

# **Negotiating with the Taliban: Six Critical Conditions that Must Be Met to Avoid Another “Peace to End All Peace”**

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There is no doubt that successful peace talks would be the best possible outcome of the Afghan conflict for everyone involved. History is not, however, filled with best possible outcomes. Far too often, the parties involved in peace talks continue to pursue their own interests in any way they can and peace talks become little more than a cover for prolonged struggle or become a weapon in the hands of the most skilled side.

Even seemingly successful peace talks – such as those in Cambodia, Nepal, and Vietnam – are demonstrations that diplomacy often becomes an extension of war by other means. In fact, former Afghan Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah, has warned that Afghan mujahedeen were involved in peace negotiations through the 1980s— but still ended up overthrowing the pro-Soviet Najibullah regime in 1992.

This is not a case against talking to the Taliban and other insurgents in Afghanistan. The Afghans have now lived through over 30 years of war and crisis and they need peace badly. There are limits to how long the US and its allies will stay, the Pakistani and Afghan governments both present challenges to a successful transition, and there are some indications that the Taliban and some other insurgent groups are “tired,” have suffered serious losses, and are willing to compromise. No one is going to get all of what they want out of this war, and some form of viable peace may be possible.

There is a strong case for laying the groundwork that might help produce a real peace if one is possible, and for setting conditions that limit Taliban and other insurgent capability to exploit such talks. This war cannot be won by military means alone, but it can also be lost through the wrong kind of negotiations or agreement.

## **Caution Versus Hope: Taliban Conditions**

The Taliban have already made it clear that there is as much -- or more -- reason for caution as for hope. The Taliban have talked about working with other Afghan factions in a government – albeit in uncertain terms – and, “political efforts to come to mutual understanding with the world”. They also, however, have gone on fighting and have sought to build their pace of attacks. They were working with Al Qaida in meetings in Pakistan in December and early January to try to persuade the Pakistani Taliban to increase its role in attacks in Afghanistan.

The initial Taliban statement issued by the “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” on December 3, 2011 – acted as if the Taliban were still the government of Afghanistan and did not even mention the existence of the Karzai government, other than to say that, “The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has always tried to solve the problems with the opposition through talks:”

It is a unambiguous reality that the Islamic movement of Taliban arose to establish an Islamic system in Afghanistan, uproot injustice, eradicate narcotics and the local writ of gunmen, strengthen security and to form national unity and with the help of Allah and with the backing and sacrifices of the nation, it was able to eradicate corruption and establish an Islamic government in the various provinces and the capital in a very short period of time. It almost completely eliminated the years of strife and fragmentation in the whole country and was able to bring ninety five percent of the country under the control of the central government. The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has always tried to solve the problems with the opposition through talks.

The ongoing issue in the country which came about ten years ago has been between two fundamental elements: on the one side is Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan and on the other is the United States of America and its foreign allies.

The stance of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan from the beginning has been to bring about the end of the invasion of Afghanistan and to let the Afghans establish an Islamic government of their own choosing which does not pose danger to anyone. Through realization and understanding, Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan has time and again made clear its stance to other nations and has persistently said that the allied nations under the leadership of America will never be able to subdue the Afghans by force in order to realize its aims. We are at the moment, besides our powerful presence inside the country ready to establish a political office outside the country to come to an understanding with other nations and in this series, we have reached an initial agreement with Qatar and other related sides. Islamic Emirate has also asked for the release of its prisoners from the Guantanamo prison in exchange basis.

The Taliban have since repeatedly stated that the beginning of the peace talks will not end the fighting – and had indicated that all US and foreign forces must leave before or by the end of 2014, depriving the Afghan government of any military support and advisors. The “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan” laid out the key conditions in the Taliban’s initial negotiating position in a statement on January 12<sup>th</sup>,

It is well known to the Mujahid nation of Afghanistan that the Islamic Emirate has been engaged in a struggle and Jihad for the past one and a half decade to establish an Islamic government in accordance with the request of its people. It is for this purpose and for bringing about peace and stability in Afghanistan that we have increased our political efforts to come to mutual understanding with the world in order to solve the current ongoing situation. But this understanding does not mean a surrender from Jihad and neither is it connected to an acceptance of the constitution of the stooge Kabul administration but rather the Islamic Emirate is utilizing its political wing alongside its military presence and Jihad in order to realize the national and Islamic aspirations of the nation and its martyrs.

We must say that some sources and reports of media outlets often try to distort realities. For this reason we would like to ask all the officials of the media outlets to work within the framework of unbiased journalistic ethics, avoid circulating baseless and one-sided reports and only publish that which is confirmed by relevant sources. Similarly, if it is a report about Islamic Emirate then it should be forwarded to the relevant office for confirmation so it can reach the Afghan Mujahid nation and others in an authentic form.

**This does not mean that the Taliban will not compromise or become more flexible over time, but there are no indications as yet that it will change.**

## Caution Versus Hope: Taliban Opportunities

The Taliban's willingness to participate in peace talks may well be a strategy rather than a sign of weakness or a desire for peace on any terms other than their own. The Taliban and other insurgents have lost key leaders and cadres, and have had many tactical defeats over the last two years. *But*, it is all too clear that the Taliban knows it can use the negotiations for war as well as peace. It knows most of its key enemies will largely be gone by the end of 2014, that Pakistan shows no signs of trying to drive them out of their sanctuaries, and that the Afghan government is weak and divided.

The Taliban can use the talks to show Afghans and others in the region that the US and other Western states recognize that they cannot defeat the Taliban before they leave and recognize its enduring power. They can use the talks to try to convince Afghans that the US and other states only pushed for negotiations because they are weak and losing. This, in fact, became all too clear in a statement the "Islamic Republic of Afghanistan" issued on January 15<sup>th</sup> – a statement entitled *Formal Proclamation of Islamic Emirate's Victory* -- one that showed even less interest in a real peace than the Taliban's initial statements, and made the peace negotiations more of a threat than a search for peace:

The Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan showed it openly to the world that it is a well-organized political power besides being a military power. It has ruled the country successfully and preserves the right and might of each and every decision of the country. It can neither accept external orders nor can it come under any one's pressure. It is proved to the world that the Islamic Emirate is deeply rooted internally in the Afghan nation and externally in the whole Islamic ummah. Militarily successful resistance against a gigantic international alliance, full presence on the whole soil and overall perseverance are the signs and secrets of the Islamic Emirate.

The invading countries of Afghanistan are compelled to review their policies by looking into the military and political determination, unity, organization and unshakeable stance of the Islamic Emirate.

A year ago a European diplomat said to an envoy of the Islamic Emirate:

"For a complete decade we were deceived by America and Karzai saying that a neighboring country is supervising the Taliban and can prepare them for anything. Therefore we were giving every kind of prerogatives to the authorities of that neighboring country. Although they endangered their country for this purpose but they did not succeed. If they could do something, they would have done it for the sake of these privileges. Now the world has realized that the claims of Karzai and America were only a kind of propaganda to deceive the nations worldwide. The Afghans and Taliban are not a trivial phenomenon but an ideological and national movement that should be acknowledged as a political fact.

It is but sheer determination, religious and ideological adherence and unequalled sacrifices displayed by true Afghan Mujahid nation for the last decade that today regional and world powers are after to reach mutual understanding about the country.

Today somewhere in the world if the name of the Islamic Emirate is carved and a flag with 'Kalma tayyebaa' (holy word of creedal testimony) is waved on the top; it is actually the formal proclamation of the success of resistance against the incursion.

*The contractors of the international invasion can no more deceive the nation by their baseless talks. They used the word 'peace' as a propaganda fragment to deceive the people. But today as their guardians and supporters are fed up militarily and logistically with this war and are planning for retreat, they are giving contradictory statements which show their complete*

*confusion and embarrassment. Sometime they say that the office of the Islamic Emirate should be opened in some other country. Another time they say they have no part in this.*

The choice of Qatar for the inauguration of formal office shows the political deliberation of the Islamic Emirate. If this initiative had been taken in some neighboring country, it would have been another chance of every day propaganda for Karzai administration. If the office was inaugurated in Saudi Arabia, someone else would have suspected it because of the close bilateral relations of Pakistan and Saudi Arabia. And finally Turkey could not have been considered an ideal place for the sovereignty and prestige of this office because of its membership of the NATO alliance.

But Qatar, having balanced relations with all sides and a prestigious status in the Islamic world, is the most appropriate place for this kind of office. Although none of the Muslim countries is interested in opposing the Islamic Emirate, due to the sympathy of the masses in the Muslim world with Islamic Emirate. Even if the governments or the authorities might not be interested, they may take a careful stance on this for the sake of their people.

Now the military, political and national efficiency of the Islamic Emirate is evident, perhaps no one will benefit from the mere enmity of the Islamic Emirate. Everyone concerned should choose the rational and logical path of solving issues with Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. If the present invaders had chosen a lucid path instead of incursion, they would not have faced such a huge personnel and financial loss in Afghanistan.

Simply announcing that more formal talks may start in Qatar is already making some of those in the US and allied countries who are tired of the war focus even more on leaving, rather than focus on a successful transition to Afghan capability and the need to continue supporting transition after 2014. Commentators and analysts in the region, Asia, and Europe are already saying that the fact the US catalyzed the talks proves that the US wants out at any price.

The very announcement that talks have reached the point where the US is actively supporting the creation of a Taliban negotiating entity in Qatar gives the Taliban more official status and recognition. One key example is a set of statements that Vice President Biden made about the Taliban in an interview in *Newsweek* in the December 19, 2011 edition,

That is part of what the reconciliation process is about right now. We are not just deciding that all we are doing is supporting a government and building up their military capability. We're engaged in a reconciliation process. Whether it will work or not is another question. But we are in a position where if Afghanistan ceased and desisted from being a haven for people who do damage and have as a target the United States of America and their allies, that's good enough. That's good enough. We're not there yet.

Look, the Taliban per se is not our enemy. That's critical. There is not a single statement that the president has ever made in any of our policy assertions that the Taliban is our enemy because it threatens U.S. interests. If, in fact, the Taliban is able to collapse the existing government, which is cooperating with us in keeping the bad guys from being able to do damage to us, then that becomes a problem for us. So there's a dual track here:

One, continue to keep the pressure on al Qaeda and continue to diminish them. Two, put the government in a position where they can be strong enough that they can negotiate with and not be overthrown by the Taliban. And at the same time try to get the Taliban to move in the direction to see to it that they, through reconciliation, commit not to be engaged with al Qaeda or any other organization that they would harbor to do damage to us and our allies.

Such statements do not mean ending the fighting or abandoning the Afghan government, and may be a necessary condition to start peace talks. They do, however, illustrate the fact such talks make the Taliban a quasi-legitimate alternative to the Karzai government, and gains aid in fund raising. It also gains more international recognition from other states and the media. It can do a better job of negotiating for prisoner releases, access to funds, and other side conditions as well as peace.

The insurgents can also try to use the negotiations to try to split the Afghan government, excluding some factions, portraying them as the enemy of peace, or seeking to split key Pashtun factions, or divide Pashtuns from the Hazara and the key non-Pashtun ethnic groups that made up the Northern Alliance.

### **Five Critical Conditions That Must Be Met to Ensure that Negotiations Do Not Become an Extension of War By Other Means**

The way in which the Afghan government, the US, its allies, Pakistan, other outside powers, and UN approach the talks will be absolutely critical in shaping the extent to which they seek a real peace or become a tool that the Taliban and other insurgents can exploit. Some of these conditions were agreed to -- in broad, undefined terms -- by the US, most of its allies, and many other states in the declaration of the Bonn Conference on December 5, 2011:

Mindful of the relevant UN resolutions, the International Community concurs with Afghanistan that the peace and reconciliation process and its outcome must be based on the following principles:

(a) The process leading to reconciliation must be

- ☐ truly Afghan-led and Afghan-owned; as well as
- ☐ inclusive, representing the legitimate interests of all the people of Afghanistan, regardless of gender or social status.

(b) Reconciliation must contain

- ☐ the reaffirmation of a sovereign, stable and united Afghanistan;
- ☐ the renunciation of violence;
- ☐ the breaking of ties to international terrorism;
- ☐ respect for the Afghan Constitution, including its human rights provisions, notably the rights of women.

(c) The region must respect and support the peace process and its outcome. An outcome of the peace process respecting the above principles will receive the full support of the International Community

If the peace talks are to succeed, however, they must be carried out under the following – far better defined -- conditions

1. *It must be absolutely clear that the US must take the lead in working with its allies and other donors to show that it is committed to supporting the Afghan government through and after 2014, that it will ensure the funding of the*

*Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) and government budget so it can survive transition, and will be prepared to leave some military forces and strong advisory teams as long as necessary.*

The US government has repeatedly stated that is going to make this commitment. Secretary Clinton stated this clearly at the Kabul Conference in November 2011:

“...we can pursue three mutually reinforcing objectives: We’re going to continue fighting, we’re going to be talking, and we’re going to continue building... Now, some might say, “How do you do all three of those at the same time?” And my answer is, under the circumstances we must do all three at the same time. So we want a very clear message to the insurgents on both sides of the border that we are going to fight you and we are going to seek you in your safe havens, whether you’re on the Afghan side or the Pakistani side. They must be dealt with.”

However, discussions with senior Afghan, Pakistani, other Asian, and European analysts and officials make it all too clear that many privately believe the US wants to use the peace talks to get out, and has either decided to abandon Afghanistan or will do so. The Taliban and other insurgent groups almost certainly have strong elements that believe the same thing.

Broad reassurances about US and allied commitments to the Afghan government and transition are not enough; nor are vague pledges at events like the Bonn conference. The US (and its allies and other donors) will only be a credible force in persuading the Taliban it must negotiate on accept acceptable terms if the US takes the lead in making firm commitments in forces and money, and if the US constantly reiterates those commitments and makes them a key aspect of all of its communications.

The President’s budget proposals for FY2013, and what they say about US force levels in Afghanistan, will be a key test. They will be the test of whether the US commitment is real in spite of the current budget crisis and other changes in US strategy

2. *US, ISAF, and Afghan forces must be strong enough for the fighting to go on until it is clear that the Taliban have accepted a meaningful peace, and a peace must then be enforceable. US and ISAF forces must phase down in ways that allow the Afghan forces to develop and take effective responsibility for security, and Afghan forces must demonstrate that the insurgents cannot win as US and ISAF withdrawals.*

There is a serious risk that a combination of the peace talks and US and allied withdrawals and funding cut will give the impression that the Afghan government and Afghan forces are steadily weaker with each reduction and funding cut, and that the US and other ISAF forces are becoming too weak to challenge the Taliban in key areas of influence and are accepting its return.

This risk is reinforced by the lag in the Afghan government's ability to establish effective levels of security and governance in many areas in the south and the east. It also will encourage the Hazara, Turkmens, Uzbeks, and Tajiks to try to recreate the northern alliance, and splits among the northern and southern Pashtuns. The insurgents are more likely to believe they can exploit "divide and conquer" tactics than to succeed through negotiations.

Negotiating from a growing position of weakness will not make the Taliban and other insurgents negotiate a real agreement as distinguished from exploit the peace process. The grim reality is that the only way to achieve a favorable peace is to continue to make war.

*The US and its allies must make it clear that the Afghan government is in charge, and will hold the negotiations, and set the terms. The Afghans must be in the lead – not the US, not some facilitator, and above all not the Pakistanis.*

Media reporting on how the new round of talks came about has already led many inside and outside Afghanistan to believe that the Afghans are not really in charge, and that Karzai and others have been forced into talks by the US. This is reflected in statements by senior Afghan officials that imply that the initiatives for talks have not had full Afghan support and participation. For example, aid Mr. Karzai's spokesman, Aimal Faizi, said on January 12, 2012 that,

Our position is very clear. The talks must be Afghan-led and Afghan-owned... The talks where nobody represents the Afghan government will not lead to any positive outcome. At the end of the day, both sides will have to come to the government of Afghanistan.

The resulting mix of fact, rumor, and conspiracy theories undermines any chance of real success. The US and other states must make it transparently clear that the Karzai government is in the lead and sets the terms, and that this is not a repeat of those phases of the Vietnam talks where South Vietnam played a supporting or no role, and was effectively forced to accept US positions.

US, European, and other negotiators must constantly stress this Afghan lead, there must be enough transparency to make it clear that the Afghan lead is real, and negotiators need to stop talking in bland, overoptimistic terms, and make it clear they will support the Afghan government demanding that any peace settlement be credible and sustainable or that the Afghan government and its supporters will continue or resume the fighting. The Taliban will never take the Afghan government and transition seriously under any other conditions.

3. *The full range of Afghan factions and key elements of power must be included.*

Any meaningful peace agreement will be shaped by enemies – as many within the Afghan power structure as among the insurgents. Any efforts to

demonize given Afghan leaders and factions, or exclude them because of past conduct, can make even the best settlement fail. So can including impossible standards or criteria for disarmament, ideology, ending corruption and real world power structures, or the rule of law and human rights. All need to focus on the art of the possible, and compromise. The best achievable peace has to be the goal, not the best peace possible.

The risk that peace talks will further divide Afghanistan is already a serious one. The insurgent's assassination of Burhanuddin Rabbani in the fall of 2011 deprived the Afghan "peace council" of a credible leader. The deep divisions within the Afghan government by sect and ethnicity, the feeling of many outside Karzai's immediate cadres that he is seeking to remain in power and exclude Northern ethnic groups and the Hazara, and anger at the permeating corruption and power-broker structure of the central government are all both undermining the credibility of the government and its ability to hold peace talks.

There needs to be a far more inclusive approach to peace negotiations as soon as possible, and leaders from key factions – or their chosen representative(s) must be present to give the Afghan side broad national credibility. This means including a voice or voices for Hazara, Turkmen, Uzbek, and Tajik leaders who are not supporters of Karzai – potentially including a senior representative (or representatives) of the National Front, National Islamic Movement, or People's Unity Movement. There also needs to be some form of broad Afghan military committee or body associated with the Afghan government side that includes a wide range of officers to discuss and vet such talks.

These efforts are equally necessary to avoid the risk of deep civil and regional divisions – or even civil war -- after US and ISAF withdrawal in 2014. The divisions inside the Afghan government are steadily growing, as are resentments of what many opposition figures see as Karzai's "dictatorship," misuse of promotions in the security forces to gain control, use of contracts and corruption, and a possible search to remain in power after 2014 in spite of the term limits in the constitution.

Regardless of the justice of any given complaint -- and the opposition is far from perfect -- there is no room for "blame games" between Karzai and his (non-Taliban) opposition. It is vital to reassure all of the key factions on the Afghan government side, and also to ensure that the Taliban and other insurgents cannot exploit the peace efforts to further divide the regional and other elements of the Afghan government and people. Far too many US and ISAF analysts talk about trying to divide the insurgency. The risk the insurgency can divide the Afghans is at least as great, if not greater.

4. *The role of Pakistan must be clear and limited*

Pakistan will play a major role in any peace settlement. It has vital interests in the security and stability of its border areas, and it will never abandon ties to Afghan insurgent groups that give it leverage, or cease to pursue its own interests. Pakistani and Afghan relations, however, are now as bad in broad terms as those between Pakistan and the US.

Afghans fear a deal that will give Pakistan control of the peace process, and they do not feel it can be separated from the insurgent threat. If they feel that a peace simply creates Pakistan zones of influence, this too risks making Hazara, Turkmen, Uzbek, and Tajik leaders split from the government, as well as divisions between Pashtun groups.

It must also be made clear to Pakistan that its role in a peace settlement must be shaped by the degree to which its government, military, and ISI do or do not support the Haqqani network and other insurgent groups, and attempt to use negotiations to secure zones of influence or control in Afghanistan and use Afghanistan against India.

At the same time, the US and its allies must decide how firm they will be in resisting Pakistani pressure before and after 2014, and in backing the Afghan government. With or without a peace settlement, any form of successful transition will depend on clear US and allied support of the Afghan government in dealing with a tacitly hostile Pakistan. The cost of aid and size of the US and allied advisory and partner effort after 2014 will be critically dependent on the role Pakistan decides to play.

Finding the right balance so that Afghans come to truly believe they are in charge, but Pakistan feels it has a role and influence is going to be a constant and critical challenge -- one matched by the lesser challenges posed by India, Iran, China, Russia, and the "Stans." That balance, however, does not currently exist in many Afghan minds, or in ways that reassure Pakistanis. Negotiations cannot succeed unless the present levels of concerns and tension are eased on both sides.

A peace that offers Pakistan security and stability without control over part of Afghanistan is the best outcome for Pakistan as well as Afghanistan. At present, however, the odds that both Pakistan and the insurgents will accept such a settlement are limited. This means that the US and its allies must also make transition planning that takes account of Iranian concerns over the Hazara Shi'ite minority, as well as the future role of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. Afghanistan will need every bit of support it can get to the west and the north to balance Pakistani pressure, and it will need clear guarantees that it will not be critically dependent on Pakistani supply corridors and overflight rights.

5. *There must be no false transfers of power or impractical ceasefires*

The Taliban and insurgents will have the advantage in any situation where they can pursue political and security interests without fighting in much of the south and the east. The risks of making agreements that ignore these realities are clear from what happened in similar British-Taliban efforts in Helmand, and Pakistani attempts to deal with the Pakistani Taliban.

The US and ISAF certainly understand these risks. However, media reporting on how the new round of talks came about – and the regional rumor mill and conspiracy generators – have already led many Afghans to believe that the Afghans are not in charge, that the US has already made commitments to the Taliban to turn over some provinces or reach “ceasefires” that give the insurgents power and allow the US to withdraw more quickly.

These are further areas where immediate clarification and transparency are needed. They are also areas where caution will be needed throughout the peace process. Any kind of military or security deal that enhances Taliban and insurgent power, while making the government and US/ISAF security efforts less credible, will add fuel to the insurgent side, and seriously undermine the leverage necessary to get and sustain a meaningful peace.

Moreover, there are a wide range of ways that the Taliban can go on fighting while negotiating even if it appears to agree to a ceasefire. It can use low-level violence, intimidation and extortion to win influence in areas without openly fighting the US, ISAF, or Afghan security forces. It can blame hardline elements like the Haqqani network for attacks and assassinations. It can make deals with local Pashtun and other power brokers who fear both US and ISAF withdrawals and the weakness of the Afghan government. This means the US, ISAF, and ANSF must be ready to react immediately to any Taliban or other insurgent use of such tactics throughout the entire negotiating process, and if an actual agreement is violated.

### **The Sixth and Most Critical Condition: The Afghan government must provide reform and more effectiveness governance in return for US, allied, other donor, and Afghan support**

A sixth condition has become the most important condition of all. The US, its allies, donors, and the world should not make continued commitments to an Afghan government that continues to fail its people. All of the prior conditions depend on US, allied, and donor calculations that the Afghan government and forces will be strong enough – and have broad enough Afghan support to secur a meaningful and lasting peace. This may be the most challenging condition of all for a successful peace effort, and the Afghan government and all Afghan supporters need to recognize that they – not outside powers – will be the critical factor shaping the end result of the talks.

#### ***Bonn Conference Vague and Meaningless Good Intentions***

The Bonn Conference declaration of December 5, 2011 touched upon these issues in vague terms that could just as easily have been drafted in 2002, that have been repeated in statement after statement over the years, and that were so vague as to be little more than meaningless:

We recognize that building a democratic society above all entails enabling legitimate and effective civilian authority embodied in a democratically elected government and served by transparent and strong, functioning institutions. Despite significant achievements, Afghanistan needs to continue its work to strengthen state institutions and improve governance throughout the country, including through reforming the civil service and strengthening the linkage between justice reform and development of its security institutions, including an effective civilian police force. Strengthening and improving Afghanistan's electoral process will be a key step forward in the country's democratization. Afghan government institutions at all levels should increase their responsiveness to the civil and economic needs of the Afghan people and deliver key services to them. In this context, the protection of civilians, strengthening the rule of law and the fight against corruption in all . . .

...We will move this agenda forward, in accordance with our commitments under the Kabul Process in line with the principle of mutual accountability.

...As the Afghan government sets priorities, embraces reform and meets its Kabul commitments, including strengthening transparent and accountable public financial management systems and improving budget execution capacity, its partners recommit to meeting the minimum targets set in London and Kabul for aligning international assistance with Afghanistan's priorities and channeling a growing share of development aid through the government budget. We welcome the Government of Japan's intention to host a ministerial conference in July 2012 in Tokyo, which will address, in addition to the coordination of international economic assistance through the Transition period, Afghanistan's strategy for sustainable development, including aid effectiveness and regional economic cooperation.

### ***Afghan Government Pledges With Limited Credibility***

As the Bonn Conference declaration mentions, the Afghan government did provide a document of its own in the form of a document called *Towards a Self-Sustaining Afghanistan, An Economic Transition Strategy* that is dated November 29, 2011. Like so many previous Afghan government documents, it makes a long series of promises about reform:

- Acknowledge Government analysis of the economic impact of transition as well as the analysis in the World Bank study "Transition in Afghanistan looking beyond 2014", and the resulting fiscal pressures it will to face;
- Support the Government's intention of increasing fiscal sustainability through a commitment to an aggressive program of efficiency and reform and efforts to encourage economic growth, improve human development, and public service delivery;
- Agree to work with Government through *The Kabul Process* to implement the prioritized National Priority Programs in a sustainable and fiscally responsible manner.

The Government of Afghanistan is committed to building a secure, prosperous, democratic Afghanistan based on fiscally sustainable private sector-led economic growth, well-governed and transparent government institutions, and mutually beneficial regional economic cooperation. We will set priorities and take difficult decisions to embrace reform and make effective use of international assistance, in accordance with the following objectives:

- Increasing Government capacity and building on structural reforms to improve public

service delivery;

- Strengthening public financial management systems, improving budget execution, and increasing revenue collection, including phased implementation of a value-added tax;
- Increasing transparency and accountability to prevent corruption;
- Creating a strong enabling environment for private sector investment, including public-private partnerships in social and economic development, supported by adequate regulatory and institutional reforms and a robust financial sector; and
- Working closely with the International Community to develop strategies to reduce overall security costs.

Progress towards the achievement of these objectives is vital. They will help us to reach shared goals for improved security, governance, and development. The Government believes that clear, mutually agreed targets, pursued with the International Community, are the best means for monitoring our joint performance. For these reasons, and with the support of the International Community, the Government commits to:

- Improve Afghanistan's ranking in the Transparency International's Corruption Perception Index, moving from a current rank of 176 to a rank of 150 within three years,
- Improve by 15 positions on the IFC's Doing Business Survey within three years, and maintain or improve our ranking on each of the ten indicators,
- Grow the ratio of revenue collection to GDP from 11% to 15% within four years, and to 20% by 2025,
- Within five years: to improve the management of public funds as measured by the PEFA assessment by 20%, to improve transparent accountable use of public funds measured by the Open Budget Index to 40% and to improve budget execution to 75%, and
- Improve our score in the UNDP human development index by 25% in the next three years; and by 50% in the next ten years.

The Government of Afghanistan believes that with the support of the International Community these commitments are realistic and achievable.

... The Government will continue to employ the Kabul Process including increased donor engagement to channel international support for the specific activities that can further these over-arching objectives. These activities will support the Government of Afghanistan to develop policies and undertake programs aimed at: (a) achieving financial sustainability through future revenue streams by creating critical infrastructure that is sustainable and can be supported by Afghanistan's budget, (b) reforming and creating critical institutions for effective governance, (c) increasing productivity in agriculture and rural areas for growth, poverty reduction and increased food security, (d) strengthening rule of law, and continuing improvement to Afghanistan's legal framework, (e) establishing an enabling environment for private sector-led growth and private investment, including a strong financial sector, secure access to capital and transparent responsible regulatory environments, (f) building skilled human capital, (g) achieving economic and social stability through increased access to improved job opportunities, (h) strengthening regional economic integration through initiatives such the historical trade routes and the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) Program to promote trade, facilitate transit, expand market access and support economic growth.

The Government's strategy to address this involves a re-commitment by the Afghan Government to economic growth, key reforms and increased efficiency in revenue mobilization. The IMF forecasts that Afghanistan will collect \$2.0 billion in revenue in fiscal 2011-12, corresponding to just over 11% of GDP. By fiscal 2016 we believe that a 15% revenue to GDP ratio is achievable...Succeeding would mean that the Government would collect \$4.4 billion in 2016, and would reflect an average revenue growth rate from 2009 of more than 30%.

...To achieve this, the Government has committed to an aggressive program of efficiency and reform, agreed with the IMF on November 14th, 2011. The key elements of this program include

- measures to increase the efficiency of our customs and revenue departments,
- expanding the Government's ability to enforce the Afghan tax law,
- improved governance of our state-owned enterprises and corporations, including strong measures for the elimination of subsidies, and clear time-bound plans to turn over non-essential functions to the private sector,
- increase capacity and an improved institutional framework to respond to economic crime,
- implementation of a series of reforms to strengthen the financial sector, ensuring access to capital for legitimate investors, and
- a phased implementation of a value-added tax providing for tax efficiency and a more progressive, pro-poor taxation.

...The Kabul Process is built on a framework of mutual accountability and transparency. The Government has succeeded in implementing 38 of 50 of the reforms agreed in London and Kabul. The Government remains committed to completing implementation of the outstanding 12 measures. The London Conference saw the International Community agree to two major commitments: to channel 50% of development assistance through the national budget within two years, and to align 80% of total assistance with Afghan priorities defined by the NPPs. In spite of this, development assistance delivered through the budget has declined and the NPPs endorsed by the JCMB remain underfunded. The Government acknowledges that the failure of the Kabul Bank and the subsequent delay to agreement with the IMF complicated the achievement of these goals. It is very pleased to be back on track within a program and is confident that these goals can be met within two years.

***Tying US and Allied Support of the Afghan Government to Tangible, Measurable Progress in Reform***

The Afghan government document asks for US and international support through 2025 to eliminate its "dependency on international assistance for funding to non-security sectors and will only receive support consistent with all other least developed nations. A robust and growing extractive industries sector will have developed. Through effective development and improved delivery of Government services, the root causes of insurgency will be reduced and, in consultation with international partners, plans will have been put in place to reduce the size of the ANSF." It also states that,

Based on our initial analysis we must look to donors to finance approximately 47% of GDP or approximately \$10 billion in 2015. At first glance, this figure may look enormous. However, it reflects a 40% reduction from current aid levels, and it is expected to decline over time. The Government takes the challenge donors will face in maintaining this level of assistance seriously, but notes that when compared to the current spending of the International Community it is small. The current estimated cost of the international military presence in Afghanistan is \$140 billion per year; 7% of total 2011 security costs is sufficient to fund the entire gap. This cost savings can facilitate Afghanistan's passage to a future that is not aid-dependent. A long-term funding commitment by the International Community, declining over time and ending in 2030, would provide the necessary stability in financing to allow Afghanistan to arrive at a stable and prosperous future. This approach allows Afghanistan to take full responsibility for its own security.

To be blunt, no one believes that, "The Government has succeeded in implementing 38 of 50 of the reforms agreed in London and Kabul" in any meaningful form. Ten years of pledges and talk about reform, about reducing corruption, and serving the

people rather than power brokers has created a situation where the Afghan government -- and particularly President Karzai and his key supporters -- need to be forced to understand that the US, its allies, and donors will abandon the Afghan government unless its leaders act immediately and consistently to make good on the reforms they promised at Bonn and in the document they circulated asking for transition aid.

Moreover, the last thing outside donors should do is fund the existing central government system as the US and other donors phase down their aid teams. The current constitution puts virtually all such money in the hands of the Afghan president and Afghan power brokers, leaves the legislature impotent and corrupt on its own, and pays off provincial and district governors and local leaders and contractors in ways that are generally wasteful and corrupt. It is striking that after ten years, every study of Afghan governance, financial management, spending, and corruption reaches this conclusion.

Moreover, it still is not clear that President Karzai will honor the constitution and leave office in 2014, or that anything approaching an honest election process will be developed after a presidential and legislative election that were both filled with fraud and corruption. It is not clear that moves will be made to elect provincial and district governors and make them responsible to the constituents they are supposed to serve.

The current system cannot be blamed on President Karzai. It is an unworkable structure based on a fatally flawed constitution and failure to see the control of money as the critical test of corruption and effective governance. Full reform is impossible by 2014 – even on the terms set by Afghan standards rather than the impossible dreams of the West. Major movement towards reform is not only possible, but also a precondition to both peace and the post-2014 survival of anything like the present Afghan government.

It is not clear that the promotion structure and command of the Afghan security forces will not continue to be altered to favor Pashtun and other Karzai loyalists. Reforming the development of the Afghan national security forces is more controversial than the need for the reform of governance, the central government political process, and to create elected, responsible provincial, district, and local governments.

It is clear, however, that the Afghan forces must represent all factions and recruit and promote on the basis of merit and without top down political power brokering and bottom up sale of positions and promotion. It is equally clear that further reform is needed of the police and justice systems – perhaps turning the police into a provincial force, giving provinces and districts more control over local forces, and mixing formal and informal justice into functioning forms of prompt justice tailored to the needs of given areas.

Neither the Bonn Declaration nor *Towards a Self-Sustaining Afghanistan, An Economic Transition Strategy* do any more to address the key issues that deprive the

government of popular support and that may well set the conditions for civil conflict, failed peace efforts, and a failed transition.

A failure to address the full range of critical reforms already help to deprive the Afghan government of outside support as well as deprive it of popular support. Public opinion polls in the US and virtually every ISAF country make it brutally clear that the weaknesses in the Afghan government are alienating the US, Europe, Afghans, and other donors. Transition and any meaningful peace cannot work without real changes by the Afghan government, without a clear commitment to power sharing by Karzai, without elected – or at least honest -- provincial and district officials, and without a clear plan for honest elections and a political transition in the 2014 Afghan Presidential election.

*At this point, the Afghan government is almost as much a threat to itself as is the Taliban and other insurgents.* Reform does not – and will not – have to meet Western standards or ideals and the US and its allies need to do far more to control the flow of unfocused money that had done so much to corrupt Afghans. *But*, major reforms must begin soon and continue to the point where a far more effective and popular government exists by the time of the Afghan presidential election in 2014. If they do not, three more years of Afghan words and token action or worse, will cost the government the support of the Afghan people. It removes any rationale for sustained outside support for transition. It will end in losing the war and any chance of a real peace and lasting peace.

### **Shaping an Actual Peace Versus Cutting Future Losses**

Meeting these conditions are ones that can make meaningful peace negotiations possible – they do not define what a peace should be to succeed on any stable basis, or how it can be made stable or enforced. This is what the actual negotiations are for. At the same time, simply holding peace talks or even drafting an actual agreement is likely to be little more than a facade unless most or all of these conditions are met – especially the sixth.

For peace to have a real chance, the US, other ISAF countries, and outside donors must pay a high cost in blood and dollars through 2014, they must provide aid and large teams of advisors through 2025 to 2030, and the Afghan people must pay in years of further conflict. This price should never be paid unless there is a clear and consistent movement towards far more effective Afghan governance than currently exists and it is clear that it can create effective and enduring Afghan forces. At some point over during 2012, the continued failure of the Afghan government to move forward will remove the rationale for outside support. If Afghans do not recognize this and act, they cannot accuse the US and other powers of abandoning them.

A detailed analysis of the current US and ISAF strategy and the challenges of making the governance, economic, and security aspects of transition work entitled *Transition in the Afghanistan-Pakistan War: How Does This War End?* is available on the CSIS website at <http://csis.org/publication/transition-afghanistan-pakistan-war-how-does-war-end>

An update on the state of the fighting and transition planning in map and graphic form is available in a two part series entitled *The Afghan War at the end of 2011: A Status Report*, which is available on the CSIS website at <http://csis.org/publication/afghan-war-end-2011-status-report>.