



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

### Background on Afghanistan-Pakistan February 2011

*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:** 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.” U.S. troop levels exceed 90,000 since 30,000 were added last year in Afghanistan. More than 40,000 troops from 47 other countries operate there under NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). The Obama Administration strategy includes not only security, but also helping Afghanistan improve its governance and development. A December 2010 review of that strategy cited slow progress. President Obama reiterated his intention to begin bringing some troops home by July 2011 while “building the Afghan capacity that can allow for a responsible transition of our forces out of Afghanistan.” International donors to Afghanistan who met in July pledged continued support to the Afghan government, military and police for an anticipated transition of power by 2014. Reconstruction and development are expected to continue beyond that time.

Yet many challenges remain nearly ten years into this effort. Flawed August 2009 presidential and September 2010 parliamentary elections in Afghanistan continue to raise questions as to the credibility of President Hamid Karzai’s government and its ability to deliver basic services. Violence has escalated not only in the south where the U.S. has focused the strategy, but also in the west and north. Much needed development assistance and efforts to improve governance are fraught with tribal tensions, questions of accountability for U.S. funds, and weak capacity.

Developments in Afghanistan are closely tied to Pakistan. U.S. pressure on Pakistan has increased, given the presence of al Qaeda-affiliated terrorist groups in the region bordering Afghanistan, its nuclear weapons capability, and its importance for regional stability. More U.S. drone attacks along the border killed militants, but also civilians, inflaming anti-American sentiments. To improve stability in and relations with Pakistan, the “Enhanced Partnership with Pakistan Act” passed in 2009 providing \$7.5 billion in non-military aid over five years. It aims to “improv[e] 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.” Some of this assistance has been used to help respond to the devastating floods in summer 2010, which covered one-fifth of the country, killed thousands and displaced millions. In recent months there are growing and serious concerns over religious freedom issues, particularly blasphemy laws which were used to sentence a Christian woman to death. In January 2011 a guard assassinated the Punjab provincial governor who had been outspoken in defending religious freedom and calling for a repeal of the blasphemy laws. The killing was 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 between different ethnic, tribal and religious groups devolved into anarchy. By 1998, the Taliban, a ruthless but relatively disciplined collection of Pashtun mujahideen groups, restored order and controlled 90% of Afghanistan. But 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 terrorist attacks of 9/11, 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

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government with security. When U.S. attention and resources shifted to Iraq, the Taliban regrouped, regained territory and support (some through intimidation), capitalizing on the Afghan people's anger over civilian casualties from ISAF/U.S. military action, 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 build capacity for emergency response. In Pakistan, CRS funds similar programs and also responded to Afghan refugees in 2009. In response to the floods, CRS has helped to build temporary shelters and restore agricultural production to expedite economic recovery. In both countries, as it does worldwide, 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 tragedy 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 rely solely on military force; and encourage international collaboration to provide humanitarian assistance and rebuild Afghanistan. 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."

USCCB embraced 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 acknowledged a perception that the presence of U.S. and ISAF forces in Afghanistan may be creating resentment in the local population. USCCB supports a multilateral approach that strengthens and improves the accountability of national and local governments, and fosters economic and agricultural development. The Conference advised that whenever possible, development assistance should be delivered through civilian/NGO channels, rather than through the military. It remains important to give priority to the poor and marginalized, especially in a continued response to the flooding in Pakistan. International private voluntary organizations (PVOs), like Catholic Relief Services, provide cost-effective, sustainable, community-based development and humanitarian relief in partnership with local community organizations.

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. International relief and development should be redefined to ensure that it is community-based, sustainable, and delivered through civilian channels in partnerships between international PVOs like CRS and local civil society groups.

**For information:** visit [www.usccb.org/sdwp/international/afghanistan.shtml](http://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](mailto:vfarris@usccb.org).

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