



Fulfilling the Commitment to Success in Afghanistan

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Colleagues and Friends: The Transatlantic Alliance was founded in the ashes of war with a mission of security for a long peace. Our job in Europe is nearly done, though we have work to do in the Balkans. Yet, it was the dream of our predecessors that the principles for which we stand – liberty and opportunity, human dignity and human rights – would inspire a broader community of democracies, beyond Europe, with both the capability and the resolve to shape an international balance of power that favors freedom.

Today we are realizing that aspiration. Gathered around this table we see the key members of a greater democratic community – our alliance's new global partners, Australia and New Zealand, Japan and South Korea, as well as three of the world's critical institutions: the United Nations, the European Union, and the World Bank. On this day, NATO headquarters is at the center of the wider democratic world.

As democracies, we have a unique duty to help all who wish to join our ranks, as is the case, thousands of miles beyond Europe, in the nation of Afghanistan. Joining us today is Afghan Foreign Minister Spanta. I know that I speak for all of my colleagues, Mr. Minister, when I say how honored we are that you could be here at this important time for your country.

As Foreign Minister Spanta has said, he and his fellow citizens have, in recent years, taken heroic steps to build a free society, one that reflects the cultures and customs of its people, rather than the foreign radicalism of the Taliban. And let's be clear: We are winning in Afghanistan. Afghan police officers are now enforcing laws made by a freely elected parliament. New roads, new hospitals, and new jobs are giving fresh hope to a nation eager to prosper. Where before educating women was a "crime," now over 6 million children are back in school, 2 million of them young girls.

We are winning, and that's why the Taliban is fighting back, and why the Afghan people depend on us to help them succeed. Let there be no doubt: Success in Afghanistan is measured in many ways – in political terms, in economic terms, in terms of human development. I agree with my European colleagues: Ours is a humanitarian mission, and military force alone cannot guarantee success. We all recognize this.

At the same time, we must also recognize that political and economic progress depends on hard security. People cannot build better lives when life itself is threatened. The Taliban is doing everything in its power to impose a dark view of the world on the Afghan people, denying them the democratic future that they themselves have chosen. The violence we are seeing is not evidence that our strategy has failed, nor that the situation will improve in our absence; rather, it is evidence of how much we are needed. It is evidence that we must do more – and do it better, faster. We must protect innocent lives. We must stay, we must fight, and we must win.

If there is to be a "spring offensive," it must be our offensive. It must be a political campaign, an economic campaign, a diplomatic campaign, and yes, a military campaign. Our strategy must be comprehensive: Our military and counter-narcotic efforts must create space for democracy and development to flourish in peace. At the same time, our political and economic assistance ensures that our soldiers' hard-won military victories will be lasting. These efforts must take place in harmony, and at the local level, where this struggle is being fought, and where it will be won or lost.

All of us will share the benefits of Afghanistan's success, so we must also share the burdens of effort that success demands. Nations that have made pledges of support should follow through and deliver. America will do its part. President Bush will ask our Congress for an unprecedented increase in our assistance to Afghanistan over the next two years: \$2 billion in new reconstruction assistance; and \$8.6 billion to help train and equip Afghanistan's National Security Forces, its army and police.

In addition, Defense Secretary Gates plans to expand the U.S. military contribution, partly by extending the duty of troops already there, and partly through extra forces. This effort will help us to build on NATO's hard-won successes, and to provide the robust capability for NATO-ISAF to maintain the military initiative against the Taliban. We will make final decisions based on General Craddock's revised statement of military requirements, as well as the contributions of all Allies. Secretary Gates will be prepared to discuss the details of the increased U.S. contribution when he meets with Defense Ministers in Seville two weeks from now.

These are substantial new U.S. commitments – financial, military, and political – to advance our common effort in Afghanistan. Every one of us must take a hard look at what more we can do to help the Afghan people – and to support one another. We need greater commitments to reconstruction, to development, to fight the poppy economy. We need additional forces on the ground – ready to fight. And we need to provide greater support for the development of Afghan institutions, especially its security forces.

This is a defining moment for Afghanistan, for NATO, and for our wider democratic community. Our nations and organizations have achieved our greatest success when we have married power and principle to achieve great purposes – not when we have dealt with the world as it is, but when we have sought to change the world for the better. This same spirit must guide our efforts today.

We are transforming NATO into an alliance that its founders might not have recognized but would certainly have celebrated: an alliance of free nations, joined in common effort with other great democracies from across the globe, to support the growth of peace and freedom throughout the world. Now we must fulfill our commitment to success in Afghanistan – for in so doing, we will help a new democracy take root in the heart of a troubled region, and we will make a lasting contribution to the security of our world.

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