

# Afghanistan

America was justified in responding to the September 11 attacks with a clear mission: We drove al Qaeda from its base area in Afghanistan and are ensuring they can never target the U.S. from that soil again. U.S. and allied forces are set to withdraw by the end of 2014. The aim is now to complete a responsible transition to a strengthened Afghan government that can control the country, prevent terrorist safe havens, and govern effectively. Any transition will be fruitless unless we remain dedicated to improving governance in Afghanistan after our troops are out.



## What do we do now?

Even if the Karzai government refuses to sign a bilateral security agreement, we should work to sign such an agreement with the next leader, and continue governance assistance as we draw down troops. The Afghan government needs to be able to control, train, and support



## If you read only one thing A RESPONSIBLE TRANSFER

- Afghanistan was the right fight.
- Now, al Qaeda has shifted to places like Yemen, Somalia, the Sahel, and Pakistan
- The U.S. needs to be agile to pursue our enemies.
- We want to leave only if we can ensure that the Afghan National Security Forces are strong enough to take over on their own and that Afghanistan does not return to a terrorist safe haven.
- Staying indefinitely is not in our strategic or financial interest.

## GETTING IT DONE

- We must pay for Afghan security force assistance so they can keep the peace.
- Longterm governance programs are essential to keeping the country stable.
- An effective political transition after presidential elections in 2014 is also required.

the Afghan National Security Forces and deny al Qaeda and its allies a safe haven. Afghan forces have now taken the lead for all military missions, but still rely heavily on the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) for logistics and support. We must continue to strengthen the security forces and government institutions so that they have the capacity to prevent al Qaeda from operating from the region and are able to complete a legitimate political transition of power after elections. We also have to create incentives for Pakistan to use its influence to stabilize, rather than undermine, the region. Corruption in law enforcement and other government agencies undermines support for the government and could lead to renewed insurgency; ensuring better governance is in our long-term interests.

## Key Issues

**Al Qaeda “Central” now has, at most, a few hundred members in Afghanistan, but it has splintered into smaller groups elsewhere that are still dangerous.** The United States succeeded in dismantling al Qaeda’s hub in Afghanistan. That has greatly reduced the strength of the terrorist organization with the most global reach. However, al Qaeda members move in and out of Pakistan, operating freely across the border, and others have moved to Yemen and various parts of Africa, such as Somalia and Mali. These smaller splinter groups can still plan global attacks on the U.S. homeland.

**Meanwhile, other groups threaten the future of Afghanistan, including the Haqqani Network and other Taliban-affiliated groups.**



It’s time for a responsible military transition out of Afghanistan so we can focus on new threats and opportunities.



### Key Issues 101

- There are only a few Al Qaeda fighters left in Afghanistan.
- A government that can deliver is essential to preventing the Taliban’s return to power.
- Government corruption remains an obstacle.
- Developing a capable Afghan National Security Force is a necessity.
- Pakistan greatly complicates the situation in Afghanistan.

Many local insurgent groups also continue to target ISAF forces in the region. The vast majority of these groups do not have global ambitions, and some are not even allied with the Taliban, but they can cause great instability in next-door nuclear-armed Pakistan and throughout the region.

**Afghanistan needs a government that delivers security, services, and a healthy & legal economy.** If the post-2014 Afghan government cannot deliver basic security and opportunities, civil war is more likely to recur. The Taliban, for example, has been able to create a shadow government for courts and other public services because of Afghan government failures in these areas. International development assistance focused on improving governance will be needed for another decade to avoid a power vacuum and help Afghanistan's government and security forces. However, as reports from the Special Inspector General for Afghan Reconstruction (SIGAR) have consistently made clear, the U.S. itself is fueling significant corruption in Afghanistan. Instead of repeating activities that have shown little progress, assistance must be directed strategically and measured by what is most impactful. Cutting our development work short or misdirecting it now could well force us back to Afghanistan to fight future wars, a far more expensive and costly proposition.

**Afghan corruption undermines progress towards a stable government.** Corruption in the Afghan government undermines U.S. efforts to build government capacity and compromises trust between the Afghan population and its own government, leaving them vulnerable to other actors, like the Taliban. Often, Afghans view the U.S. as a source of corruption because of the billions of dollars that flow from government contracts, as well as U.S. intelligence community payouts to warlords and



Cutting our development work short now could mean we're back in Afghanistan to fight future wars. But we need to make this more effective.



### Key Fact

**Development programs that help local governments do their job are essential weapons against insurgencies**  
Insurgencies like the Taliban often deliver public services and create judicial systems to undermine the government and establish themselves as a legitimate authority. International development programs can strengthen government capacity to prevent this—but only if they are allowed to do the slow work of building governance and citizen oversight, not quick wins like paying for buildings and equipment.

members of the Karzai government.

For example, NATO estimated that Afghans pay nearly \$2.5 billion per year in bribes, often for routine services such as processing passports and driver's licenses. Corruption occurs on a much larger scale, too: in 2010, the Kabul Bank nearly collapsed when Afghans began withdrawing money following allegations of corruption. It was later discovered that political elites had siphoned as much as \$900 million into their own pockets. Investigations and prosecutions remain ongoing, as do the Afghan government's attempts to track down the missing money.

Minimizing corruption and improving popular support is crucial to a sustainable government that thwarts destabilizing forces. We must improve our own procurement systems and stop the intelligence community's under-the-table funding, while at the same time working to clean up the Afghan government.

**Developing the Afghan National Security Force (ANSF) is crucial to a responsible withdrawal.** ANSF forces, which consist of the Afghan National Army (ANA), the Afghan National Police (ANP), and the Afghan Air Force (AAF), numbered about 344,000 personnel at the end of 2013. Afghanistan's security forces were built from scratch following the U.S. invasion, but many members had years of fighting experience under various militias and the Northern Alliance. The U.S. Department of Defense has reported recent progress in terms of both numbers and quality, and is implementing a phased plan to transfer full responsibility to Afghan forces by December 2014. An important milestone was achieved in June 2013, when ISAF transitioned into a support and advisory role, and the Afghan National Security Force began taking the lead in combat missions and security operations across the country. Nevertheless, the



Afghanistan needs security forces that can do the job when we leave. Without them, it might easily return to being a safe haven for terrorist groups.

ANSF still relies heavily on ISAF for logistics and support, and mistrust between the ANA and ANP continues to hamper their effectiveness.

Other major obstacles to Afghan National Security Force's success include a high desertion rate, illiteracy, equipment shortages, poor logistics, and administrative capabilities, and a lack of specialized support personnel. Additionally, the ANSF will only be able to execute its mission if it is viewed as trustworthy and legitimate by the Afghan people. ISAF must prioritize imparting respect for the rule of law and human rights among the forces that it trains to ensure that the Afghan military and police use force responsibly while carrying out their missions. At a cost of between \$4 and \$8 billion a year, the Afghan National Security Forces is a necessary investment, but this burden needs to be shared among ISAF partners as well as the broader international community. Everyone gains from a stable Afghanistan.

**Developing an Afghan economy with our international partners is important.** Afghanistan remains one of the poorest countries in the world. Nearly 90% of its GDP is dependent upon international aid, and the illicit economy – mostly based around the narcotics trade – is massive. A sustainable Afghan government needs to meet minimal requirements: security, jobs, and the provision of basic services. Paying for that requires a functioning, legitimate economy that the government can tax for revenues. The narcotics trade undermines the rule of law and generates the largest portion of the Taliban's revenue in the south. It also is a corrosive influence on Afghan institutions.

**The April 2014 presidential elections present major challenges and opportunities.** The Afghan Constitution bars President Karzai from running again, and he has said that he will not seek to remain in

power after his second term expires. The 2009 elections were marred by serious charges of electoral and pervasive insecurity. Going forward, fair and free elections should be a precondition for the Afghan government receiving billions of dollars in aid from international donors. If the Afghan government can hold legitimate elections and conduct a peaceful transfer of power in 2014, it will be a crucial step toward long-term stability. Furthermore, while President Karzai has refused to sign an ongoing agreement for U.S. forces in the country, all the current presidential contenders have offered to sign one.

**Pakistan is a player with mixed motivations.** ISAF has facilitated cooperation between the Afghan and Pakistani militaries in recent years. While there has been some progress in building the relationship to address common threats of extremism and cross-border violence, the partnership remains fragile.

Pakistan has a number of interests that might make them more interested in a weak Afghanistan than a strong, independent one. First, they fear strategic encirclement by a strong Afghanistan allied to India. They want to maintain “strategic depth” against India by keeping Afghanistan weak and unstable. They also want to blunt once-prominent Pashtun nationalism. As such, Pakistan has played a central and often destabilizing role in Afghanistan for decades. Supporting groups like the Hezb-e-Islami Gulbuddin and the Haqqani Taliban Network allows Pakistan to pursue all three of these interests, keeping Afghanistan weak and divided in the process.

Today, the U.S. relationship with this nuclear power continues to be complex and uncertain. Some security experts believe that Pakistani military leaders had knowledge of Osama bin Laden’s whereabouts prior



### Key Fact

Pakistan uses extremist groups as proxies against India, but those same groups threaten Pakistan as well. Pakistan’s support for extremists destabilizes Afghanistan and causes American casualties.

to the U.S. raid and question their dedication to a negotiated settlement with the Taliban. Yet, Pakistan has its own problem with extremism, having faced numerous attacks against the Pakistani military, seizures of territory in the tribal regions, and assassinations.

Pakistan is playing a dangerous double game. Any future settlement with more moderate Taliban elements will not succeed without Pakistani support. Our relationship with Pakistan is deeply flawed, but it remains essential for a successful troop withdrawal from Afghanistan, overall regional security, and countering transnational terrorism and nuclear proliferation.

**Peace talks with militant leaders have yielded little progress.** The Afghan and U.S. governments have engaged in efforts to bring political representatives of the Taliban and other militant organizations into peace talks, but so far progress has been very limited. If these peace talks are to succeed in the future, the U.S. has an important role to play, as we remain the strongest actor on the stage. From the U.S. perspective, the Taliban must cut ties with al Qaeda and accept the Afghan Constitution. Former Secretary of State Clinton also stated that any settlement must not result in backsliding on rights for women and ethnic minorities.

## Policy Landscape & Recommendations

**Transfer Afghanistan back to Afghan control, ensuring their security**

**forces are both strong and responsible to their citizens.** The Obama administration transitioned security control over to the Afghan National Security Force in April 2013. The President is doing the right thing by giving Afghanistan back to the Afghans, ensuring a competent Afghan security force is present and providing American military leaders the time they need to redeploy our troops and equipment as safely as possible. We should increase investment in the ANSF, which is key to our strategy for responsible withdrawal. Afghanistan needs a competent, responsible, and ethical force that can maintain security, protect the civilian population, and prevent the Taliban from returning to power.

**We need an agreement with Afghanistan on security and future troop levels past 2014.** The United States seeks a bilateral security agreement with Afghanistan that addresses important security questions. President Obama and President Karzai signed the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) in May 2012, which was intended as a framework until a comprehensive bilateral security agreement (BSA) could be reached. But President Karzai has so far refused to sign a bilateral security agreement. Without a BSA, the United States will have to withdraw all of its forces from Afghanistan by the end of 2014. This “zero option,” in which no troops are left in Afghanistan to aid in training the ANSF, would be a disaster for Afghan security and stability. Fortunately, every major candidate in Afghanistan’s 2014 presidential election has said that they would sign a BSA if elected. American military leaders expect that if a BSA is agreed upon, approximately 10,000 ISAF troops, mostly American, would stay in Afghanistan as advisors, trainers, and Special Operations support.

**Fund Afghan development in multi-year packages with long-term metrics.**



## If you only read one thing

- Strike a balance between leaving quickly and staying too long.
- Transfer, carefully, to Afghan control.
- Build an Afghan economy—the key to long term stability.
- Fight Afghan corruption.
- Invest in multi-year development packages to Afghanistan focused on governance and oversight.



The administration and Congress should pass a multi-year development package for Afghanistan. Building a sustainable economy, governing capacity, and an effective security force takes time. But the appropriations process on Capitol Hill runs in a one-year cycle, which forces development projects to focus on quick, short-term gains at the expense of sustainable success. We have had ten one-year plans in Afghanistan instead of one ten-year plan. A multi-year package focused on governance, not just human services, with long-term metrics for impact would allow our development agencies to be more effective by taking the long view.

**Increase business investment in Afghanistan.** The future of Afghan stability requires strengthening Afghanistan’s economy through private sector investment from the U.S. and other countries. About 80% of Afghans depend on agriculture for their income. Afghanistan needs more roads to transport goods. Investments in trade—like the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Natural Gas Pipeline (TAPI) Project —build sustainable, regional trade ties. But merely building these for Afghanistan creates short-term solutions and unsustainable expectations.

To reduce aid to Afghanistan while enabling a functioning government, we should encourage neighboring countries to develop trade relationships and sustainable enterprises. As Secretary Kerry said in June 2013, “Afghanistan’s fortunes are tied to the region, just as the future of the region is tied to an increasingly stable, secure, prosperous future for the Afghan people.” A new approach to regional trade, known as the “New Silk Road,” will accelerate Afghan private sector growth and customs revenue receipts. Our development funding is best directed toward creating this regional business ecosystem, rather than focusing on one-and-done projects.



A strong and stable Afghanistan means terrorists can’t use it as a launch pad again.

### Curb Afghan corruption while working through the government

Afghanistan has low state capacity, and corruption undermines local support for the government while increasing support for the Taliban. Donor funding is soon expected to be “on budget,” meaning increasingly directed through the Afghan government. It is tempting to bypass the government when delivering assistance. Doing so, however, weakens the institutions that we must build in order to leave Afghanistan as a functioning state that can maintain its own security. We must continue to build government capacity at the local and national level. We must also honestly address the corruption problems of the Karzai administration. This means that rather than giving the government a blank check, we should increase our support for oversight institutions within the government, and civil society organizations that can hold the government accountable. We should also hold those behind the Kabul Bank scandal accountable and assist in building stable financial institutions that have the trust of the Afghan people. Finally, we should make graft more difficult through solutions like mobile payment systems, which allow customers to conduct day-to-day transactions through their cell phone accounts, offer a promising alternative to traditional banking institutions, and are less susceptible to official corruption. Finally, we must be honest about the role the U.S. has played in catalyzing Afghan corruption. Smarter procurement systems and more oversight of intelligence community payments to local leaders are essential, especially during these final phases of transition to Afghan control, if we are not to undo with one hand the work we are doing with the other.

**Work with our allies to ensure free and fair elections in 2014.** We should use our leverage to make sure President Karzai keeps his promise to step down when his second term expires in 2014. And we must work with our allies and Afghanistan’s Independent Election Commission to prevent fraud and improve security at the polls. The European Union, in



particular, has pledged substantial funds to the Afghans to help prepare for the elections. Having free and fair elections and a peaceful transfer of power will be a crucial step forward in building Afghan civil society and long-term stability.

## Key Players

**Hamid Karzai (haw-MIHD kahr-ZEYE)** Karzai became president of



Afghanistan through the Bonn Agreement in 2001. He was elected president in 2004 and re-elected in 2009 in an election broadly seen as illegitimate. However, he has stated that he will not seek to remain in office after his second term expires in 2014. Karzai's opponents claim that his aides are Islamist and that he is advised

by a narrow group of Pashtuns (ethnic identities play a large role in Afghan politics). The U.S.-Karzai relationship has experienced rifts over charges of corruption and civilian casualties.

**The Taliban** While frequently referred to as if it were a singular group, what most in the West refer to as “the Taliban” consists of many semi-autonomous insurgent organizations that at times operate together, and at times separately.



The original Taliban was a movement founded by former Afghan mujahedeen who fought

the Soviets and the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan in the 1980s and early 90s. They arose out of the chaos and predation of the Afghan Civil War in the mid-1990s with support from the Pakistani Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). The Taliban governed most of Afghanistan and was engaged in a civil war against the Northern Alliance when the 9/11 attacks occurred. They were quickly toppled by the joint efforts of the Northern Alliance, U.S. and allied Special Operations Forces, and U.S. air power. Its remnants fled into Pakistan. After rebuilding their networks from their safe haven in Pakistan, they re-launched rebellion against the Afghan government. The Taliban command-center, to the extent that it possesses one, is the Quetta Shura, led by Mullah Omar, which sets policies, strategic aims, and issues orders to the larger movement. It exercises its authority through four regional commands with 'shadow' governments and commissions at the provincial level. Members of this formal hierarchy are more likely to be ideologically driven and committed. However, parallel, informal chains of command and semi-autonomous groups have proliferated throughout the movement based on kinship and tribal networks and past mujahedeen affiliations.

### Mullah Omar (moo-LAH O-MAHR) Omar led the Taliban regime



from 1996 to 2001. He is currently at large and is believed to reside in a safe haven in Pakistan. Experts disagree on Omar's links to al Qaeda. Some believe he maintains a close association with al Qaeda and expect that relationship to continue if the Taliban returns to power. Others think that Omar and his inner circle blame al Qaeda for the Taliban's removal from power and would not welcome reconciliation.

**The Haqqani Taliban Network (Hah-KON-ee)** Led by Jalaludin Haqqani and his sons, the Haqqani Taliban Network has ties with al Qaeda as well as a relationship with Pakistan's ISI. It falls under the authority of Mullah Omar and the Quetta Shura, though it is allowed greater independence of action than most Taliban groups. The organization operates primarily out of havens in the tribal areas of Pakistan, though it has maintained a sustained insurgency, primarily in eastern Afghanistan and Kabul. In September 2012, under bipartisan pressure from Congress, the U.S. State Department designated the Haqqani Network as a foreign terrorist organization.

**Gilbuddin Hekmatyar (Gull-boo-DEEN Hek-mah-TYAR)** Hekmatyar emerged as a mujahedeen leader during Afghanistan's fight against the Soviets in the 1980s as the leader of Hezb-e-Islami Gilbuddin. He served briefly as Afghanistan's prime minister in the early 1990s before the various mujahedeen groups who fought the Soviets turned on each other. Hezb-e-Islami has staged attacks against coalition forces as well as against civilians, and is now a designated terrorist organization that has close ties with both al Qaeda and the Taliban.

**Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai (ASH-raf GAH-nee)** Ghani served as Afghanistan's finance minister from 2002-2004. He is an internationally respected academic in the fields of cultural anthropology, comparative religion, and development, and spent many years managing large-scale development projects for the World Bank. In 2001, he returned to his native Afghanistan after 24 years in exile to serve as a chief advisor to President Karzai and then as Chancellor of Kabul University. In 2006, he was considered as a possible candidate to replace outgoing UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. Ghani is a Pashtun, but his running mate is Uzbek political leader and former warlord Abdul Rashid Dostum, who served

as a commander in the Northern Alliance during the NATO invasion in 2001.

**Dr. Abdullah Abdullah (ahb-DUHL-lah ahb-DUHL-lah)** Abdullah



Abdullah served as Afghanistan’s Foreign Minister but was dismissed by Karzai in 2006. He unsuccessfully challenged Karzai for the presidency in 2009, and he continues to criticize Karzai in speeches. He is a contender for president in the 2014 elections. Abdullah’s father is Pashtun, but his mother is Tajik and he is politically identified as a Tajik.

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**General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr. (USMC).**

In early 2013, General Dunford replaced General John Allen as Commander of NATO’s International Security Assistance Force-Afghanistan and Commander, United States Forces-Afghanistan. Previously, he served as Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps.



### General Joseph F. Dunford, Jr. (USMC).

Appointed in August 2012, Cunningham currently serves as U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan. He previously served as deputy to U.S. Ambassador Ryan Crocker in Kabul. Before that, Cunningham served as Ambassador to Israel, as U.S. Consul General in Hong Kong, and as Ambassador and Deputy U.S. Permanent

Representative to the United Nations.

## Going Deep: Background & Context

**Afghanistan was a Cold War battlefield for most of the 1980s.** The Soviet Union sent troops into Afghanistan in 1979 to protect their client state, the Democratic Republic of Afghanistan, which was established in 1974 when Afghan communists overthrew the regime of Mohammad Daud Khan. With Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Israel, and Pakistan, the U.S. armed the Afghan mujahedeen in a successful campaign to bleed the Soviet Union by forcing them to fight a long, drawn out war in Afghanistan.

**The Soviets left Afghanistan at the end of the decade, and we did too—creating a dangerous power vacuum.** In 1988, after a long, costly, and unsuccessful campaign, the Soviet Union agreed



to withdraw from Afghanistan. The U.S.—believing it had no vital interest in Afghanistan after it had successfully undermined the Soviet Union there—drastically reduced its support for Afghanistan and the mujahedeen. It suspended its Kabul embassy in 1989. The mujahedeen that fought the Soviets began to fight each other in the ensuing power vacuum. Around 1994, Afghan Islamist clerics and students of Pashtun origin formed the Taliban movement and eventually gained the upper hand in the civil war.

**The Taliban used their control of a sovereign government to give protection to al Qaeda.** The Taliban ruled most of Afghanistan from 1996 until 2001, brutally killing minorities, instituting torturous punishments, and destroying the country’s economic base. While al Qaeda had already been invited to Afghanistan and had settled there by the time the Taliban took power, the Taliban happily continued to provide the international terrorist movement with a base of operations and the security of a sovereign government. This is the outcome that we are working to prevent from reoccurring.

**Al Qaeda attacked America on September 11; American forces and Afghan groups collaborated to retaliate.** President George W. Bush ordered airstrikes that succeeded due to partnerships with Afghan groups that opposed the Taliban. These groups helped us target Taliban forces and then formed the bulk of the ground forces in a NATO campaign that quickly removed the Taliban from power. But Osama bin Laden and many of his top lieutenants escaped. In 2003, the Bush administration believed the war in Afghanistan was won and turned its focus to Iraq. This move badly under-resourced Afghanistan and failed to secure the peace. Due to this miscalculation, the Taliban surged back into the fight around 2006.



We do not want to leave Afghanistan in a state of conflict that forces us to return later. We must work to build a functional state in Afghanistan.



**President Obama refocused America's efforts on Afghanistan.** President Obama added 50,000 U.S. troops to Afghanistan in his first two years in office. The additional troops stopped the Taliban's momentum and allowed the U.S. to begin the transition to Afghan responsibility. That process will end in 2014, hopefully with a bilateral security agreement that will allow a small U.S. force to remain in Afghanistan in a training and counterterrorism capacity. Since no BSA has been reached, the Pentagon has been forced to begin planning for a "zero option" contingency in which no ISAF troops remain in Afghanistan.

**The Current Drawdown and Future Schedule:** The U.S. began withdrawing troops in 2011, and as of March 2014 only 34,000 troops remained in Afghanistan, down from a peak of 101,000 in 2011. The exact level of forces to remain after 2014 is yet to be determined, but is likely to be around 10,000 if a bilateral security agreement is reached.