

A Peace-building Transition Strategy for Afghanistan

Women's Action for New Directions & Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies February 2012

The United States and NATO countries have started a gradual military drawdown and transition process in which they will end combat operations in the latter part of 2013 and transfer security responsibilities to Afghan authorities by 2014. A successful peace-building strategy requires a comprehensive set of security, political, diplomatic and economic policies. The United States and allies must:

1. Reorient policies from an emphasis on military solutions to a greater focus on political solutions;
2. Intensify peacemaking diplomacy and consider developing an interim peacekeeping force, and;
3. Work with Afghans and the international community to protect the rights of Afghan women and ensure that women play a leading role in building sustainable peace.



Photo courtesy of Canada in Afghanistan

Re-orienting U.S. Policy from Military to Political Solutions

A more peaceful and economically viable future for Afghanistan requires a major re-orientation of policy by the United States and its major allies. Rather than the continued focus on military solutions, the emphasis should be on political solutions in Afghanistan and among neighboring states. Keeping U.S. troops and military bases in Afghanistan, as is currently planned, will prolong armed conflict, because the presence of foreign forces is a principal cause of armed resistance in the region. A 2009 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace report concluded that the presence of foreign troops is, “The most important factor in mobilizing support for the Taliban.” In particular, insurgent groups are using popular resentment of

house raids and drone strikes to fan the flames of militancy.

U.S. forces conduct hundreds of night raids into Afghan homes every month – “kicking in doors” is what troops call it. These operations are deeply offensive and highly unpopular and are generating resentments that help the insurgents. For strangers to barge into a home with women living inside is a grave violation of Afghan culture and religious tradition.



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Drone strikes are also causing public resentment and are damaging relationships especially with people in neighboring Pakistan, where officials have sought strict limits on drone strikes as a condition for their cooperation. To overcome these obstacles and create a climate for reconciliation will require confidence building measures and gestures of restraint. To signal its commitment to a peaceful solution the United States should suspend house raids and drone operations and halt targeted military operations in both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Peace-making Diplomacy with the UN & An Interim Security Force

The Afghanistan Study Group recommends “an energetic diplomatic effort, spearheaded by the United Nations (UN) and strongly backed by the United States and its allies,” to forge an agreement among regional powers for military neutralization and stabilization. Neighboring states will be more willing to participate in helping to stabilize Afghanistan if the resulting diplomatic and security arrangements are under UN auspices rather than NATO control.

A diplomatic compact among neighboring states can help to contain Taliban influence after the current International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops depart. Six of the seven neighboring regional powers with a stake in Afghanistan’s future—Russia, Iran, India, China, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan—share the goal of preventing the return of a Taliban dictatorship in Kabul. Four of these countries—Russia, Iran, India, and Tajikistan—cooperated in helping to remove the Taliban regime in 2001. All are threatened by Muslim extremist movements that could be energized by the return of Taliban power in Kabul. This common regional interest should be harnessed and a coordinated regional process structured within an UN-managed diplomatic framework that prioritizes the security of Afghanistan and the stability of the region.



Photo by ISAF Public Affairs

To avoid a security vacuum as U.S. and NATO troops leave Afghanistan, an interim international security force should be deployed under UN auspices. This proposed interim peacekeeping force should be linked to a security agreement between the United States and the Kabul government and insurgent forces. The agreement should include a mutual ceasefire among all combatants and the withdrawal of ISAF forces in conjunction with the demobilization of insurgents. The security agreement would be linked to related political arrangements and the proposed regional diplomatic compact. A high level NATO planning team should be established to explore the feasibility of the proposed interim protection force and begin dialogue with the appropriate authorities.



Photo courtesy of Canada in Afghanistan



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The UN Security Council would authorize the deployment of the interim force, which would have a mission of protecting civilians, especially women and children and helping to secure strategic centers. The role would be policing not combat operations. The proposed interim force would operate for a limited period with the consent of the Afghan government and insurgent forces. In December 2008, Taliban leader Mullah Omar proposed the introduction of peacekeeping forces from Muslim countries as part of a “seven point plan” to resolve the conflict. Other Taliban representatives have also raised the idea, and they have pledged not to attack such a force. A peacekeeping force might enjoy legitimacy in the eyes of insurgent groups and could increase their willingness to accept security and political agreements.

Protecting the Rights of Women & Furthering Women’s Peace-building Leadership

As the report *Afghan Women Speak* documents, Afghan women and girls have made significant gains over the past decade. They have seized opportunities to go to school, earn an income and participate in public life – all denied to them during Taliban years. As of last year 7.3 million Afghan children were in school – 37 per cent of them girls - compared to only

900,000 boys in 2002. Hundreds of midwives have been trained in a push to tackle maternal mortality. The Afghan Parliament has a 25 percent reserve quota for women.

These gains are real but they are in danger because of rising violence and insurgency. Hundreds of schools have been closed in the south and southeast, with girl students targeted for attack. Health clinics have been closed as health workers are abducted and killed. Insecurity has limited women's participation in the electoral process and public life. Electoral participation rates for women and men have declined since the high point of 2005.

Afghan women know it will be impossible to consolidate their gains in a militarized environment. They support a peace process, but they want assurances that they will not be the 'victims' of the process, that peace will not be bought at their expense. As the United States pursues a policy of gradual military withdrawal, it will need to maintain a commitment to protecting women's rights and preserving women's political, economic and social gains.

Any drawdown in foreign troops must be accompanied by long-term, sustained investment in projects that support Afghan women and families. To date development funding has been linked to military objectives, with aid money concentrated in areas where there is fighting. This connection between military operations and development needs to be severed, with support provided directly for human rights and development programs that have merit in their own right.

Aid organizations have identified social programs that are effective at improving the lives of women and families, especially in areas of education and healthcare – such as improving access to secondary education for girls, training midwives and expanding economic opportunities for women in rural areas. These programs need to be supported with all available resources.

One of the best ways to prevent a roll back in women's gains is to ensure that women are meaningfully represented in all peace discussions and political forums. So far, Afghan women's organizations have had to fight hard to have their voices heard during the various conferences and peace jirgas of recent years. U.S. policymakers must insist that Afghan women have a seat at the table in these discussions about the country's future. Washington should use its significant leverage with the Kabul government to advocate on behalf of women's interests.



Photo by ISAF Public Affairs

¹ *A New Way Forward: Rethinking U.S. Strategy in Afghanistan*, Report of the Afghanistan Study Group, August 16, 2010, <http://www.afghanistanstudygroup.com/>

² David Cortright and Sarah Smiles Persinger, *Afghan Women Speak: Enhancing Security and Human Rights in Afghanistan*, The Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, Notre Dame, Indiana, October 2010, <http://www.nd.edu/~jfallon2/WomenAfghanistanReport.pdf>