



Committee on International Justice and Peace

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October 6, 2009

General James L. Jones, USMC (Ret.)
National Security Advisor
National Security Council
Washington, DC

Dear General Jones:

As the Administration reviews U.S. strategy in Afghanistan, I write on behalf of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops and its Committee on International Justice and Peace. While we are pastors and teachers and not military experts, we can share Catholic teaching and experience which may help inform various policy choices.

We recognize that the situation in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan is at a critical juncture. Should these states fail, particularly with Pakistan possessing nuclear weapons, there are grave implications for regional and international security. Electoral problems and corruption have led many, including Afghans, to question the legitimacy of the Afghan government.

In the face of terrorist threats, we know that 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.

In a pastoral message, "Living with Faith and Hope after September 11," we bishops offered criteria for moral discernment and a call to solidarity in response to the terrorist attacks on our nation and the subsequent military action in Afghanistan. In that statement we warned, "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." We noted some principles to help guide U.S. actions:

- *Restrain use of military force and ensure that civilians are not targeted:* When military force is used, it should be directed against terrorist or insurgent combatants, not at the Afghan people, and its use should be monitored. Military force must be discriminate and proportional, especially if our nation is to be perceived as acting justly and is to win popular support for the struggle against terrorism.
- *Address the root causes of terrorism rather than relying solely on military means to solve conflict:* Military force alone cannot deal with the terrorist threat. Non-military measures must be pursued to defend the common good, protect the innocent and advance peace. These non-military actions include addressing poverty and injustice, exercising diplomacy, and engaging in dialogue with Muslims.
- *Encourage international collaboration to provide humanitarian assistance and rebuild Afghanistan:* The United States, working with the UN and other interested parties, must deal with the long-standing humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, especially Afghan refugees and displaced persons, and help Afghans rebuild their political, economic and cultural life.

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We observe that some military leaders now share the view that the success of U.S. operations in Afghanistan cannot come from military measures alone. In light of the current situation, the moral guidance of our earlier pastoral message still seems applicable. We urge the Administration to consider the following actions:

- Review the use of military force--when force is necessary to protect the innocent and resist terrorism--to insure that it is proportionate and discriminate;
- Develop criteria for when it is appropriate to end military action in Afghanistan;
- Focus more on diplomacy, long-term development (particularly agricultural programs), and humanitarian assistance;
- Strengthen local governance and participation of local groups in planning their own development; and
- Encourage international support to create effective national and local governments and to foster economic development.

We understand that for humanitarian assistance and development projects to be carried out in Afghanistan, security is important. But too much development assistance appears to be directed to short-term security objectives or channeled through the military. These funds, often used for building projects with little community involvement, are less-effective in building stable communities and meeting the legitimate needs of Afghan citizens. Whenever possible, U.S. policy and funding should more clearly delineate and differentiate foreign assistance provided through military channels versus civilian channels. Otherwise, integrating these strategies, capabilities and activities on the ground may undermine recovery and sustainable development in Afghanistan. Military involvement in development should be phased out as local situations stabilize and civilian agencies resume activity.

Catholic Relief Services (CRS) has been working with local communities in Afghanistan on projects in agriculture, water, income generation, education and health since 1998. CRS' ability to develop local partnerships, involving people in examining their needs and determining priorities, has meant that those communities have a greater commitment to their own development, as well as protecting CRS programs and staff. CRS' approach exemplifies how long-term efforts can lead to sustainable development and contribute to improved security.

We bishops acknowledge that our nation has moral responsibilities to combat terrorism and to help rebuild Afghanistan. Unfortunately, there are no easy answers on how best to accomplish these objectives, but we offer these reflections based upon our teaching and the experience of CRS as the Administration formulates future strategy for Afghanistan.

Sincerely,



Most Rev. Howard J. Hubbard
Bishop of Albany
Chairman, Committee on International Justice and Peace