



International Conference on Afghanistan

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As Prepared

I am very pleased to be here with you today to discuss our shared concern for Afghanistan -- a country that has suffered terribly from a nightmare of violence and destruction. The story of Afghanistan's current transformation to a future of great hope and opportunity is no less dramatic, no less important a lesson for us today, than understanding the need for us all to combat terrorism wherever in the world it appears.

I am grateful to the organizers of this colloquium for putting together such a fine program. We are addressing important topics here today and highlighting the role of international cooperation in helping Afghanistan to join the community of democratic nations. This meeting is a precursor to the international conference that will take place in Berlin next week where government officials will be reviewing Afghanistan's political development, reconstruction progress and security concerns. It is essential that the world community to know that so many of us are interested and engaged in the rebuilding of Afghanistan. Holding this conference in Paris today is a clear example of that engagement.

Last week, Secretary of State Powell traveled to Afghanistan to meet with President Karzai and review Afghanistan's substantial progress over the past two years. Next week, he will travel to Europe to discuss Afghanistan's future at an international conference with our coalition partners in Berlin and with our allies at NATO.

Ladies and Gentlemen: we have much reason to look back at the past two years with satisfaction. At our conference next week in Berlin and our meetings in Brussels we will have an opportunity to demonstrate that the international community remains solidly behind the emergence of Afghanistan as a moderate, democratic and independent nation. We will take steps to assure the success of its political evolution and reconstruction in the immediate future. We will also discuss and take steps to assure that Afghans will be able to enjoy security, the essential precondition for successful political and economic development.

The international community is resolved that Afghanistan will never again become a terrorist haven. Next week we will have the opportunity to demonstrate our resolve that Afghanistan will continue to enjoy our support as it rejoins the international community.

Security for Afghanistan

Regrettably, a relatively small number of international terrorists and Taliban remnants have been determined to use violence and intimidation to make it more difficult for Afghans -- particularly in the rugged south and south east parts of the country -- to rebuild their nation. Their determination to frustrate Afghanistan's reconstruction respects no person and no nation. We remember the courage and the sacrifices of our partners in the international community -- such as Bettina Goislard who was murdered last November -- and of the Afghans who are daily risking their lives for a better future.

Coalition forces, under Operation Enduring Freedom, are continuing to carry out the vital mission of neutralizing insurgents and terrorists. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), now under NATO's leadership, is providing security in and around Kabul and expanding operations beyond the capital. Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs), whether under command of the Coalition or of ISAF, are contributing to stability with a unique blend of reconstruction assistance and security to bring the benefits of stability to all of Afghanistan.

I am sure that you are all aware of the continuing military operations in Afghanistan and along the Afghan -- Pakistan border regions. In recent weeks our coalition forces have been working closely with our Pakistani allies to address this challenge. The Pakistani forces last week were in a fierce battle on their own territory against several hundred of these fighters who had been moving in the mountainous area along the border region in an effort to regroup. The Pakistani army engaged these fighters and they have, sadly, sustained casualties in the process. Pakistan is stepping up its efforts to ensure that its territory not be used as a haven for the Taliban.

As the Bonn Agreement recognized, "the responsibility for providing security and law and order throughout the country resides with the Afghans themselves." The Afghan people have suffered from the chaos that enveloped their country over the past generation, but in the past two years they have begun to emerge again as guarantors of their own security. In the interim, the international community has accepted the challenge to help establish and train Afghan security forces and, together, we will complete this work.

The Government of Afghanistan is building the Afghan National Army (ANA), which currently has 9000 members, a national police force, a border patrol and anti-narcotics investigators. The judicial system, once in ruins because of Taliban abuse is being restored. In support of the Afghan government, we have clearly told the warlords and their militias that they must reform their ways and work toward the building of a unified, democratic Afghanistan. Through a Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) program we are helping former militia fighters put down their arms and begin new lives.

International security cooperation in Afghanistan over the past two years has been outstanding. France has joined the United States along with the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Italy, the Netherlands, Turkey and Denmark in playing leading or significant roles in Afghan security. This is as it should be -- we are Allies and partners. We hope that France will agree to take on a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in the months ahead, either under ISAF or the OEF coalition. The United Kingdom, Germany and New Zealand have already taken on such important roles, and other nations are considering contributions as well. France has both the military capability and the civil-military experience to fulfill this need.

Political Progress

Afghanistan has come such a long way in the past two years! After years of war, oppression and misery, the Bonn Conference created a process to give Afghanistan a new beginning. The Bonn framework outlined an agreed timetable for Afghan political reform. The international community -- with a significant role for the United Nations -- has been an active participant in breathing life into the political timetable. We must continue to do so.

This is what has been achieved: the Afghan people are enjoying restored liberties and unprecedented opportunities to chart the future of their country; over three million Afghans refugees have returned to their country; millions of children are attending school -- the largest numbers in the country's history; Afghanistan's economy is growing again; government institutions are undergoing overhaul and reform to deliver basic social services to citizens; women and girls are reclaiming their rightful places in society alongside men and boys to shape the future of the country as Afghanistan begins to explore the meaning of tolerance and human rights; and Afghanistan has a legitimate, moderate and democratic constitution, openly debated by representatives of its people and will soon have free and fair elections.

We all look forward to Afghanistan's first Presidential and parliamentary elections. We will all work together with the Afghan government and the United Nations to ensure that Afghans will be able to exercise their democratic rights -- free from violence and intimidation.

Reconstruction Efforts

Reconstruction efforts in Afghanistan thus far have been a model of international cooperation and have engendered much goodwill between the Afghan people and the international community. Next week in Berlin, the international community will again gather to help the Afghan government meet its immediate needs and firmly reject the notion that the world is occupied elsewhere and becoming indifferent to the fate of the Afghan people. We cannot lose momentum now, as much work remains to be done.

In Berlin, the United States -- already Afghanistan's largest donor nation - will announce its pledge of \$1 billion, reaffirming our long-term commitment to Afghan reconstruction. The new pledge brings the total USG pledges for 2004 up to \$2.2 billion, bringing our commitment to Afghanistan over the past three years over \$4 billion.

Americans are sending a strong, unmistakable signal that we support Afghanistan. We are looking forward to strong and unmistakable signals also from the international community. We must all continue providing needed support for Afghanistan's reconstruction until the country is on the path to self-sustaining economic growth.

Summary

Next week, in Berlin and in Brussels, leaders of the international community will gather to look seriously at Afghanistan -- at what we have achieved and what work remains to be done. We have been full partners in this just endeavor. In addition to providing financial pledges of assistance, we will reaffirm the goals of the December 2001 Bonn Accord. We are committed to completing what we started, to setting Afghanistan firmly on the path to security, democracy and sustainable economic growth -- together and for the future. Thank you.



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