

# Setting—and Capitalizing on— Conditions for Progress in Afghanistan

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**T**he past 18 months have been a time of significant change in Afghanistan. During this period, we have seen a renewed national and international commitment to preventing Afghanistan from once again becoming a safe

haven from which al Qaeda and other transnational terrorists can launch attacks on our lands. We have also seen an increased sense of urgency to accomplish that difficult mission. Consequently, amplified commitment and urgency now characterize our effort to implement the comprehensive civil-military counterinsurgency campaign that is required to achieve our critical national security objectives here.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan—in partnership with our Afghan counterparts and members of the U.S. Embassy in Kabul, the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and



*A U.S. soldier (left) sets up tactical satellite communications while an Afghan soldier shoots at enemy fighters in the Shekhabad Valley, Wardak Province, Afghanistan, in August.*



other embassies and key elements of the international community—have implemented significant changes to set the conditions for moving forward in Afghanistan. As a result of those changes and amid tough ongoing fighting, we are beginning to see progress in the security, governance and development arenas, though that progress has been uneven and varied from location to location. The year ahead will be a critical period during which we can help our Afghan partners further their gains and work toward long-term security and economic opportunity in their country.

### Setting the Conditions for Progress

Over the past 18 months, coalition leaders have worked hard to set the conditions for progress in Afghanistan by “getting the inputs right.” Critical to this effort were the leadership, vision, energy and expertise provided by GEN Stanley A. McChrystal during his time as the ISAF commander.

Getting the inputs right began with building the organizations and structures needed to carry out a comprehensive civil-military counterinsurgency campaign. The ISAF commander, for instance, is now dual-hatted as both a NATO commander and the commander of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, thereby allowing greater unity of effort. A three-star headquarters, the ISAF Joint Command, is now responsible for the near-term planning and conduct of our operational campaign, which allows the four-star ISAF headquarters to focus more on the strategic level. We also now have a joint task force to help develop Afghan rule of

law and corrections capacity, several interagency fusion cells, an information operations task force, and an ISAF element that assists the Afghan government with reconciliation and reintegration efforts. Another new organization, the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan, now heads the critical effort to develop Afghan security forces.

Ensuring that the right people are in charge of these organizations was just as important. All of the nations involved in Afghanistan have sent their most talented leaders, from U.N. Special Representative Stefan di Mistura, NATO Senior Civilian Representative Ambassador Mark Sedwill, and U.S. Ambassador Karl Eikenberry to ISAF Joint Command commander LTG David M. Rodriguez, NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan commander LTG William D. Caldwell IV, and ISAF Reintegration Cell chief British Maj. Gen. Phillip Jones, among many others. These and many other senior leaders have brought to Afghanistan important experience from having served in Afghanistan before or having held key positions in Iraq. As a result, the decisions now being made in Afghanistan are informed by a deep appreciation of counterinsurgency principles; a growing, granular understanding of the situation on the ground in Afghanistan; and increasingly strong relationships with Afghan leaders at all levels, from local tribal and religious leaders to those at the highest levels of the Afghan government.

Adjustments to the inputs in Afghanistan also included developing the appropriate guiding concepts for a comprehensive civil-military counterinsurgency campaign. From pushing to achieve greater civil-military unity of effort and aggressively pursuing the mission of partnering with Afghan security forces to issuing appropriate tactical guidance designed to reduce the loss of innocent civilian life, GEN McChrystal implemented several important changes as the ISAF commander. We continue to build on those initiatives and to refine our guiding concepts, particularly with regard to ensuring that tactical guidance is imple-



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*Soldiers with Company A, 1st Regiment, 503rd Infantry Battalion, 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team, escort captured enemy fighters following a mission in the Shekhabad Valley in August.*

mented in ways that provide our troopers all the support they need when they are in a tough situation while continuing our efforts to reduce to an absolute minimum the loss of innocent civilian life in the course of our operations. We also continue to ensure that all involved are focused on the Afghan people. After all, the human terrain is the decisive terrain. In addition to our kinetic operations, we also pursue numerous nonkinetic efforts to support our Afghan partners as they strive to improve governance, reduce corruption and foster economic growth.

Getting the inputs right also required deploying the necessary resources. As a result of various national decisions, substantial additional resources of all types have flowed into Afghanistan over the last 18 months. The most obvious of these is the increase in U.S. and coalition forces. We have, for example, tripled the number of U.S. troopers in Afghanistan since early 2009, and nearly all of the final

30,000 additional U.S. forces committed in December were on the ground as of early August. Significantly, our NATO allies have committed some 13,000 additional troopers to the effort since last year as well. Complementing the force buildup has been an increase in civilian personnel, with an ongoing “civilian surge” of nearly 1,000 additional civilian officials. Most important, though, has been the further growth and professionalization of the Afghan National Army and Police, which were authorized to grow by an additional 100,000 last December and are now ahead of their growth goals to achieve their new authorizations by fall 2011.

### **Capitalizing on the Conditions for Progress**

Having set the conditions for progress over the last 18 months by putting in place the proper organizations, people, concepts and resources, we are now working to capitalize

on what those changes are making possible. Indeed, despite innumerable remaining challenges on the security, governance, economic and anticorruption fronts, we have seen some important improvements—albeit slow and uneven—in each of these areas. Over the coming months, we will work closely with our Afghan partners to forge further progress on each front even as we support Afghan capacity growth in each area.



*GEN David H. Petraeus, commander, International Security Assistance Force, meets with members of the Afghan National Army in the Bala Morghab Valley of Afghanistan in August.*

## Improving Security

In terms of security, the changes of the last 18 months have enabled new operations in key districts of Afghanistan. To be sure, as we and our Afghan partners have fought to take back insurgent sanctuaries in the central Helmand River valley and elsewhere in the traditional insurgent heartland of southern Afghanistan, the enemy has fought back, as expected. The tough fighting and elevated levels of violence will likely continue for some time as our troopers and their Afghan partners clear more insurgent strongholds, support establishment of legitimate governance structures and help implement development projects.

We have begun to see some encouraging progress, however, amid the tough fighting. From just early April through early August, more than 375 middle- and upper-level Taliban and other extremist element leaders were killed or captured, and some 1,500 of their rank-and-file were taken off the battlefield. At the same time, adherence to ISAF's tactical guidance has helped reduce civilian casualties in the course of our operations—a notable achievement given the increase in our numbers and the launching of numerous offensive operations. In addition, operations in Central Helmand Province have wrested several key strongholds from Taliban control, including Nad-i-Ali and Marjah, which had been a critical sanctuary for the Taliban and the home to improvised explosive device factories, headquarters, medical facilities and the illegal narcotics industry. As holding and building operations gradually expand in Central Helmand, our troopers and their Afghan partners have increasingly begun to focus their efforts on Kandahar City, where they are working to provide the Afghan people with a "rising tide of security" that will expand over time and serve as the foundation upon which local governance can be built, basic services can be improved and economic opportunities can be created. Checkpoints have been established around the city and are now jointly staffed by Afghan National Civil Order Police and ISAF forces. Additional U.S. military police are partnering with a growing number of Afghan uniformed police in the city, and troopers from the 2nd Brigade, 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), are working with Afghan police and soldiers to clear and hold critical districts to the northwest and west of the city. The impending deployment of the 525 Battlefield Surveillance Brigade to the border area

southeast of the city will also help to interdict the flow of fighters and explosives across the border.

Along with these encouraging developments, significant security challenges do remain. Helping our Afghan partners overcome these challenges will require continued progress on several fronts, including Afghan security forces development, local citizen involvement in security, reintegration efforts and reduction of sanctuaries in Pakistan.

A critical aspect of improving security is increasing the size and capability of the Afghan national security forces (ANSF). The past 18 months have seen significant progress in this regard. During that time, the ANSF have added nearly 90,000 soldiers and police to their ranks, bringing the total number to more than 241,000. In fact, by the end of this year, they will have equaled in 18 months the growth of the previous seven years. Just as important, ISAF has implemented several changes to better develop ANSF quality and capacity. Training capacity has expanded significantly, with a 400 percent growth in Afghan police training and with the density of trainers to trainees increasing from one trainer per 79 trainees to one trainer per 30 trainees. Partnership efforts have been dramatically expanded, with embedded U.S. and coalition forces now partnering with the ANSF at all levels to provide mentorship and leadership. Today Afghan military headquarters typically are colocated with ISAF unit headquarters, and nearly 85 percent of the Afghan National Army is now fully partnered with ISAF forces in the field. As a result of these efforts, we are beginning to see improvement in ANSF capability, with Afghan forces now in the lead in all but one district of Kabul and in a number of other areas as well. Despite this improvement, however, Afghan forces are still challenged by retention issues in certain units, insufficient experienced leadership and a host of other issues. The coming year will see continued efforts to help our Afghan partners in uniform work toward taking increased responsibility for security in their country.



*GEN Petraeus speaks with Col. Massimo Biagini, commander of the Italian Task Force North, in Bala Morghab, Afghanistan, in August.*

Even with more coalition forces and more capable Afghan forces, achieving greater security in Afghanistan will require involving local Afghan citizens in their own security. To enable this, President Hamid Karzai recently approved the creation of Afghan local police as a new element of the Ministry of Interior's forces. These elements will be recruited and vetted locally to help provide security in their own villages and will allow local Afghans to work with the ANSF to help protect their communities from the Taliban's oppressive practices, indiscriminate violence and extremist ideology. As Afghan leaders move forward in implementing this initiative, Afghan local police will be an important force multiplier in the critical effort to improve security.

Another important factor in reducing violence in Afghanistan will be continued efforts to reintegrate reconcilable insurgents back into Afghan society. The past year has seen the beginning of momentum on this front, with Afghan leaders recognizing that they cannot kill and capture their way out of the insurgency they face. After convening an important National Consultative Peace Jirga this May, President Karzai approved the Afghan peace and reconciliation program in June. This program provides a vehicle through which Taliban fighters who renounce violence and accept the Afghan Constitution can return to Afghan society as fully enfranchised citizens. Relying heavily on the Afghan tradition of conflict resolution (*jirgas*) to ensure insurgent reintegration, the program will also provide important job training to help insurgents resume productive lives. We will work closely with our Afghan partners in the coming months to help them ensure that this program is implemented equitably as provinces and districts throughout Afghanistan begin forming their peace and reconciliation committees.

Also integral to the security of Afghanistan is the security situation in Pakistan. In light of this, Pakistani leaders' efforts over the last 18 months to take on violent extremists within their country's borders have been heartening. Backed by a growing consensus among Pakistan's government officials, religious leaders and people who believe that violent extremism poses an existential threat to Pakistan, the Pakistani military has been involved in nearly continuous operations against extremist elements in the regions bordering Afghanistan. Pakistani civilian and security force losses have been substantial; nonetheless, the Pakistani military has continued to expand its operations against

the elements that threaten its very writ of governance. Also encouraging has been the establishment of a tripartite commission to further cooperation between Afghanistan, Pakistan and the United States, as well as the establishment of additional coordination centers on the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. Still greater cooperation and coordination are required, however, and we will continue to encourage and support our Pakistani partners in their efforts to counter extremism and extremists on their soil.

Progress in all of these efforts will be essential to forging greater security in the coming months as we approach July 2011, the target date to begin the conditions-based process of transferring tasks to Afghan forces and officials as well as to begin the gradual—and also conditions-based—withdrawal of U.S. "surge" forces. Even as we work with our Afghan partners to develop plans for that transition process, we are working to ensure that security gains are accompanied by gains in the governance, development and anticorruption lines of operation.

### Supporting Governance Expansion

Security gains in Afghanistan will only be sustainable if the Afghan government can provide effective governance and deliver essential services to its people. Recognizing this reality, Afghan officials have taken important steps to expand governance capacity. Many of their initiatives have focused on the important issues of building human capital and connecting the national government in Kabul to provincial and district governments. These initiatives include developing a comprehensive plan to coordinate technical assistance, creating a strategy to increase inter-ministerial coordination of service delivery in select districts, and training thousands of government employees through the Afghan Civil Service Institute. From company commanders to ministerial advisors, ISAF leaders at every level actively mentor, advise and assist Afghan leaders as they pursue these and other capacity-building endeavors.



*Nangarhar Provincial Reconstruction Team members SPC Shane Bastin (left) and SGT Daniel Wells pull security during a mission in Jalalabad, Afghanistan, in August.*

Planning for governance capacity building is now an increasingly integral part of operational planning. In preparation for operations in Kandahar, for example, President Karzai and his ministers held *shuras* and fostered other political initiatives focused on increasing the sense of inclusivity and transparency in the province. As we press forward in Kandahar and elsewhere, we will continue to help our Afghan partners empower governors and local leaders and establish viable social-organizing structures at the local level.

ISAF and its partner organizations have also supported the critical effort to develop rule of law and criminal justice capacity in Afghanistan. While the last 18 months have seen important developments, including the implementation of the Afghanistan case assignment system to track and report cases and to monitor judges, Afghan legal and justice systems remain underdeveloped. International and U.S. Department of Justice advisors continue to mentor and advise Afghan leaders in addressing the staffing and corruption issues in the judicial system. Also, to assist in the growth of the Afghan corrections system, we created a new task force responsible for overseeing U.S. detention operations and for facilitating partnered development of an Afghan-owned detention process. By integrating senior Afghan leaders, training corrections officers, and developing vocational, reintegration and rehabilitation programs, this task force is working with our Afghan partners to set the conditions for the eventual transition of detention operations to full Afghan control.

## Promoting Economic Development

Though slow and uneven, economic and social service development in Afghanistan continues as well. For example, nearly 7 million Afghan children are now in school. Immunization rates for children are now in the 70 to 90 percent range nationwide. Cell phones are ubiquitous in a country that had virtually none during the Taliban days, though the Taliban does force the shutdown of some towers at night. Kabul is a bustling, busy city, as are Herat, Mazar-e-Sharif and Jalalabad. Roads and bridges and other infrastructure have been built, including 53 kilometers of railway in the north. Commerce is returning to those parts of Helmand where ISAF and Afghan forces are present. Even in places where governance remains weak, innovative efforts like the Afghan government's national solidarity program, supported by American and international donors and civilians as well as by our troopers, have helped enable local *shura* councils to choose their own development priorities and receive modest cash grants to pursue them.

Despite progress on the economic front, significant further growth is needed. Toward this end, U.S. and international civilians and troopers are working hard to support development of Afghanistan's agricultural sector, from implementing voucher programs for high-value crops and supplies and advising university and government officials on developing agribusiness to refurbishing canal and irrigation systems. We are also supporting Afghanistan's efforts to build the infrastructure that is so vital to linking

agricultural and mining areas to domestic and international markets. As we have worked to assist with agriculture, infrastructure and basic services expansion, last November's "Afghan First" initiative has led to a significant number of jobs for Afghan contractors; moreover, Afghan workers' participation in these projects is also helping to build their skills and the country's human capital.

These and other economic initiatives will continue to prove important in the year to come as we help our Afghan partners build on the foundations of improving security in southern and eastern Afghanistan and ultimately begin to take advantage of the extraordinary mineral wealth in Afghanistan.

## Reducing Corruption

Corruption in Afghanistan is a cross-cutting issue that affects security, governance and economic progress. It undermines the rule of law, drains vast amounts of revenue from the Afghan economy and delegitimizes the Afghan government. We continue to work with our Afghan partners to help them



GEN Petraeus and NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen visit the Afghan National Police Regional Training Center in Kandahar.

turn President Karzai's stated commitment to combating corruption into reality and to protect the people from malign government actors—and this will be an increasing area of focus in the coming year.

Some limited progress in anticorruption efforts has been achieved in the last 18 months. Afghanistan has implemented several institutional and legal reforms, including establishing an anticorruption unit in the attorney general's office and an anticorruption tribunal under the supreme court; increasing the independence and expanding the capacity of these elements are essential next steps. In addition, the past 18 months have seen the removal from office and prosecution of a number of senior officials, including the former mayor of Kabul and a number of "flag-level" military and police officers. Clearly, more actions of this nature are necessary, and Afghan leaders have committed to them. Nonetheless, turning President Karzai's clear commitments in this area into reality will depend on Afghan political will and significant encouragement and support from the international community.

A particular area of concern in the anticorruption arena is the illegal narcotics industry. Opium trafficking continues to serve as a significant source of funding for the insurgency and of government corruption. In partnership with the ANSF and Counternarcotics Police of Afghanistan (CNPA), U.S. troopers and civilians made the transition last year to targeting drug traffickers and their networks rather than the farmers who grow poppy crops. Simultaneously, we and our civilian partners have continued provid-

ing agricultural assistance to farmers, working to help them switch to legal crop production. Recent ANSF and ISAF operations in southern and eastern Afghanistan have also targeted the narcotics industry, with traffickers moving out of those opium-rich regions prior to the start of clearing operations. ISAF has continued to work with other U.S. and international agencies to support the development of Afghan counternarcotic efforts, particularly with regard to specialized training for the CNPA and education programs for Afghan youth.

Even as we support Afghan development of programs and initiatives to reduce corruption, leaders and troopers throughout ISAF's ranks are working to bring networks of malign actors to the attention of their trusted Afghan partners and their chains of command. Our leaders are charged with supporting their partners in confronting, isolating, pressuring and defunding malign actors—and, where appropriate, with referring them to trusted Afghan counterparts for prosecution. Afghanistan has a long history of representative self-governance, and we continue to work with its leaders and people to revive those traditions and address government abuses where they are present.

### **Our Troopers: Carrying Out a Difficult Mission**

The situation in Afghanistan remains exceedingly complex and very tough. While we now have the right inputs and are seeing incremental progress in all our lines of operation, we know that much hard work remains ahead. Success will take continued commitment, perseverance and sacrifice, and it will not be achieved quickly. Everyone in ISAF continues to press forward with determination, continuing the difficult work of helping our Afghan partners forge greater security and a more hopeful future for their country.

In all of this, the performance of our NATO and ISAF troopers has been nothing short of extraordinary. They have demonstrated themselves to be true "pentathletes," as adept at facilitating meetings between rival tribal leaders and helping spur local economies as at conducting patrols and undertaking kinetic operations. Their selfless commitment to continue serving despite the repeated deployments and other sacrifices it entails is truly inspiring. Because of their hard work, exceptional skill and indomitable will in soldiering together with our Afghan partners, we have achieved progress in a hugely important and hugely difficult mission. Those qualities in our troopers and in our Afghan partners will enable progress in the months and years ahead. ★



*Soldiers from the 101st Airborne Division advance through the town of Barge Matal, Afghanistan, during an operation in July.*