



Department of Justice, Peace and Human Development Office of International Justice and Peace

Background on Afghanistan-Pakistan **February 2012**

I think with affection of all those who have suffered ... as a result of terrorist attacks which have sown death and destruction in countries like Afghanistan ... (and) Pakistan. ... Faced with this reality, we must not grow discouraged ... but rather redouble our efforts on behalf of security and development. --Pope Benedict XVI, January 9, 2009

CURRENT SITUATION: After a 2010 surge in troop numbers in 2010, in June 2011 President Obama declared that the U.S. had largely accomplished its goals in Afghanistan and began withdrawing U.S. forces. The President estimated that by summer 2012, America troop presence would decrease from 100,000 to 70,000 and that all U.S. troops will be withdrawn by 2014. France just announced its intention to withdraw all its troops by 2013.

Despite ten years of U.S. efforts to quell insurgent attacks and to help build a functional state, Afghanistan remains mired in insecurity and instability. President Hamid Karzai's government has limited credibility due to elections marred by fraud and its inability to deliver basic services in many parts of the country. Attacks by the Taliban and other insurgent groups continue despite attempts by Afghan government officials to start a dialogue with Taliban leaders. Since August 2011, assaults on the British Council, the U.S. Embassy and NATO headquarters in Kabul left scores dead. The September slaying of a former Afghan President and acting Peace Council Chief, and the recent surge of suicide and terror attacks are further indications of the perilous conditions the region faces.

In December 2011, international donors pledged ongoing support to the Afghan government, military and police for an anticipated transition of power by 2014. The Afghan government asked that international aid (which funds most of its operations) continue until at least 2025 to allow development to become sustainable. But development assistance and efforts to improve governance are fraught with tribal tensions, questions of accountability, and weak capacity. Since 2007, the U.S. Agency for International Development has committed over \$10.8 billion to Afghan development projects. Once U.S. and NATO forces withdraw, will these vital development programs be funded and will the Afghan government be capable of governing fairly and providing security for its people? While Afghan security and police forces have grown and taken on more responsibility, corruption, persistent attacks by insurgents and lack of capacity raise questions about future stability.

Developments in Afghanistan are closely tied to Pakistan as they share a porous border where al-Qaeda affiliated groups and other insurgents flow back and forth. Tensions with the U.S. have increased given Pakistan's geopolitical position and its nuclear capability, questions about its ability to control terrorist activities within its borders and suspicions over developing ties between Haqqani/Taliban operatives and Pakistani military. The May 2011 covert operation that killed Osama Bin Laden and mounting numbers of drone attacks that killed between 1,350 to 2,150 militants and hundreds of civilians since 2004 have fueled anti-Americanism. The inadvertent November 2011 attack by NATO forces on two Pakistani military outposts that left 24 dead further damaged U.S.-Pakistan relations. Pakistan cut supply lines into Afghanistan and demanded that U.S. end all drone operations within its borders. In addition, rising tension between Pakistan's military and civilian leaders and Supreme Court challenges to the government have created more instability.

The "Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act" passed in 2009 provides \$7.5 billion in non-military aid over five years, making Pakistan the second largest recipient of U.S. foreign assistance. This assistance is aimed at building sustainable economic development, strengthening democracy and the rule of law, and combating extremism. Some of this assistance has been used to respond to the devastating floods in the summer of 2010.

There are growing and serious concerns over religious freedom in Pakistan, particularly blasphemy laws that were used to sentence a Christian woman to death. In January and March 2011 the Punjab provincial governor

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(a Muslim) and the federal Minister for Minority Affairs (a Christian), who both had been outspoken in calling for changes to blasphemy laws, were assassinated. Their killers have been lauded as “heroes” by many, and these sectarian murders condoned by some Islamic leaders.

BACKGROUND: During the Cold War, the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and other nations provided covert support to an alliance of Afghan freedom fighters (mujahideen) who successfully routed the invading Soviets in 1989. But after the Soviets withdrew, infighting among different ethnic, tribal and religious groups devolved into anarchy. By 1998, the Taliban, a ruthless and disciplined collection of Pashtun mujahideen groups, restored order and controlled 90% of Afghanistan. Their strict interpretation of Sharia law led to severe human rights violations, especially against women and minorities. The Taliban were also closely allied with al Qaeda, offering them sanctuary in exchange for financial and political support. Those opposed to the Taliban formed the Northern Alliance. After the 9/11 attack for which al Qaeda claimed responsibility, U.S. forces entered Afghanistan in October 2001 and helped the Northern Alliance dislodge the Taliban, many of whom fled to Pakistan. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was created in late 2001 to help the fledgling Afghan government with security. When U.S. attention and resources shifted to Iraq, the Taliban regrouped, regained territory and support, capitalizing on the Afghan people’s anger over civilian casualties, and rising fears of “foreign occupation.” Although ISAF/U.S. forces have sought to eliminate terrorist groups and restore order, basic security, and human rights in Afghanistan, their presence is resented by many Afghans and Pakistanis.

CRS in Afghanistan has more than \$14 million in programs to build community-based schools, improve agricultural development, empower women, and improve emergency response. In Pakistan, CRS funds similar programs and assisted Afghan refugees in 2009. After the floods, CRS helped to build temporary shelters and restore agricultural production to expedite economic recovery. In both countries, CRS collaborates with local NGOs to carry out these programs in culturally sensitive ways that build the capacity of local organizations.

USCCB POSITION: Following the 9/11 attack and the U.S. decision to send troops into Afghanistan, the bishops issued a pastoral message, “Living with Faith and Hope after September 11.” They offered moral guidance for military action: restrain use of military force and ensure that civilians are not targeted; address the root causes of terrorism rather than relying solely on military force; and encourage international collaboration to provide humanitarian assistance and rebuild Afghanistan. They noted that “...special attention must be given to developing criteria for when it is appropriate to end military action in Afghanistan.”

USCCB called for a “responsible transition” as an overall ethical framework for U.S. actions in Afghanistan and outlined some specific criteria for withdrawing U.S. military forces at the earliest opportunity. These include: insisting on effective measures to ensure proportionate and discriminate use of force when force is required; encouraging the U.S. government to focus more on diplomacy, development and humanitarian assistance and less on exclusively military actions; protecting religious freedom and other human rights of all, especially vulnerable minorities; minimizing further loss of human life; and assisting refugees and internally displaced persons. Having initiated military action in Afghanistan, our nation should help build good governance, respect for human rights and religious freedom, and economic development long after direct military engagement ends. USCCB recognizes that the presence of U.S. and ISAF forces in Afghanistan may be creating resentment in the local population and supports a multilateral approach that strengthens and improves the accountability of national and local governments, and fosters economic and agricultural development.

ACTION REQUESTED

Seek opportunities to encourage political leaders to promote a “responsible transition” in Afghanistan and withdrawal of U.S. forces at the earliest opportunity consistent with that goal. International relief and development should be community-based, sustainable, and delivered through civilian channels in partnerships between international NGOs like CRS and local civil society groups.

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