



HEADQUARTERS
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COMISAF

25 January 2011

To the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, Coast Guardsmen, and Civilians of the NATO International Security Assistance Force

SUBJECT: COMISAF Assessment

I thought it might be useful to provide my assessment of the situation in Afghanistan as we enter 2011.

Up front, I want you to know that you and our Afghan comrades did tremendous work in 2010. Indeed, ISAF and Afghan forces made impressive progress in our mission—a mission that is of enormous importance not just to each of our countries and Afghanistan, but to the region and the entire world, as well.

As you will recall, our core objective here is to ensure that Afghanistan never again becomes a sanctuary for Al Qaeda or other trans-national extremists. Achieving that objective requires that we help Afghanistan develop the ability to secure and govern itself. This, in turn, requires the conduct of a comprehensive civil-military campaign, carried out in full partnership with our Afghan counterparts, to improve security, develop Afghan security forces, and support the establishment of good governance and economic development.

The implementation of our strategy in 2010 was helped considerably by the deployment of additional ISAF forces, the growth of the Afghan Army and Police, an increase in the number of our civilian partners, and the associated funding to enable it all. Indeed, together with the establishment of additional organizations and refinements of our strategy, the additional resources enabled us this past fall to get the “inputs” right in Afghanistan for the first time.

Our efforts were given a further boost by the commitment of our countries’ leaders at the Lisbon Summit. At Lisbon, our leaders pledged to provide the support needed to enable achievement of President Karzai’s goal of Afghan forces being in the lead throughout Afghanistan by the end of 2014. More recently, many of our countries’ leaders and the NATO Secretary General have announced their desire to seek strategic partnership agreements with Afghanistan for the period beyond 2014. These commitments came, in part, because of the progress achieved in 2010.

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Throughout the past year, you and our Afghan partners worked together to halt a downward security spiral in much of the country and to reverse it in some areas of great importance. For example, despite occasional attacks, Kabul Province enjoyed impressive security throughout the latter half of 2010—and that is particularly noteworthy given that nearly one-fifth of the Afghan population lives in the greater Kabul area and Afghan forces are in the lead in all but one of the Province's districts.

Hard-won progress was also achieved in Helmand and Kandahar Provinces—a great credit to the Coalition and Afghan Forces who fought so skillfully and courageously in those areas. There were advances as well in a number of other areas in the east, west, and north, aided by the growth of Afghan and ISAF forces, the commencement of the Afghan Local Police initiative, the beginning of Afghan-led reintegration of reconcilable insurgents, and the relentless pace of targeted operations by ISAF and Afghan special operation forces. Indeed, while there clearly is a need for additional work in numerous areas, it is equally clear that ISAF and Afghan forces inflicted enormous losses on mid-level Taliban and Haqqani Network leaders throughout the country and took away some of their most important safe havens. Now, in fact, the insurgents increasingly are responding to our operations rather than vice-versa, and there are numerous reports of unprecedented discord among the members of the Quetta Shura, the Taliban senior leadership body.

To be sure, nothing about the past year's achievements was easy. To the contrary, our successes entailed hard fighting, tough losses, and periodic setbacks along the way. Moreover, you had to transition from intense combat to complex stability operations—and back again—on innumerable occasions, sometimes on the same day. Your versatility, skill, determination, and courage have truly been the stuff of history—and we have sought to capture your accomplishments and to recognize individuals and units accordingly.

Despite the achievements of 2010, there is much hard work to be done in 2011. And, as always in Afghanistan, the way ahead will be difficult. As President Karzai has made clear, the Kabul security bubble needs to be extended into neighboring provinces. The gains in the south and southwest have to be solidified, joined, and expanded. Areas of improved security in the east and west need to be connected and extended. And insurgent advances in recent years in the north and mountainous northeast must be halted and reversed.

To capitalize on the security gains we achieved in 2010, we will also have to maintain our support for Afghan-led efforts to establish governance that can earn the support of the people. We will have to sustain our work to enable Afghan institutions to improve basic services and to show the Afghan people that a brighter future lies in supporting the new Afghanistan rather than returning to the repressive, brutal days of the Taliban. Additionally, we will have to expand our efforts to help Afghan officials implement President Karzai's direction to combat corruption and the criminal patronage networks that undermine the

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development of effective Afghan institutions. In support of the latter effort, we will need to pursue initiatives to ensure that our contracting and procurement activities are part of the solution rather than a continuing part of the problem.

Needless to say, the Taliban and other enemies of security in Afghanistan will fight hard to prevent us from accomplishing these tasks. But, given the skill and the will that you and our Afghan partners demonstrated over the past year, I know that you—and they—will prove equal to the difficult tasks that lie ahead.

All of our operations must be conducted in complete partnership with, and in full support of, our Afghan counterparts. This is, after all, their country, and we are working together towards a better future for them and their children. Increasingly—and understandably—Afghans want to exercise greater sovereignty in their country. This should be applauded; indeed, the commencement this year of transition of security tasks in select areas to Afghan forces, at a pace determined by conditions on the ground, will facilitate the Afghan Government's increasing exercise of sovereignty. We should enable and celebrate this, for our Afghan partners' success is, of course, our success.

In sum, 2010 was a year of significant, hard-fought accomplishments. The year ahead is likely to be a tough one, too. Again, though, I am confident that the combined efforts of ISAF and Afghan forces will enable further important progress in 2011.

As always, thank you for your extraordinary service, sacrifice, skill, and resolve. Each of you is part of your country's New Greatest Generation, and it is the privilege of a lifetime to serve with you in this critical endeavor.

Thanks for your great work!

With admiration and appreciation,



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