



Media Note
Office of the Spokesman
Washington, DC
September 25, 2008

United States-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Joint Statement

Following is the text of a joint statement issued by U.S. Deputy Secretary of State John D. Negroponte and Afghanistan Foreign Minister Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta following the third round of the United States-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership dialogue.

Begin text:

Senior representatives of the Governments of the United States of America and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan met in Washington DC today for the third round of the United States-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership dialogue. President Bush and President Karzai created and signed into effect the Strategic Partnership in May 2005 to enhance the long-term security, democracy and prosperity of Afghanistan, as well as to support U.S. national interests. Today's meeting again underscores the commitment of the United States and Afghanistan to carrying forward a shared vision through senior-level dialogue to further improve bilateral coordination and cooperation to address near- and long-term challenges.

The United States delegation expressed regret over the loss of any innocent civilian lives incurred during security operations. In response to concerns expressed by the Government of Afghanistan, the United States is conducting a senior level review and assessment of the August 22 Shindand operation. In addition, both sides recognize the need for establishing a mutually agreed-upon a framework and mechanism to minimize civilian casualties and to maintain the strong support of the Afghan people in fighting terrorism. The United States reiterated during discussions that it takes every precaution to avoid harming any Afghan civilian during military operations and drew a sharp contrast to the Taliban and Al Qaida and their deliberate campaigns of intimidation and terror on the Afghan populace. The United States especially condemned, along with the UN Secretary General, the recent murder of two UN doctors and multiple Afghan civilians during the UN's humanitarian efforts to vaccinate Afghan children in southern Afghanistan.

In the Security Working Group, the two sides reaffirmed their commitment to pursue a comprehensive security strategy to address Afghanistan's security challenges and threats. By commending the growing professionalism and sacrifices of the Afghan National Security Forces, they reiterated their determination for the Afghan National Security Forces to progressively assume the leading role in defending the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Afghanistan and protecting the lives of Afghan citizens. The U.S. side welcomed the recent agreement to expand the Afghan National Army (ANA) to 134,000 personnel. This agreement will allow the ANA to move closer to our shared goal of a well equipped and fully capable force. The Afghan National Police (ANP) also continues to strengthen its capabilities, with the Focused District Development Program serving as the cornerstone of these efforts. Hence, in order to support Afghanistan's Ministry of Defense and Ministry of Interior visions, both sides agreed that the assistance of the international community is essential to realizing the improving capabilities of both ANA and ANP. The ANA, ANP and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) are playing central roles in voter registration security and are working to ensure that Afghan voters are able to exercise their rights fully, freely and in a secure environment. The two sides recognized the successes of the United States-Afghan Defense Parliamentary Exchange Program and the Agri-Business Development Teams and continue to look for ways to expand cooperation in these areas.

Both sides emphasized the important roles of regional countries, particularly in confronting transnational terrorism, extremism, organized crime and narcotics trafficking.

In the Governance Working Group, both sides emphasized the fundamental role of respecting and institutionalizing principles of good governance and human rights. The Independent Election Commission of Afghanistan briefed the Governance Working Group in detail on Afghanistan's preparations for the 2009 Presidential and Provincial Council elections. The Afghan side expressed its gratitude for the significant funding and expertise provided by the United States to support this process, including assistance to the Independent Electoral Commission and a number of non-governmental organizations helping Afghan citizens to prepare for this upcoming election. The delegation of the Government of Afghanistan emphasized the transformation in sub-national governance, built around the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG). The two parties agreed on the importance of improving the ability of governors to connect to and serve their constituents. The United States, noting the milestone represented by this second round of democratic elections, pledged funding and technical expertise to support this outreach program.

The Governance Working Group welcomed Afghanistan's recent legal and institutional measures to establish the High Office of Oversight and Anti-Corruption, including special units in the Office of the Attorney General and in the Supreme Court, to intensify and oversee efforts aimed at eliminating corruption through preventative, educational and enforcement measures. Both sides committed themselves to seek more progress on corruption over the next year, and to help ensure concrete results – including successful prosecutions where appropriate – the U.S. side agreed to assist the above-mentioned entities in their efforts to secure the necessary resources and means to carry out their respective mandates. We look forward to Afghanistan's next step in establishing anti-corruption tribunals in the Supreme Court.

In the Prosperity Working Group, both sides expressed concern over increased food insecurity in Afghanistan and pledged to take appropriate actions to resolve this problem. They also acknowledged the enormous needs facing victims of drought, returnees, and internally displaced persons. Private sector-led economic growth as a stability and confidence-building measure, beginning with passage and implementation of a package of pro-competitive, transparent commercial and investment laws and regulations designed to attract investors and to create new jobs was deemed essential for Afghanistan. The two delegations highlighted the importance of promoting a number of key infrastructure projects as prioritized by the Afghanistan National Development Strategy (ANDS), such as irrigation, agriculture, roads, and power. The delegations noted positively the progress toward electricity sector agreements between Afghanistan and its neighbors. The United States pledged to continue to support efforts to build both bilateral and regional linkages in electricity, and to explore such linkages in transportation and communications.

Both sides also supported concrete steps to expedite and increase Afghanistan's trade with neighbors in the region, eliminate obstacles to commerce, and focus on preparations to implement the Reconstruction Opportunity Zone (ROZ) legislation now under consideration by the U.S. Congress. This type of economic strategy is key to fighting terror and narco-trafficking by creating jobs, promoting sustainable development, and drawing investment to targeted areas and the border regions of Afghanistan. Transit trade and Reconstruction Opportunity Zones will be discussed in more detail in the October 8, 2008, U.S.-Afghanistan Trade and Investment Framework Agreement talks in Kabul.

The two delegations discussed the importance of strengthening fiscal sustainability, including the challenge of increasing domestic revenue. The Afghan side is considering a number of steps to ensure that all revenues are duly collected and properly transferred to the Ministry of Finance for recording and allocation. The United States delegation welcomes recent steps taken by the Government of Afghanistan to place operations and maintenance of public infrastructure on a sound cost-recovery basis. These include commercializing the management of key public services such as electrical power in Kabul and the provision of urban water to several major municipalities, as well as the establishment of a Road Maintenance Unit within the Ministry of Public Works. The United States pledges to support both of these efforts by sharing high quality technical expertise.

Both sides recognize the importance of the Afghanistan Compact and the Afghanistan National Development Strategy as useful frameworks to foster Afghanistan's reconstruction and revitalization.

Both delegations in the Counter-Narcotics Working Group welcomed the success achieved this year in reducing poppy cultivation by 19 percent from 2007. This reversed the trend of record poppy growth over the past two years and expanded the number of poppy-free provinces from 13 to 18 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. During the same period, Nangarhar province went from being Afghanistan's number two poppy-producing province to achieving poppy-free status. These developments are inspiring confidence that the Government of Afghanistan's broad-based counter-narcotics strategy of incentives and disincentives, with the support of the United States and the international community, is working in areas that enjoy relative security and stability. However, connections among narcotics, terrorism, organized crime and corruption are undeniable and the drug problem remains a pressing concern, particularly in the insecure south and southwest regions where seven provinces accounted for 98 percent of total opium production this year. The Government of Afghanistan and its international partners are collaborating on an effort to target more intensively these areas to reduce opium production.

The two delegations endorsed the Afghan Government's plan for Helmand province to further improve security and governance in that province, and consequently make sustainable progress in eliminating poppy cultivation. The United States will expand the Drug Enforcement Administration's operations in Afghanistan and continue to build the Afghan Counter Narcotics Police's capacity. The two sides will work together and will focus on creating an intensified mix of disincentives and incentives for further reductions in opium poppy cultivation and trafficking, including expanded alternative development programs and improving market access infrastructure to support the growing of alternative crops. The Afghan side also spoke of the importance of U.S. support toward the restructured and reformed Counter Narcotics Trust Fund (CNTF). The Government of Afghanistan is committed to carrying out a more robust counter-narcotics campaign for the coming year, including poppy elimination and eradication; strengthening the justice sector; enhancing public information and education; taking vigorous anti-corruption measures, and arresting and prosecuting high-value drug kingpin targets.

Based on this Strategic Partnership Joint Statement, the United States and Afghanistan hereby recommit themselves to shared efforts towards Afghanistan's commitment to join the family of nations as a secure, prosperous, progressive and democratic nation.

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2008/789

Released on September 25, 2008

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