



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

Background on Afghanistan-Pakistan February 2010

In Afghanistan, in addition to violence, there are other serious social problems, such as the production of drugs; greater support should be given to efforts for development, and even more intensive work is required in order to build a serene future.
--Pope Benedict XVI, January 7, 2008

CURRENT SITUATION

An additional 30,000 U.S. troops are headed to Afghanistan following President Barack Obama's December 1, 2009 announcement that he would augment the 68,000 troops already there. Another 36,000 troops from over 40 countries also operate in Afghanistan under NATO's International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). This build-up is intended to give the Afghan government, military and police more time to prepare to take over the security of their own country. President Obama indicated his intention to begin bringing some troops home by July 2011 after "building the Afghan capacity that can allow for a responsible transition of our forces out of Afghanistan."

In October 2009, President Obama signed the "Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act" which provides \$7.5 billion over five years in non-military aid aimed at "improving the living conditions of the people of Pakistan through sustainable economic development, strengthening democracy and the rule of law, and combating the extremism that threatens Pakistan and the United States."

U.S. interest in Afghanistan and Pakistan is due in large part to terrorism and extremist insurgencies which threaten regional stability and U.S. national security. Pakistan's nuclear weapons capability and who controls it are major causes for concern. In March 2009, President Obama announced a strategy which aimed "to disrupt, dismantle and defeat al Qaeda in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and to prevent their return to either country in the future." There were escalating attacks in the summer and fall 2009 by Taliban and al Qaeda-affiliated extremists against Afghan and Pakistani military and police forces, ISAF and U.S. troops, and civilian targets. A flawed August 2009 election in Afghanistan raised questions as to the credibility of President Hamid Karzai's government and its ability to deliver basic services. Pakistan's military dislodged many Taliban from the Swat Valley who regrouped in the mountainous area bordering Afghanistan where Osama Bin Laden is rumored to be hiding and which is home to many ethnic Pashtun tribes reportedly hostile to outsiders. Both countries have weak governmental structures and economies.

BACKGROUND

Active U.S. involvement in Afghanistan dates back to the Cold War. Following the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, over one million Afghans fled to Pakistan. There, Afghan freedom fighters (mujahideen) emerged to counter the Soviets. Some mujahideen formed an alliance and with covert funding from the U.S., Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and other nations, were successful in routing the Soviets in 1989. But after the Soviets withdrew, infighting between different ethnic, tribal and religious groups produced anarchy.

The Taliban, a ruthless, extreme, but relatively disciplined collection of Pashtun mujahideen groups, restored order and cracked down on corruption. By 1998 they controlled 90% of Afghanistan. But their strict interpretation of Sharia law, combined with Pashtun tribal customs, led to severe human rights violations, especially against women, girls and minorities. Those opposed to the Taliban's oppressive tactics formed the Northern Alliance. The Taliban began collaborating with al Qaeda, giving them sanctuary and an operational base in return for financial and political support. When the Taliban refused to surrender Osama Bin Laden after 9/11, U.S. forces entered Afghanistan in October 2001 and helped the Northern Alliance dislodge the Taliban, many of whom fled across the porous border into Pakistan.

3211 Fourth St., NE. Washington, DC 20017. Tel: (202)541-3160 Fax: (202)541-3339

The United Nations created the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in late 2001 to help the fledgling Afghan government with security. In 2003, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) assumed control of ISAF. The U.S. contributed significant forces to ISAF, but U.S. attention and resources shifted to Iraq. The Taliban regrouped with al Qaeda elements and regained some support, capitalizing on the Afghan people's resentment of civilian casualties from ISAF/U.S. military action, and rising fears of "foreign occupation." While the Taliban currently do not have widespread support, the U.S. and its allies remain in the difficult position of trying to provide basic security while their presence is resented by many Afghans and Pakistanis.

USCCB POSITION

In 2001, following the tragedy of 9/11 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 subsequent military action in Afghanistan: restrain use of military force and ensure that civilians are not targeted; address the root causes of terrorism rather than rely solely on military force; and encourage international collaboration to provide humanitarian assistance and rebuild Afghanistan.

The bishops were concerned that in the face of terrorist threats, our nation must respond to indiscriminate attacks against innocent civilians in ways that combine a resolve to do what is necessary, the restraint to ensure that we act justly, and the vision to focus on broader issues of poverty and injustice that are unscrupulously exploited by terrorists in gaining recruits. They noted, "Probability of success is particularly difficult to measure in dealing with an amorphous, global terrorist network. Therefore, special attention must be given to developing criteria for when it is appropriate to end military action in Afghanistan."

Bishop Howard Hubbard, Chair of USCCB's Committee on International Justice and Peace, sent letters in October and December 2009 to National Security Advisor General James Jones. He affirmed the need 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, consistent with the objectives of denying safe havens for terrorist organizations, minimizing further loss of human life, assisting refugees and internally displaced persons, and helping set the country on a path to recovery.

USCCB supports a multilateral approach that strengthens and improves the accountability of national and local governments, and fosters economic development and agriculture. The Conference advised that whenever possible, development assistance should be delivered through civilian/NGO channels, rather than through the military, since agencies, like Catholic Relief Services, have the experience to promote sustainable development. Given the decentralized nature of Afghan society, significant aid should go to local community projects.

Each action taken by the U.S. must be weighed in light of the traditional moral principle of "probability of success." Will this action contribute to a "responsible transition" and withdrawal as soon as appropriate? Will it improve Afghan security and minimize loss of life? Will it lay an adequate foundation for long-term development? The bishops urge the Administration to continually review the use of military force—whether and when force is needed to protect the innocent and resist terrorism—to insure that it is proportionate and discriminate. The goal of a "responsible transition" should be carefully defined and limited to permit a timely withdrawal. Having initiated military action in Afghanistan, our nation must help build good governance, respect for human rights and religious freedom, and economic development long after direct military engagement ends.

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. A "responsible transition" should aim to reduce further loss of life; address the humanitarian needs in Afghanistan and the refugee crisis in the region; help rebuild the war-torn country; promote human rights; support good governance and accountability in political systems and long-term sustainable economic development in both countries; and engage international support for stabilizing Afghanistan and Pakistan. More international assistance and development should be delivered through civilian channels and go toward local community projects.

For information: visit www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/afghanistan.shtml or contact *Virginia Farris*, Office of International Justice and Peace, USCCB, 202-541-3160 (phone); vfarris@usccb.org.

3211 Fourth St., NE. Washington, DC 20017. Tel: (202)541-3160 Fax: (202)541-3339