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The White House

Office of the Press Secretary

For Immediate Release

February 12, 2013

Fact Sheet: Afghanistan

Afghanistan

In his State of the Union address, the President announced that the United States will withdraw 34,000 American troops from Afghanistan by this time next year, decreasing the number of U.S. troops in Afghanistan by half – the next step to responsibly bringing this war to a close.

- **Afghans in the Lead**: Beginning in the spring of 2013, Afghan forces will assume the lead across the country. Even as our troops draw down, they will continue to train, advise and assist Afghan forces. In that capacity, we will no longer be leading combat operations, but a sizeable number of U.S. forces will provide support for two additional fighting seasons before Afghan forces are fully responsible for their own security.
- **Planning for post-2014**: We are continuing discussions with the Afghan government about how we can carry out two basic missions beyond 2014: training, advising and equipping Afghan forces, and continued counter-terrorism missions against al Qaeda and their affiliates.

The Security Transition Process

At the 2010 NATO Summit in Lisbon, the United States, our International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) partners, and the Afghan Government agreed to transfer full responsibility for Afghanistan's security to the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) by the end of 2014. This transition process allows the international community to responsibly draw down our forces in Afghanistan, while preserving hard-won gains and setting the stage to achieve our core objectives – defeating al Qaeda and ensuring it can never again use Afghanistan as a launching pad for attacks against us.

At the Chicago NATO Summit in May 2012, leaders reaffirmed this framework for transition and agreed on an interim milestone in 2013 to mark our progress. This milestone will mark the beginning of the ANSF's assumption of the lead for combat operations across the country. When we reach that milestone this spring, ISAF's main effort will shift from combat to supporting the ANSF. As international forces shift our primary focus to training, advising, and assisting, we will ensure that the Afghans have the support they need as they adjust to their new responsibilities.



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Today, Afghan forces are already leading nearly 90 percent of operations, and by spring 2013, they will be moving into the operational lead across the country. These forces are currently at a surge strength of 352,000, where they will remain for at least three more years, to allow continued progress toward a secure environment in Afghanistan.

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As the international community's role shifts and Afghan forces continue to grow in capabilities, coalition troop numbers will continue to decrease in a planned, coordinated, and responsible manner. By the end of 2014, transition will be complete and Afghan Security Forces will be fully responsible for the security of their country.

Supporting Political Transition

The United States believes that Afghan-led peace and reconciliation is ultimately necessary to end violence and ensure lasting stability of Afghanistan and the region. As the President has said, the United States will support initiatives that bring Afghans together with other Afghans to discuss the future of their country. The United States and the Afghan Government have called upon the Taliban to join a political process, including by taking those steps necessary to open a Taliban office in Qatar. We have been clear that the outcomes of any peace and reconciliation process must be for the Taliban and other armed opposition groups to end violence, break ties with Al Qaeda, and accept Afghanistan's constitution, including its protections for the rights of all Afghan citizens.

The Afghan Government will be holding presidential and provincial council elections in April 2014 and the United States intends to provide technical assistance and funding to support a fair and inclusive process.

The U.S. Role After 2014

In May 2012, President Obama and President Karzai signed a Strategic Partnership Agreement to cement our long-term relationship in the areas of social and economic development, security, and regional cooperation. The United States remains fully committed to a long-term strategic partnership with the Afghan Government and the Afghan people. The steps we are taking now are intended to normalize our relationship, including withdrawing troops in a way that strengthens Afghan sovereignty and the Afghan state, rather than abandoning it, as the international community did in the 1980's and 90's.

While it is too soon to make decisions about the number of forces that could remain in Afghanistan after 2014, any presence would be at the invitation of the Afghan Government and focused on two distinct missions: training, advising and equipping Afghan forces, and continued counter-terrorism missions against al Qaeda and their affiliates. As we move towards decisions about a long-term presence, we will continue to assess the situation on the ground in Afghanistan, assess the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces, and consult with our Afghan and international partners. We also continue negotiations on a Bilateral Security Agreement with the Afghan Government that would provide the protections we must have for any U.S. military presence after 2014. We hope that agreement can be completed as soon as possible.

Consistent with our goal of ensuring that al Qaeda never again threatens the United States from Afghan soil, the United States has committed to seek funds annually to support training, equipping, advising, and sustaining the ANSF. Helping to fund the ANSF is the best way to protect the investment we all have made to strengthen Afghanistan and insulate it from international terrorist groups.

Strengthening Afghan governance and economic development is also key to achieving our core objective. We've made significant economic and development progress in the past decade, but Afghanistan will require substantial international assistance through the next decade to grow its private sector and promote its integration in greater

South Asia's thriving economy. The United States has committed to seek, on a yearly basis, funding for social and economic assistance to Afghanistan. At the July 2012 Tokyo Conference, the international community and Afghanistan agreed on a long-term economic partnership, based on the principle of mutual accountability. We expect Afghan progress in fighting corruption, carrying out reform, and providing good governance as the international community provides support after 2014.

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