



FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL LEGISLATION

... a Quaker lobby in the public interest

February 18, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC
Via fax: 202-456-2461

Dear President Obama,

The U.S. is headed for disaster in Afghanistan and Pakistan. U.S. policy has failed to create security, establish good governance, or provide hope for a better economic future for the people of the region. Military operations are killing innocent civilians, fueling resentment of foreign occupation among the population, and strengthening the hand of extremist groups. Before the U.S. commits more blood and treasure to fighting a war that it cannot win, an urgent change in policy is needed.

War is not the answer. As General David Petraeus himself has said, "You can't kill your way out of an insurgency." The growing consensus among former government officials, foreign policy experts, and military officers is that a new strategy which emphasizes diplomacy and development is needed. Yet, the U.S. is poised to send an additional 30,000 more troops to Afghanistan in the coming months. History and military experience suggest that the escalation of troops will further escalate the violence and fuel the insurgency. The annual cost for deploying a force of 60,000 is around \$70 billion.

Rather than continuing to lead with the military in Afghanistan, the U.S. should invest in regional diplomacy and improved assistance to strengthen civilian rule of law and stimulate development and peacebuilding. Toward that end, we offer the following recommendations for shaping a new approach to the region.

1. Immediately end aerial bombing, house raids, and other offensive tactics which harm civilians and increase anti-U.S. sentiment. The UN estimates civilian casualties in Afghanistan rose by 40% in 2008, reaching nearly 2,000, with approximately half caused by international military operations. Estimates of Afghan organizations put the number of civilian casualties even higher. As Thomas Johnson of the Naval Postgraduate School has noted, "When we kill innocents, especially women and children, you lose that village forever."

2. Clarify U.S. Goals. The U.S. continues to pursue mixed goals with mixed strategies in Afghanistan. A clarification of your administration's goals in the region is critical to developing an appropriate strategy. The U.S. should limit its goals in Afghanistan to those consistent with an early withdrawal.

3. Lead with Diplomacy. Although many military, foreign policy, and Afghanistan experts are calling for increased diplomacy in the region, the U.S. continues to lead with the military. As the Obama administration's special representative, Ambassador Holbrooke should be empowered to engage with regional neighbors on the broadest range of issues that could lead to greater cooperation on addressing ongoing conflicts, strengthening civilian rule of law, and promoting economic development. This would include:

a. Sustained diplomatic talks with Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, China, and Russia, to discuss shared interests and possible cooperation toward promoting peace and stability in Afghanistan and the region. Direct U.S. engagement with Iran will be critical to the success of such an initiative and could pave the way for broader cooperation. Ideally a series of bilateral and multilateral talks would lead to the creation of a platform for a regional peace process backed by the UN. Such a platform should serve as a mechanism for strengthening and promoting greater accountability of the Afghanistan government as well.

b. A determined diplomatic effort to reduce India-Pakistan tensions. Fear of India is the main factor shaping the outlook of Pakistani security forces; that fear makes reform of the security forces and the extension of civilian control unlikely, necessary conditions to reduce support for extremist groups in Pakistan and Afghanistan.

c. Talking to the Taliban. While striking viable and effective political agreements with ideologically-driven extremists is unlikely, ensuring that the Pashtun population feels included in any decisions on the future of Afghanistan is critical to creating a viable and legitimate government, reducing support for extremist groups, and providing any base for reconciliation. Finding a way to include elements of the Taliban at the negotiating table will ultimately be necessary.

4. Promote Accountability and Participatory Government. A legitimate national government in Afghanistan that is seen as representative of all its people, can provide basic services and promote economic development, establish and maintain rule of law, and address grievances and conflicts through nonviolent channels will ultimately be needed to reduce support and safe haven for extremist groups and ensure a stable and peaceful future for the Afghan people. Building such a government is the work of the Afghan people but requires the support of the international community. Thus far, foreign interventions in the form of military occupation and massive infusions of reconstruction and development assistance have undermined good governance and accountability. The U.S. should chart a new course by:

a. Supporting a national loya jirga in Afghanistan to re-establish a peace and reconciliation process, build consensus around a revised plan for national elections, and review and strengthen a national development and peacebuilding plan. Such an initiative should be owned and led by Afghans and

backed by financial and logistical support of the U.S. and international community.

5. Invest in Afghan-led development and peacebuilding. Thus far, billions of dollars poured into reconstruction and development in Afghanistan have shown few results and often contributed to corruption and conflict. Lack of donor coordination, large infrastructure projects, foreign contracting and labor, militarized assistance, "tied aid", and development projects driven by a counterinsurgency effort rather than true development needs are all factors fueling the problem. The use of PRTs is undermining national and local development and governance. The U.S. should lead an effort with other international partners to better coordinate aid, with a focus on strengthening Afghan civil society and reducing the foreign footprint on development and reconstruction. The UN mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) should be empowered to lead the coordination of reconstruction and recovery aid in Afghanistan. The focus of assistance should be on supporting Afghanistan's National Development Plan through Afghan-led design, development, and implementation of projects as much as possible. Local or regional materials and labor should be employed. The military should not engage in reconstruction and development activities.

6. Promote Security through Civilian Rule of Law. Security should ultimately come through civilian rule of law and community peacebuilding. Unfortunately, as Anthony Cordesman of the Center for Strategic and International Studies has observed in a briefing to Congress, "The development of Afghan security forces has been a badly managed, grossly understaffed and poorly funded mess," The United States didn't even seriously fund the development of Afghanistan's own forces until 2007. A new approach to establishing security based on civilian rule of law rather than military force is urgently needed.

a. Draw down - do not expand - military operations. Shift from war fighting to international justice. Set a timetable for full withdrawal. Waging war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban has only fueled anti-U.S. sentiment in the region and increased the recruiting base for extremist groups. The U.S. should work instead through increased regional and international cooperation in intelligence, policing and extradition to arrest and bring to justice those involved in terrorist attacks and crimes against humanity. The U.S. and NATO should establish a timetable for withdrawal, as requested by the Karzai government. Until all military forces are removed, the role of any international troops in Afghanistan should be the protection of civilians, support for rebuilding civilian rule of law, and helping secure the borders.

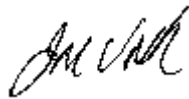
b. Strengthen national and local police, judicial systems, and traditional justice mechanisms to establish rule of law and civilian-led security. The U.S. should make a priority of working with the Afghan government - at national and local levels - and with international partners to help strengthen civilian rule of law in Afghanistan and Pakistan. This should include financial assistance and civilian technical expertise for building the local and national police, judicial systems, and traditional justice mechanisms to establish rule of law and civilian-led security.

Such an effort will take time and serious effort, but will inevitably be less costly - in both lives and money - and more effective than escalating the war. The military is ill-equipped to train civilian police.

7. Increase nonmilitary aid to Pakistan to strengthen civilian rule of law. The U.S. should transform the U.S.-Pakistan relationship from short-term crisis management relying heavily on military aid to long-term strategic engagement emphasizing economic development and enhancing the rule of law. Increased nonmilitary assistance to strengthen civilian rule of law and support economic development, particularly in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas, could go far in reshaping relations in the region and reducing support for extremist activity.

We urge you to support these policies to transform the U.S. approach to Afghanistan and the surrounding region. Without such a transformation the U.S. will be creating a deadly, costly, and endless war in Afghanistan.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joe Volk".

Joe Volk
Executive Secretary