



Afghan boy, 1 of more than 13 million cell phone users in Afghanistan, shows phone to U.S. Marines in Khwaija Jama

# The Comprehensive Approach in Afghanistan

BY JAMES G. STAVRIDIS

Today, the Afghan people and the international community have an opportunity to secure large areas of terrain and population from the Taliban while simultaneously creating sufficient governance and security capacity in the Afghan government to enable them to take the lead in their own country. Above all, we can prevent the return of al Qaeda, the fundamental reason we are there.

Training and operations to create this environment are ongoing and meeting with a steady level of success. Although the war is far from over, positive trends are developing that demonstrate this approach is working and that the international community and the Afghan people

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are heading in the right direction. The best way to combine their efforts is to improve on the current level of cooperation between security forces, other government activities, and the rest of the actors involved, which can be called the *Comprehensive Approach*, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) term for bringing together all the elements of effort—political, economic, cultural, military, and so on.

### The Comprehensive Approach

Warfare is an inherently political act. As such, it requires the participation of more than only security services. Indeed, because it is a political act, the entire society of the challenged state is involved. A solution requires a holistic approach, which combines security forces with other government entities and the rest of society to form a whole-of-society approach.

At the global level, the Comprehensive Approach is a point of view that articulates the links along the spectrum from security to humanitarianism, illustrates the most appropriate roles for soldiers and civilians in this complex arena, appropriately resources government agencies crucial for success in the military and humanitarian nexus, and searches for productive partnerships with allied governments and international organizations that share an interest in promoting security and prosperity around the world.

At the national level, as in Afghanistan, it is an approach that conceptualizes the interaction between security forces, the rest of government, and the rest of Afghan society. This approach involves the Afghans and the entire international community. The Comprehensive Approach seeks to achieve the highest possible degree of coordination, cooperation, and unity of effort from the different actors involved.

The current situation in Afghanistan stems from part of the global response to the attacks of September 11, 2001. United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1378 was passed to support a new Afghan government, provide urgent humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering of the Afghan people, provide long-term assistance for the social and economic reconstruction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan, and ensure the safety and security of Afghanistan.

As a result of the Bonn Agreement in late 2001, the United Nations (UN) authorized the establishment of an International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to assist the Afghan Interim Authority in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding areas. In December 2003, the North Atlantic Council authorized ISAF to expand its operations. By October 2006, ISAF expanded to cover the entire country.

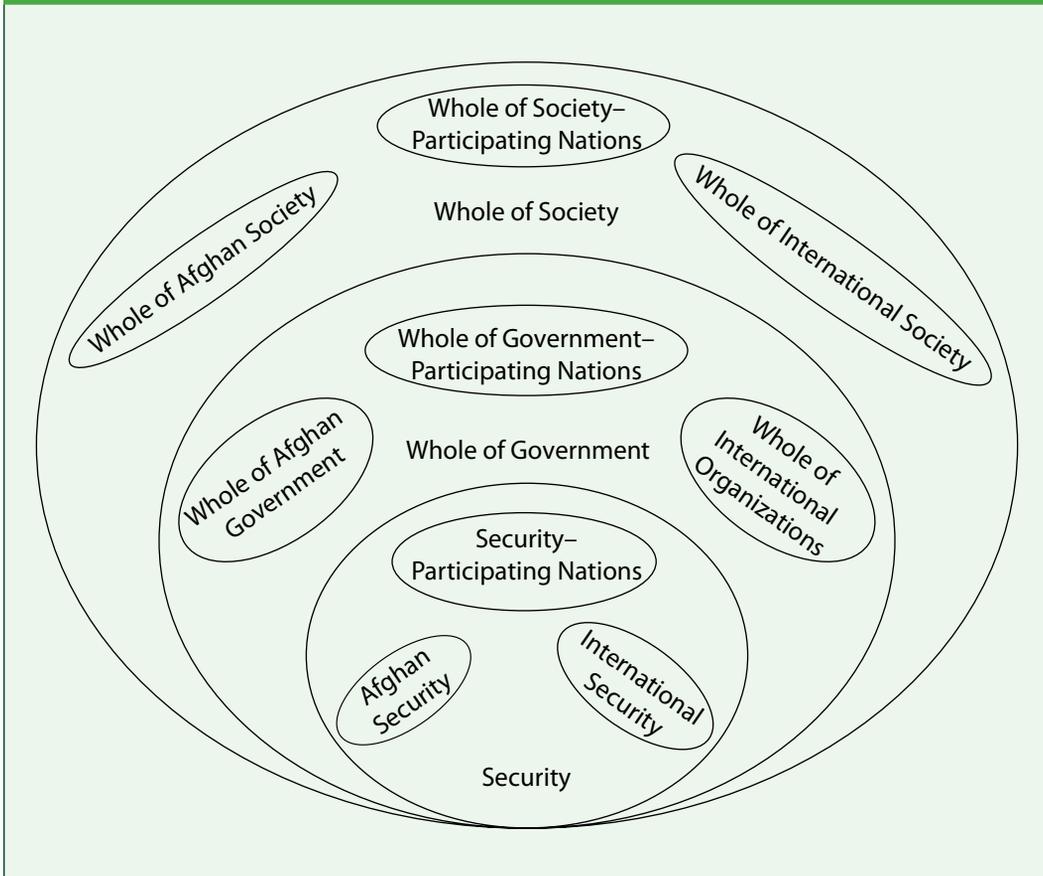
Over time, troop levels increased in response to a stubborn insurgency, and more countries agreed to support operations. There are currently 49 countries on the ground in Afghanistan providing roughly 150,000 troops. From the beginning, most key international organizations have been involved.

As time went on, ISAF and the other participants realized this effort needed to be expanded to include the population of Afghanistan in addition to the Afghan security forces and government. Additionally, the international community realized this situation could not be addressed by military means alone, and so supporting governments deployed more civilians to Afghanistan.

### Counterinsurgency

Although it is possible to defeat an insurgency through security means alone, it is highly challenging. As such, successful modern

Figure. Comprehensive Approach = Integrated Efforts of Afghans, the International Community, and the United States



counterinsurgency missions always involve an aspect of integrating at least the majority of a society. The Comprehensive Approach is the most recent manifestation of the idea of mobilizing the resources of an entire society to face these challenges.

Many contemporary authors have argued that most modern problems derive from a lack of stability in some states. Some developed democracies are able to handle internal frictions through the democratic process enabled by law enforcement. It is in the underdeveloped countries, primarily where the state has not yet overcome societal factions, where instability that breeds insurgency flourishes.

In a situation where the insurgency develops over time, a country may be able to quell the issue through internal means of improving governance and police forces, perhaps enabled by security assistance from abroad. In cases where there is no state to improve, where an insurgency suddenly explodes without warning, or an insurgency is triggered by external events such as an intervention, the situation is different. If there is no government, one must be formed. If there is no security, it must be provided.

In the case where there is no government or security, the first major part of counterinsurgency operations involves expanding security. Although providing security is difficult and challenging under these circumstances, it is often the simplest counterinsurgency task, and is one of the few tasks that is clearly the key responsibility of one group: security forces.

Security forces, both from the host nation as well as any international assisting forces, provide initial security by entering an area and determining the situation, often by physically facing any challengers. This could be as violent as the street-to-street fighting encountered in Baghdad during 2007 or as nonviolent as initial Kosovo Force entry into Kosovo in 1999.

At this point, other aspects of counterinsurgency should be addressed. Although some believe security forces must provide absolute security before development can begin, it is impossible to provide 100 percent security without development. Once the enemy forces are cleared, other actors become involved, including contact with local elites to attempt to co-opt them into supporting the government.

Someone has to hire the local young males in an attempt to diminish their desire to assist the insurgency, effectively draining the manpower pool available to the insurgents. If these men have a job, they are less likely to be bored

inject money into the local economy. When this occurs, local markets will reopen and prosperity will begin to return. If security forces or other government entities do not hire the local youths, they will likely take up arms for ideological reasons, for economic purposes, or out of boredom.

Once this stage is reached, operations shift from clearing to holding and building. In these phases, a government must be formed if one is not present, and the government must then provide the services that the people expect.

The government must be legitimate in the eyes of the people and provide a system of governance that is appropriate to the population involved. The rest of society becomes involved because they are the target of the insurgency and, by necessity, the counterinsurgency. The people in the area are participants whether they want to be or not. Although the majority of the general population tends to avoid supporting one side over the other as long as their basic needs are met, both the government and the opposition seek their support. The rest of the society that is located in previously pacified areas participates by providing support (via taxes, for example) to the government.

Other actors such as businesses participate in building the economy. The central government participates by mobilizing resources to assist the fight while simultaneously promulgating policies designed to maintain the support of the population in pacified areas and address grievances in insurgent areas. The whole of government of any assisting states is involved by not only providing security assistance, but also providing development assistance. They can also deploy civilians from government agencies who can assist with rule of law issues, help develop governance capabilities, and assist with

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and they will not tend to be as bitter toward security forces that might be perceived as occupiers. This also provides a manpower pool that may be used to provide local security and

building the political infrastructure and developing the host nation intelligence community.

The rest of the whole of society of the assisting states can also help, although this is difficult to achieve. Nongovernmental organizations and other groups can assist. As examples, political specialists from organizations such as the International Republican Institute and National Democratic Institute can assist with grassroots democratization efforts, private medical organizations can send doctors to provide medical assistance or advice, and universities can come forward to help with the educational infrastructure or provide agricultural advice as part of public-private initiatives. They can also mobilize resources at home to send forward, such as medical and school supplies. They can also take people from the host nation out of the combat zone and give them the opportunity to learn from spending time with functioning political, legal, law enforcement, and agricultural or educational organizations, all in a safe atmosphere.

One major thing that assisting societies must keep in mind is that the challenged state is usually composed of cultures different from their own. This requires a deft touch and willingness to entertain different approaches that are appropriate for the problem at hand.

The whole of the international community is also an important player within a country that is beset with problems. The United Nations is the most obvious organization to provide assistance. Not only does the UN Security Council provide resolutions that legitimize international involvement while simultaneously delegitimizing the opposition, but it also creates organizations such as the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) to coordinate operations on the ground. UNAMA has 23 field offices throughout

Afghanistan and mobilizes resources belonging to the 18 different UN organizations involved in Afghanistan. In 2006, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) assisted in the creation of district development plans in 138 districts in 14 provinces. These plans are updated annually and reflect the district, provincial, national, and international goals for the districts and provinces.

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The United Nations is only one such international organization operating in challenged countries. Other international organizations such as the World Bank and International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) operate in a variety of countries. Some regional organizations are available as well, such as the Asian Development Bank, which operates in Afghanistan. The international community can also set up unique organizations to deal with individual countries, such as Afghanistan's New Beginnings Programme, developed by the UNDP to assist with disbandment, demobilization, and reintegration.

In addition to international whole-of-government efforts, portions of the international whole of society are available as well. These organizations are self-chartered and self-organized, and are present throughout the world. Some of the more famous include Médecines Sans Frontières (Doctors Without Borders), which provides medical assistance, and Reporters Without Borders, which works to ensure freedom of the press and security for reporters.

Thus, the pool of potential assistance is huge: security forces, national whole of government and national whole of society from the challenged state, government capabilities and the whole-of-society resources from assisting countries, international organizations, and the whole of international society.

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### Difficulties

Although the potential of the Comprehensive Approach is limited only by the desire to assist, in actuality it is difficult to mobilize, organize, and coordinate the activities of all these disparate actors. Even agreeing to a common purpose can be difficult to achieve, much less agreeing on where and how to do things.

Security forces tend to be the easiest to mobilize and deploy because they normally have the mandate as well as operations and logistical capability to do so. Within the challenged nation, however, security forces may be an issue. In some cases, there is almost no security force present, and sometimes they are part of the problem: they may be corrupt, participate in ethnic cleansing, or just be incompetent or afraid of the insurgents. Security forces from assisting nations may be easier to deploy, and more utilitarian once they arrive.

In some cases, they may only be needed as trainers, but sometimes external forces may need to deploy for training, advising, and combat missions. Although most states will not deploy to other countries, there are several

countries that will deploy to assist challenged states if it is in their interest. Legitimization in the form of a UNSCR, internal political debate, and collective decisions can make it much easier for countries to participate. Once countries decide on deployment of forces to combat and training, an agreement must be developed between the host nation and assisting nation(s). This arrangement will determine the way ahead on the ground in the assisted nation. These relationships will change over time as the situation develops and as the host nation capacity grows.

The deployment of whole-of-government capabilities is difficult, even for countries that have a well-developed governmental capacity. Many governmental organizations are used to a more benign security atmosphere than is currently present in countries such as Afghanistan. Several require freedom of movement in order to do their jobs. In places with limits on movement, this impedes their capability to perform their missions.

The deployment of the whole of society is even more challenging. Many elements of society outside of the government balk at the concept of “deploying.” Many would be reluctant to be seen affiliating with a governmental organization, especially the military. These organizations tend to have a tradition of free-thinking and self-motivation that they see as incompatible with subordinating themselves to government-led organizations. Where a security force sees cooperation, a volunteer organization may see subordination to the security services, and by extension support for policies in which they may or may not believe.

International capabilities are also problematic. After the bombing of the UN Assistance Mission to Iraq, the UN circumscribed its activities because of deteriorating

security conditions. Other international organizations such as the ICRC will operate in austere conditions; however, there must be an acceptable level of security for them to operate fully. During deteriorated security conditions, these organizations may travel to an area while working through trusted intermediaries or their own local employees.

Working with international whole-of-society groups can be even more difficult. Many international organizations and individuals can have a different point of view from the perspectives of security forces and government actors. Several of these groups believe that their freedom to move around in a zone of conflict rests on their perceived neutrality, and that any cooperation with governmental efforts will cause opposition groups to perceive them as no longer neutral, and subsequently target them.

When differences can be overcome, complementary capabilities provide what the challenged country does not have so it can make appropriate changes and produce a state that governs well, provides security, rule of law, and economic opportunity, and addresses the needs of all its population. Although difficult to achieve, this has worked in the past and can work again in the future. The Comprehensive Approach is never perfect; it is an ongoing effort, requiring dialogue among all of the actors in order to have the appropriate capacity at the right time. When it works, it works well.

### **Afghanistan**

The Comprehensive Approach is ongoing in Afghanistan. Although it has proceeded by fits and starts, it has matured over the years and is functioning at a higher level now. As the conflict has changed over the years, more actors

are involved, bringing more capabilities to the effort. The situation has stabilized and is changing for the better.

Success in counterinsurgency requires the people to support a legitimate government and to resolve disagreements through agreed-upon mechanisms that are inclusive, transparent, and equitable.

Government legitimacy is fundamental because it derives from the population of all regions and protects all ethnic groups, ensuring minority rights rather than indulging in the tyranny of the majority. If the people do not believe the government represents their best interests, they will not support it. When enough of the people stop supporting the government, it loses the war.

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Over the last 15 months, this drive for legitimacy has been manifested by two nationwide elections. Afghanistan had a presidential election in 2009 and a parliamentary election in September 2010. National and international organizations participated in making these elections an arguable success. The Afghan people were represented in this process by both the Afghan Independent Human Rights Commission (AIHRC) and Afghanistan's Independent Election Commission. The United Nations also is deeply involved in the system. The Free and Fair Election Foundation of Afghanistan (FEFA) is an organization established by a number of civil society organizations to monitor elections to ensure that they are free and fair, promote democracy, promote

public participation in electoral affairs, and help consolidate public trust and faith in democracy and elections. It has observed elections since October 2004, providing assistance on the ground as well as transparency to the electoral process by publishing reports. FEFA lists 24 different partners from Afghanistan and the rest of the world and is supported by the governments of the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, and Canada, as well as the Asia Foundation and the AIHRC.

Although there were reports of low voter turnout, ballot stuffing, intimidation, and other electoral fraud, the fact that there were two elections planned and completed in Afghanistan is a success in itself and shows

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that the Afghan people and government support the idea of elections to select their government. The system continues to seek improvement. In the most recent elections, some 40 percent of those eligible voted in spite of a Taliban call for a boycott of the election and 309 Taliban attacks in 17 of the 34 provinces on election day. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) largely prevented these and other attacks from succeeding. Although 11 Afghan civilians and 3 police were killed during the September 18, 2010, parliamentary elections, this was in contrast to the 2009 elections where 479 attacks killed 31 civilians, 18 Afghan police, and 8 Afghan soldiers.

Another prerequisite for success is for the government to secure the population. If the

government does not protect the people, they have no reason to support the government. The ANSF are at the forefront of this struggle, with ISAF playing a vital role in training the ANSF and supporting their efforts in the field. A very dangerous job in Afghanistan is to be a Taliban “shadow governor” of a province. Between mid-June and mid-September 2010, ISAF and ANSF special operations forces conducted 4,000 precision targeted raids, resulting in the death or capture of 235 Taliban leaders and 2,600 enemy fighters. The insurgents’ responses have resulted in costly defeats.

The ANSF are the key to sustainable success against the insurgents. Although there have been ups and downs over the years, current trends for the ANSF are reasonably positive.

For ANSF to take the lead in security operations, it must be fully manned and trained. The NATO Training Mission–Afghanistan is supported by 29 different nations and has been the single greatest driver of this ANSF growth and improved quality. We are training the future of Afghan security, which will ultimately enable transition to self-sustaining indigenous security, stability, and progressive governance and development. The equation is stark: if we do not commit now to providing what is required on the ground, we place the future of our Afghan partners in jeopardy.

ANSF end strength at the end of the year was 260,000 personnel—5,000 higher than the target. The Afghan National Army reached its 134,000 goal 3 months early, having integrated 39,000 troops since November 2009. The Afghan National Army Air Force has also grown, increasing from 42 to 52 aircraft since November 2009. The Afghan National Police (ANP) has also reached its 2010 goal of 109,000 police 3 months early, adding 21,000 since November 2009. The ANP is also creating

units of the Afghan Civil Order Police who have capabilities similar to those of European Gendarmerie Corps, and who have rapidly won the confidence of ordinary people by their professionalism. To help the population protect themselves, President Hamid Karzai signed a decree on August 16, 2010, establishing the Afghan Local Police.

Good governance has always been problematic in Afghanistan. The country has rarely had a central government that controlled its entire territory, rule of law rarely protected the population, and the economy was destroyed by decades of violence. The anti-education and anti-female policies of the Taliban prevented Afghanistan from developing the potential of its human capital and made it difficult for Afghans to have a vision for a better way of life.

The United Nations Development Programme is addressing this need by advising the Afghan parliament and the civil service to improve their professionalism and efficiency. They also support provincial, district, and municipal administrations to improve service delivery by reforming organizational structures, streamlining management processes, and developing essential skills and knowledge of civil servants. In addition to the UN, a variety of national development agencies are assisting the three levels of Afghan government to significantly improve its ability to govern competently.

Although Afghanistan's economy was destroyed during decades of war, the economic future looks comparatively bright. An expanding economy is vital to the long-term health of the country. Sixty-three percent of Afghans believe their economic situation is better than it was 5 years ago. Although starting from a low point, last year the gross domestic product (GDP) grew by 22.5

percent, while growth in 2010 is projected to be 8 percent.

Because agriculture accounts for 45 percent of Afghan GDP and employs 70 to 80 percent of the population, a variety of actors work with the Afghan people to rebuild their agricultural capability. Development agencies cooperate with farmers, providing advice to improve and modernize their techniques as well as rebuilding shattered agricultural infrastructure. ISAF supports these efforts with several programs such as the Agribusiness Development Teams, where a variety of actors come together to bring agricultural expertise into communities in Afghanistan. As a result, Afghanistan had a 53 percent growth in its agriculture sector and a 50 percent growth in wheat yield in 2009.

Afghanistan also enjoyed a 30 percent growth in mining and a 53 percent growth in collected domestic revenues in 2009. The Ministry of Minerals and Afghanistan Geological Survey work closely with the British and U.S. Geologic Surveys and a variety of

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development agencies to tap into the estimated \$1 to 3 trillion worth of minerals located under Afghan soil. Another economic indicator was the over 13 million cell phone subscribers in Afghanistan as of March 2010. All this economic activity is improving the lives of some of the population.

Efforts to support the rule of law progress as well. Rule of law advisors are embedded in NATO units, Provincial Reconstruction Teams, and offices of the Afghan government.

These experts assist the Afghans in revamping the entire legal structure while retaining the nature of Afghan culture, empowering local leaders while countering Taliban efforts to spread the influence of their “night courts.” International actors have developed a training program that prepares Afghan authorities to

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take control of all prisons while the first trials of detainees in Afghan courts began in June 2010. With outside assistance, the Afghans now lead the Major Crimes Task Force and Sensitive Intelligence Unit, which combat corruption, drug-trafficking, and kidnapping. They act on arrest warrants endorsed by the Attorney General and Afghan judges, ensuring their efforts are in accord with Afghan legal norms, rules, and regulations.

One of the most well known problems in Afghanistan is corruption, and pervasive corruption prevents efforts for improvement. But today the Afghan government and its international partners are taking steps either to eliminate corruption or mitigate its effects. Recent violence, the repeated destruction of governments, economic collapse, and large-scale narcotics cultivation have caused corruption to spike. Graft in the ANSF includes predatory behavior against soldiers and the people as well as selling assets provided by the government such as fuel, food, ammunition, and equipment. Some corruption is a natural outgrowth of the billions of assistance dollars that flowed into an underdeveloped system.

Many different actors are modifying their practices to minimize corruption while other organizations have launched investigations. ISAF has placed Brigadier General H.R. McMaster, who has successfully adopted innovative techniques in the past, in charge of all ISAF anticorruption efforts. They have developed the anticorruption Combined Joint Interagency Task Force, which will help enable *shafaf* (transparency), and have already announced a new set of rules designed to combat corruption perpetrated by contractors. Additionally, as the largest contributor of aid, the United States is rewriting the rules for contracting and foreign assistance money to ensure that it does not fuel corruption.

The UN is also advising the government on reforming anticorruption legislation to conform to the UN Convention Against Corruption. In response to all of these international actions, President Karzai announced Afghanistan’s own program to stamp out corruption. The Afghan president told reporters that his government will fight corruption, but that it must be done in accordance with Afghan law. He has also backed up his words with actions, recently approving the removal of the Deputy Minister of the Interior, the most senior government official sanctioned so far for corruption.

Efforts continue to move forward in countering narcotics as well. Poppy cultivation has decreased by 35 percent over the past 2 years. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, 20 of 34 provinces are currently poppy-free. The Drug Enforcement Administration states that there has been a threefold increase in the number of drug smugglers incarcerated in Afghanistan this year.

Education is important to the future of any country. Afghanistan will need to invest in its human capital in order to achieve long-term

stability. Both the government of Afghanistan and the various groups assisting it have been able to improve the literacy rate in young Afghans to 34 percent and have enrolled 7 million children in school, of whom nearly 3 million are girls. These gains are in spite of the Taliban aggressively attacking efforts to educate future Afghan leaders.

The collective efforts of the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, international community, and ISAF to provide security and good governance have helped the Afghan people believe in their government. Polls indicate that 59 percent of Afghans have confidence that their country is moving in the right direction. Seventy percent of Afghans supported the presence of international forces, which indicates that Afghans understand that international forces are not those of an empire seeking to conquer and occupy Afghanistan, but a UN-mandated multinational operation designed to support their national goals and ambitions. The Afghan government also has the support of the majority of Afghans: 55 percent of Afghans believe their government is successful while the ANSF earned a 75 percent approval rating among Afghans. This compares very favorably with the Taliban popularity rate below 8 percent.

The Afghan government, people of Afghanistan, and various actors that support them are continuing to plan and fight for the future. On September 4, 2010, President Karzai created the High Peace Council, designed as a negotiating body made up of representatives of a broad section of society, to initiate a discussion with the Taliban. President Karzai's office stated that the formation of the High Peace Council was "a significant step towards peace talks."

President Karzai previously offered a list of conditions that Taliban fighters must meet

to be a part of Afghanistan's future: accept the constitution, lay down their weapons, sever ties to al Qaeda, and become productive or participating members of society. Reconciliation can be achieved only if it is negotiated from a position of strength. History shows that if the opposition does not feel pressured, they will negotiate to buy time and try to improve their situation. They will only negotiate in good faith if they understand that the price of fighting is greater than that of a negotiated agreement. The surge and

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the continued commitment of the nations whose forces are deployed to Afghanistan will provide that motivation.

All of these gains alone cannot guarantee success. They do provide a strong base from which to launch efforts that will lead to success. The Afghan people seem to want a solution and are working toward that end. Members of the international community are announcing that they will not be departing Afghanistan but will transition to training and advisory roles as the ANSF take the lead. The international community is continuing to work to build capacity in the Afghan government while continuing to cooperate in improving the lot of the Afghan people. The future involves many steps, with many groups working together as part of the Comprehensive Approach to continue development work in Afghanistan.

### **Conclusion**

The Comprehensive Approach is not a new idea. Counterinsurgency has always required a

holistic approach. With the arrival of new actors on the national and international stage, we need a new concept of how to integrate the efforts of the old and new actors. The Comprehensive Approach gives us that way of looking at things, of coordinating planning, and of aligning efforts and mobilizing the resources that the local, national, and global communities have to offer.

Make no mistake—this is a huge challenge, but we will be able to defeat the opposition if we maintain our resolve and work together to become stronger. Soon we will reach the point where we can safely modify and reduce our combat support to the Afghan government while it takes the lead in this fight. Historically, spikes in violence during an insurgency tend to mark the beginning of the end.

This is the time to maintain resolve, as was done in Malaya in the late 1950s, in the Balkans and Colombia in the late 1990s, and Iraq in the 2005–2007 timeframe. Though violence may not be completely eliminated in the short term, it can be reduced to manageable levels. We must sustain our own resolve to achieve this, and to deliver the success in Afghanistan that is within our grasp. **PRISM**