian.

reintegration process and regional cooperation and trade agreements will ensure that anarchy does not return after the transition. To safeguard the success of the transition process, the Afghan government requested the support of the international community for a “decade of transformation” at the Second International Bonn Conference on Afghanistan in December 2011. This shows that Afghans are confident in the success of the transition and are looking forward to a decade of transformation. The current strategy is the right one, and things are going comparatively well in Afghanistan, now that people are thinking of building their nation and their future. The commitment of the international community and NATO during the transition period and beyond shows that a better future awaits Afghanistan. Though it won't be perfect, Afghanistan will be a substantially better place than it had been for the last three decades.

### FRAMEWORK FOR THE FUTURE

NATO held another successful summit in May 2012 in Chicago – another decisive summit for the future of Afghanistan. About 60 heads of state and UN and international organizations attended the summit and announced a clear commitment towards Afghanistan. Despite much effort, Afghanistan still lacks a strategic plan for its future – a plan which would bring the support of the international community under an organized framework, such as Europe's post-World War II Marshall Fund program.

The program need not be similar, but the aid and support of the international community should come together in an organized mechanism based on priority, accountability, transparency and efficiency. The Conference on Afghanistan, held in Tokyo in July 2012, collected further pledges and donations to aid the country.

The stakes are high. Terrorists and insurgents are not the only challenges facing Afghanistan. Corruption, poppy cultivation and drug trafficking are also serious problems affecting the stability and security of Afghanistan. Afghanistan will need assistance from the international community to tackle these problems.

To strengthen democracy and good governance, and to stabilize the achievements of the last ten years, the Afghan government and international community should work together on a joint strategy and framework. Defining the engagement of the international community in Afghanistan is an important

issue that needs to be addressed. The U.S. carries a large share of responsibility in Afghanistan, but other international partners of the U.S. and United Nations should define and commit to their roles and participation as well.

The Afghan government has frequently asked for help building a strong Army and police, and for aircraft and training for the Afghan Air Force, but this request has often been interpreted wrongly. Western allies of Afghanistan and neighboring countries worry that Afghanistan might use a strong military against Pakistan, but this is not a realistic scenario. After the transition process, Afghanistan will require a midsize air force and a strong army to fight terrorists and insurgents. A strong and capable ANSF means a safe Afghanistan and a safer world.

Nor should the international community and the Afghan government forget about civil society, political parties and the civilian side of government. Everyone agrees that Afghanistan needs more than military solutions. It needs political and civil solutions, as well. Therefore, the international community should balance support of military and civilian institutions.

In conclusion, if the international community makes a unified, sustainable and long-term strategic plan for the support of Afghanistan and fulfills its commitments, and if the Afghan government fulfills its responsibilities appropriately, the achievement of the last 10 years will be secured and Afghanistan will not only have a prosperous future, but will be able to contribute to international peace and security. □