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Afghanistan:
Peace and Development

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

To begin let me express my thanks and appreciation to the Queens College President Doctor James Muyskens and Ms. Aniqia Islam the coordinator for organizing this conference on Afghanistan. I would also like to recognize the president of the Afghan Peace Association, Dr. Dawar Nadi for his efforts towards peace and reconciliation in Afghanistan for more than two decades. This gathering takes place during a very critical time for Afghan people. They are suffering enormously from insecurity, poverty, unemployment, lawlessness and many social and human rights violations.

The current situation in Afghanistan

Almost eight years have elapsed since the foreign forces invaded Afghanistan. The Afghan people's hope to achieve peace, security and return to a normal life has been shattered. The dominant forces in the Afghan government belong to Jihadi groups and warlords who have terrible past and present records. During their first anarchist rule (1992-96) the Afghan national army was dissolved and a functioning government in Afghanistan ceased to exist. The events in Afghanistan that have occurred over the last eight years once again proved that under the umbrella of the international community they are trying to strengthen their political position for personal interest and accumulate more wealth and prepare for the next round.

The Taliban are the other part of the same medieval forces in the region that declared war against the United States and its allies. The difference between these two medieval forces, one in power and the other as armed opposition, is their outside advocates.

The achievements of the Afghan government during the last seven years are limited.

Despite international support, the government has failed to tackle major issues like security, reconstruction and the return of millions of Afghan refugees from neighboring countries. It is unanimously recognized that the situation in the country is deteriorating.

Objective analysis shows the failure of the previous administration's strategy.

In the last seven years, almost 20 billion dollars were allocated to assist in the reconstruction of Afghanistan but have not had any tangible effect on the lives of the majority of Afghan people. Afghanistan is heading towards an unregulated free market economy.

The agriculture sector which makes up 80% of the country's economy hasn't received appropriate attention for its revival.

The negative outcomes of such trends are obvious on the national economy. Massive unemployment, poverty, homelessness, lack of medical care for thousands of children and adults are the main problems. More than 45% of the work force is unemployed. In Kabul alone the unemployment figure has reached, 60%.

Lack of coordination, planning, and transparency in the rebuilding process cleared the way for corruption, forgery, overcharging, and useless spending. Projects costs

have been overblown. Contracts have been granted in favor of people well connected to high profile officials.

The present government has not shown leadership at this critical time to move Afghanistan out of this terrible situation.

One of the unfortunate characteristics of the present political system in Afghanistan is the absence of a viable democratic opposition due to the unfavorable condition in the country. As a result Jihadi groups who have a leading role in Karzai's government have formed the opposition groups to their own establishment.

President Obama acknowledged in his statement the existence of widespread corruption within the Afghan government that caused distrust among the Afghans. But the interesting part is that you can not rely on corrupt government and officials to "crack down" on corruption.

The international community ignores democratic and progressive forces in Afghanistan. Real democratic forces are the only alternative to the medieval government in Kabul to serve Afghan people and lead the country towards a better future. Nonetheless the international community continues to assist and work with corrupt officials and warlords who made life more miserable for ordinary Afghans.

The election for a new president in Afghanistan is planned for this summer. Every one expects to have a free, fair, transparent, democratic, open, and nationwide election that may be accepted as a legitimate process by the Afghan people. One may ask do we have such condition in the country to fulfill all those requirements and provide the base for a legitimate election. The answer is NO. The government in Kabul has no control over the rest of the country. Part of the country in the south and east are ruled by the Taliban and other armed opposition groups. In the rural areas warlords and their gangs and guns are the main threat to the free and fair participation of ordinary voters. According to an official report by the Afghan government provided earlier this month 13 provinces and 36% of districts in the country are classified as totally insecure and the remaining areas are partially secure. Terrorist attacks have been increased by 45% in comparison to the last Afghan year.

Some of the possible presidential candidates have already expressed their concerns about violation in election process which has not officially begun yet. In this kind of political atmosphere one can only imagine what will happen after the election.

The problem in Afghanistan is essentially political not military. In such circumstances the country is in need to form a centralized, broad based, democratic, inter-ethnic and secular government. The composition of which should be well qualified, dedicated and honest people free of corruption who believe in democracy, progress, human rights and rule of law in Afghanistan. The elements for creating such forces already exist .The new democratic government should represent the national interest of all Afghans and should be established through a national forum that receive the support of the people. Also a comprehensive central economic plan such as Marshall Plan in Europe after WWII for the rebuilding of the country is needed to give a clear direction for the government in solving the major social, economic and security problems.

We think this is the most important step toward peace, security and development in Afghanistan to restore the trust, confidence and cooperation of Afghan people.

It is a huge mistake to leave the destiny of the poor Afghan people in the hand of medieval forces that take the nation backward to dark ages instead of forward. Their dominant rule in the last seven years clearly proves that they are resisting the modernization of Afghanistan and acting against the essence of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights. There are numerous instances of suppression of individual liberty, freedom of speech, freedom of the press and freedom of conscious all over the country. A multiethnic nation cannot flourish and live in peace and harmony if the basic human rights of its citizens are violated and they are sentenced to death or jail time because they exercise universally accepted rights.

The adoption of a family law recently approved by the Afghan government that brutally suppresses the rights of Afghan women and revives the medieval practices is additional proof of what I am talking about.

II. International Community involvement and Foreign Military Presence in Afghanistan

Afghanistan had no viable government structure in place when the Taliban oligarchy collapsed. In addition the military invasion of 2001 created a power vacuum. Soon after that an incompetent government without the support of Afghan majority took power in Kabul by the Bonn conference decision. However the Afghan people took their chance anyway hoping that with international community assistance it might work for them. From that time on the international community became heavily involved in all aspects of life in Afghanistan. The most important part of this involvement is the US and NATO military presence in Afghanistan with a promise to bring peace and security and root out terrorism in the region.

President Barack Obama in his statement has acknowledged the failure of the coalition military strategy in Afghanistan over the last seven years. On March 27, 2009 he stated the United States' goal that was later supported by NATO and I quote "to disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al-Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan and to prevent their return to either country in the future." In his statement one name was absent due to successful lobbying by the Pakistani government. That was the Taliban extremist movement that is, with the help from Pakistan increasingly gaining power in the border region and harboring the leaders of Al-Qaeda. I will focus in detail on this issue later when I speak about the role of Pakistan in the region.

The goal described earlier has three major elements: political, military and economic. They are interrelated and the success of the mission depends on the achievement of these three elements.

Regarding the political arena I have already discussed the need for a competent and well qualified government in Afghanistan.

From the military aspect, the new strategy addresses some important issues which can be encouraging if implemented properly. In particular, the decision to speed up the rebuilding of Afghan security forces is very important. However the new strategy does not address one very sensitive problems regarding the coalition military operations that have caused distrust and resentment of population toward the foreign forces in the country, namely the high number of civilian casualties and intrusive search of private

homes. We think better coordination and cooperation of the coalition forces with the Afghan security forces are needed to avoid military mistakes.

Rebuilding the Afghan national Army (ANA) and police force on a fast track is an important issue that is over due. However, Afghan national security is under an enormous threat. **Therefore, a commission from Afghan army, security experts and analysts in the field should be established to study the real security needs of the country and make recommendations for proper composition of Afghan security forces. Unrealistic numbers without thorough analyses jeopardizes the future stability of the region.**

The economic front is just as important as the political and military.

It is impossible to root out terrorism without the normalization of Afghanistan. The promise for a better future is not enough. The people of Afghanistan must feel the fundamental improvement in their daily lives toward that promise. The younger generation in particular, which is the main target for recruitment by terrorist groups, should have jobs and become productive members of the Afghan society. Only then, they will actively participate in defending the process against the terrorist groups. The economic policy during the last seven years has failed to meet the demands of the people and to fix the broken economy of Afghanistan. We missed a lot of opportunity to improve the economic situation.

An unregulated free market economy and mismanagement of the reconstruction funds by the Afghan government and NGOs have failed to deliver proper result. The appointment of “Special Inspector General” for Afghanistan reconstruction is an important act by the US administration to combat corruption and wasteful spending. However this is not enough to direct the reconstruction on the right path.

The donor countries should establish a committee under the supervision of the United Nations. The committee should be responsible for an effective coordination of all rebuilding activities in close cooperation with the Afghan government. A comprehensive economic central Marshall plan for reconstruction is needed to focus on major areas that create large numbers of jobs and moves the country toward self-sufficiency.

The Narcotic-economy which has reached over \$3 billion dollars a year provides funds for Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorist activities in Afghanistan.

In spite of the military presence of NATO and the US and active involvement of international anti- narcotic organizations in Afghanistan the opium production has been drastically increased from 3400 tons in 2002 to 8200 tons in 2007-2008.

Afghanistan needs a viable strategy to combat the drug issue.

VIII. Role of the world and regional powers in security and stability of Afghanistan.

The Afghan conflict is an international conflict with multi-dimensional specifications. Peace and stability in the country depends on some understanding and cooperation among the regional players, US, NATO and Russia. This is a very complicated issue that requires big political decisions.

The Obama administration’s new strategy contains some important elements which have not received proper attention in the past:

1. Pakistan territory has been recognized as a safe heaven and training base for Al-Qaeda, Taliban and other terrorist organizations which attack coalition and Afghan forces and civilians inside Afghanistan.
2. The Afghan conflict has been characterized as a regional conflict. Thus a special representative (Ambassador Richard Holbrooke) was appointed to work on regional issues for ending the conflict.
3. A new approach to enhance the mandate of the United Nations to “coordinate International action and assistance and strengthen Afghan institutions”.

Afghan foreign policy makers face a difficult task to follow a delicate line in relation to so many players on the scene. The Afghan foreign policy needs an overall review. The national interests of Afghanistan shall not be undermined by foreign countries' interests. **The Afghan foreign policy team should work hard to convince the major powers to cooperate closely for a durable peace and security in Afghanistan and the region. The team should formulate clear objectives and a well balanced foreign policy that reflects the national interests of Afghanistan.**

Now I would like to mention briefly some of the major players in Afghan conflict and focus on Pakistan which we consider a major source of destabilization in the region.

Pakistan:

I want to give a historic background of Pakistan in order to understand the logical connection between past and present.

Pakistan since its appearance for the first time on the world map in 1947 has been facing an “identity crisis.” Therefore the government of Pakistan for its survival adopted an extreme ideological base for its existence. The extremist religious groups were created and are supported by the Pakistani military establishment. Those groups are the source of destabilization in the region for decades and have been used as tool of Pakistan’s regional policy towards Afghanistan and India. The ideological base of the Pakistan government and the religious extremist groups are inseparable. It is not hard to find proof. While the Taliban regime was removed from power in Afghanistan; the Pakistani government recently and unanimously approved Taliban rule in the border region to scare the coalition forces.

The goal of Pakistan as defined by its leaders is to establish a “pan-Islamic confederation” with Afghanistan and to spread the Islamic extremism through out the region.

In the 1970s the Pakistani government trained and assisted about 5000 anti-government elements belonging to Afghan Islamic extremist groups in its military camps aimed to topple the Daoud regime.

During the 1980s and 1990s Pakistan used their commanding control over the most of the Afghan Jihadi leaders based in its territory and the Taliban to implement its strategy in Afghanistan. According to Col. Yusuf the former head of the Afghan department in the powerful ISI the ISI chose the military targets for Afghan mujahedeen groups to destroy the economic infrastructure and government institutions inside Afghanistan.

In the new US alliance against terrorism, Pakistan has taken an important place for political, strategic, and logistical purposes. Pakistan joined the new international coalition against terrorism reluctantly and under pressure from the United States. The military and powerful ISI which is considered a government within the government opposed to joining the coalition due to their close ties and cooperation with Taliban and Al Qaeda against whom the US declared war.

Many intelligence sources including some western agencies have reported that the Inter-service Intelligence (ISI) “helped Taliban procure roadside bombs” and “provided training and intelligence in camps on Pakistani soil”.

Pakistan occupied a special place in the US foreign policy during Cold War era. The agreement between the US and Pakistan in 1959 was an important instrument for Pakistan’s security where the US agreed to defend Pakistan “independence and territorial integrity” by all means including the use of force.

Times have changed. Pakistan’s territory by harboring Al-Qaeda, Taliban and other violent terrorist groups has become a major threat to the national security of the United States and other western countries. President Obama called it “the most dangerous place in the world” for American people.

To call Pakistan a close and trusted ally doesn’t fit with the present reality anymore. Pakistan’s continuous support and assistance of terrorist organizations and harboring them on its soil since 9/11/2001 are clear proofs of a deceptive policy followed by the Pakistani government and disloyalty to the international coalition against terrorism.

The government of Pakistan was playing the card of religious extremism very well in relations with the United States and other rich countries to extract tens of billions of dollars for decades. This became like “milking the cow” phenomenon. The numbers of madrasas (religious schools) which are the main sources of recruitment by Taliban and other religious extremist groups have increased from a few dozen in the early 1980s to 40000 at the present time, thanks to billions of dollars provided by Saudi Arabia and other rich Gulf countries.

The multi-billion dollars funds provided in the last four decades by the United States and other western countries to Pakistan were used to build up its military machine and turn that country into a nuclear armed power, while the vast majority of the Pakistani people continued to live in horribly impoverished condition.

This is the real picture of the Pakistan government. The unanimous support of Pakistan political leaders in Islamabad from the rule of Taliban in Swath valley should strongly alarm the rest of the world. Everyone should take note this is a new beginning!!!!!!

The Pakistan’s political system requires fundamental democratic transformations to meet the vast majority of the basic needs of impoverished Pakistani people. **With a government ideology of religious extremism and continued militarization, Pakistan remains a source of threat to the world peace and security.**

The international community and the United States should seriously reconsider their policies based on the facts and real intentions of the Pakistani government. Expecting different outcomes by providing more funds to an unchanged establishment only leads us to more of the same.

United States:

Afghan – US relations reached a remarkable stage after the collapse of the Taliban oligarchy. Presently the United State is one of the closest friends of the government of Afghanistan and plays a major role in the conflict and provides political, military and economic assistance to Afghanistan.

The US government is helping to rebuild the Afghan National Army and participating in many projects for reconstruction in the country. The two countries have signed a bilateral agreement on US –Afghanistan Strategic partnership Declaration that strengthened political and military ties between the two governments. Leading role of the United States is very essential in solving the conflict in Afghanistan and the region.

NATO and European Union:

The presence of NATO in Afghanistan in accordance with the Security Council resolution(s) proves the important mission to bring peace and stability in the region and to defeat terrorism in this part of the world. This is the first time that NATO carries a military mission outside of its territory. The credibility and capability of NATO is at stake in its mission against Al-Qaeda and Taliban. Afghanistan and NATO signed “Declaration of Afghanistan long-term cooperation and partnership with NATO”. Afghanistan also signed a document with the European Union on November 16, 2005 “EU-Afghanistan Joint Declaration” Both documents enhance the Afghan relations to both organizations on a new level and commitment of NATO and EU for defense and security system reform and rebuilding the country. The NATO and EU became important international factors to bring peace and security and provide economic assistance and resources for the reconstruction of Afghanistan.

Iran:

Afghanistan and Iran not only share borders with each other but their common history, culture and language are favorable factors for friendly relation between the two nations. Despite of attempts of some of religious circles to have greater influence on the Afghan government, Iran can play a positive role in the conflict. Right now, it is helping Afghanistan in the reconstruction program. In order to bring peace and stability in Afghanistan, it would be wise and prudent at this time to separate Iran’s relationship to the Middle East conflict and Afghanistan, The Obama administration’s conciliatory approach towards Iran might help to ease some tension in Afghanistan from its western border.

As long as Iran stops its interfering in the internal affairs of Afghanistan, no matter who is in power, there will be good neighborly relations with Iran

India:

The close Afghan- Indian friendship is very solid and has a multi-dimensional character. India is actively involved in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. It has already assisted with over one billion dollars in different projects in the country. Pakistani attempts to damage this relationship have no chance of success.

Russia:

As a great power in that region the Russian Federation historically has enormous interests in the region and Afghanistan. They are trying to restore their close ties to Afghanistan. Russia is concerned about the political and military presence of the United States and NATO in Afghanistan and some Central Asian states. They are monitoring the situation very closely. The United States and NATO share common interests with Russia in defeating terrorism and combating drug trafficking. Russia wants the US and NATO to succeed in those two aspects, because it would benefit them. Therefore, their cooperation with the US and NATO is very important. With the new administration in the White House US-Russian relations have a new start towards easing past tension and cooperation in international matters. Afghanistan will benefit if their cooperation focuses on a common strategy to bring peace and security in the region.

Thank you for your attention.