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Afghanistan 2015: An Uphill Road?
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to be among you, in this important meeting dedicated to the future of Afghanistan. First of all, I would like to congratulate the organizational committee, the Roosevelt Academy and the other partners for the organization of this important seminar on the security situation and the reconstruction of Afghanistan. I'm also taking this opportunity to thank my friend, the Honorary Consul of Afghanistan in Rotterdam, Mr. Ehsan Turabaz for his kind words toward me. As the state of security has become more complex these past few months, I find it important to highlight, for the audience the progress that has been achieved in the past eight years since the country has known some developments in different domains (fields).

Afghanistan is also one of the few countries whose recent past is afflicted by so much tragedy and suffering and has to meet a lot of challenges. Today I'm taking this opportunity to speak about the progress and the current challenges in Afghanistan.

The Progress

Since the fall of the Taliban, in November 2001, remarkable progress has been accomplished. Just eight years ago, Afghanistan was a country ruined by war, interference and occupation. Even though the country is still poor and underdeveloped, after eight years of joint efforts of the international community and Afghanistan itself, there has been some progress in the fields of the governance, security and the development.
The Improvement of governance

It is a vital necessity for Afghanistan to establish a genuine State of law, insuring the protection of its citizen’s rights. The State of law is essential for a legitimate government and the protection of the citizens. The well functioning of a State is the consequence of good governance.

The Afghan situation is very different from those States emerged from crisis in this domain.

Historically, the idea of nation building applies into extremely different situations. The Balkans of the 1990’s and 2000’s and today’s Irak had all preexisting State structures, be they political, security-related or social. But in post Taliban Afghanistan, State structures were all but existent.

Consequently, concerning the Afghanistan circa 2001, everything had to be invented, since the Taliban had achieved the dismantling process of the State structures that had begun to be established during the Soviet occupation of 1980’s. It is from this period on that we can best begin to evaluate the progress accomplished in the domain of governance.

Since the Bonn agreement of 2001, the international community has been helping the Afghan government in the establishment of efficient governmental institutions capable of offering basic services to its population.

After years of joint efforts of the international community and Afghanistan itself, the country has seen a lot of progress. Today, Afghanistan has the most democratic Constitution in the (area) region. The organization of both the 2004 presidential elections and the 2005 parliamentary elections, were both genuinely successful.
The registration and the campaign of the presidential elections has also been a success. As for the elections although controversial, it could be said that with regard to security it has been a success as well.

Today, the three branches of government: the executive, the legislative and the judicial branches are all functioning reasonably well for a young democracy like ours. The freedom of press is thriving. Dozens of television channels, radio stations and hundreds of newspapers and other publications have been launched in the past eight years. The Afghans of today enjoy the advantages of political and social rights, including women’s rights, like never before in the country’s history.

Afghanistan is largely a rural society. For this reason, the establishment of competent local governance is highly important. In order to reinforce ties between the local and central administration, in 2007 The Independent Board for Local Governance was created. Its objective is to reinforce the institutions at a local level and promote transparency and accountability.

Security

Though the security situation remains a tight spot, we must remember that developments have been made in the course of the past eight years. In 2001, Afghanistan was without a National Army. Instead, there were militias and private armies. Nevertheless, with the aid of the international community and NATO, Afghanistan has been able to assemble a national army that today amounts to 95000 soldiers trusted upon by the population. These soldiers are relatively well trained, participate in 80% of the operations led on the Afghan territory and are in charge of 50% of them.

I must also mention that since 2001, Afghanistan has a police force of 80 000 police officers. However, this force is not yet up to the professional standards or to our wishes of integrity or even to those of the ANA. But with
the help of the international community and especially the United States, NATO and the European Union and its EUPOL mission, as well as the serious efforts of The State Department of Internal Affairs, we hope that this situation will change in the near future, as this is vital point for the country.

However it must be emphasized that the precarious situation of the security in Afghanistan still requires the presence or even the increase of the foreign forces which are at the present time, both NATO and the Coalition together about 100,000 militaries. In order to solve the problem in the long-term, it is necessary to make efforts in increasing the Afghan security forces to around 240,000 for the ANA and 160,000 for the police.

More than ever, both the soldiers and the police need a reinforced training and more equipment to be able to face the rebels. Concerning the latter view, I must mention the remarkable efforts of NATO and the coalition in the training of Afghan soldiers. Under their direction the capacities of the ANA have risen progressively. Today, many battalions and army headquarters are up to the necessary standards to lead independent military operations. According to the Afghan authorities’ prognosis, within the next 5 years, the Afghan security forces will be capable of relieving the burden of the country’s security, thereby reducing or completely eliminating the heavy loads that weigh down the shoulders of NATO militaries and the coalition.

Reconstruction and Development

It is difficult to rapidly re-build a poor country ravaged by a massive and violent destruction. A strong international commitment remains therefore necessary in order to face the problems that Afghanistan must overcome. Thus, during the International Conference in Support of Afghanistan held in Paris in June 2008, donators promised a generous aid to implement a national Afghan strategy of development. This meant the donators would finance the priorities defined by the Afghan government in the context of this plan as much as possible. ANSD is an orientation program that secures priorities for the period from 2008 to
2013 and it rests on three pillars: security, governance and socio-economic development.

Progress is important in both economic and social development. Thousands of kilometers of road have been built. Afghanistan is on the point of finishing the construction of a grand circular road that surrounds the country. This road will constitute an important economic link between South, center and West Asia. The telecommunications system is also expanding. Today more than 5 million Afghans own a telephone. Thousands of schools and clinics have been built as well has hundreds of dams, bridges and power plants. We have a growth in double digits or close to it and Afghan currency is stable. The GDP per capita in 2008 measured around 450, which is up to two and half time to that of the Taliban era. The national solidarity program which is partially managed by local support has been able to install necessary equipments in local communities in about two thirds of the country’s villages. For the first time in our history, development programs have had an effective impact on the standard of living in the villages.

We know that military action alone is not a solution to the Afghan problem. We need to invest in the domain of development. We need to envisage a global approach from the international community, combining civil and military efforts and above all supporting an increased responsibility for Afghans, reinforcing their leadership. In short, Afghans taking in hand their own issues. Consequently we are very happy to perceive that the new American strategy takes civil aspects of development and Afghan control very much in consideration in trying to resolve the conflict in Afghanistan.

So it is important to behold that the international community is focusing on the part of development along side that of security.

The challenges
In eight years, Afghanistan has succeeded in progressing but we still have much left to do, there are many challenges to overcome. The greatest threats to Afghanistan are terrorism, cultivation and trafficking of drugs and corruption. These are each linked to one another and the cause of each of these lies in great part in the unsteady situation of security.

Terrorism

There is no doubt that security has deteriorated in Afghanistan, especially at the zones bordering Pakistan and along certain routes, due to terrorist activity.

The problem of terrorism in Afghanistan is graver and more complicated than ever before. We are confronted with a transnational enemy with goals set on an international level and supported and protected abroad. The fight against terrorism within Afghanistan will be of a limited range. The Afghan government has made demands that NATO and the coalition first concentrate on border control and on the reduction of cross-border threats, as it is on the other side of those borders, that the main terrorist sanctuaries can be found. It is there that the terrorist regroup and organize their attacks against Afghanistan.

There are more Taliban and foreign fighters in the region today than in any other moment of the past few years. These terrorists generally reach Afghanistan through our porous borders, especially in the East and South.

We are aware of the progress made by our enemies, the terrorists. They have better training, access to much more resources and equipments, new tactics (for example, suicide bombers, explosions along the roads, IED Improvised explosives Devices), improvement in instruction and coordination. All these are signs showing the danger of this plague for Afghanistan, for the region and for the world.
So currently Afghanistan has not a classical armed front line to avoid the casualties due to the explosions, IED’s and suicide bombers. Afghanistan is on the front line of this combat and is thus its first victim. Unfortunately today we are facing a common threat and we must act in joint forces to meet the challenge of terrorism.

The terrorist activities also have other disastrous consequences for Afghanistan, such as the rise in corruption and the cultivation of poppy opium which damages the restoration of democracy and the reconstruction of the country.

**Drugs**

The data published by the UN office on Drugs and Crime indicates that Afghanistan, unfortunately, continues to be the principal producer of opium, although the report does show a decrease in production compared to last year’s report.

Notable progress can be observed in comparison to 2008’s report. First of all, plantation surfaces have been reduced from 157 000 hectares to 123 000 hectares, which represents a 22% decrease. The opium production in Afghanistan has decreased for the second year in a row, with a rate of 10% percent in 2009. The production has come down to 6900 tons this year after a rise to 8200 tons in 2007, before falling back to 7700 tons in 2008. We also note that the number of provinces planting opium is decreasing; conversely the amount of provinces without opium poppy plantations has risen from 18 to 20 which are three and a half times more than in 2006. This means opium is no longer grown in 3/5 of the 34 Afghan provinces. The majority of farmers in these regions have turned toward legal crops such as wheat.
We also notice that 2% of the opium produced in Afghanistan is done in 27 provinces while the remaining 98% of opium production comes from seven south-east provinces, specifically the 5 south provinces (Helmand, Kandhar, Uruzgan, Zabul and Day Kundi) and 2 eastern provinces (Farah and Badghis).

The drug problem is strongly tied to the terrorist activities and insecurity. Currently almost all of the opium production is done on a very limited surface of land. To be specific, 98% of the poppy plantations are found in the 7 South-East provinces, while the other 27 are responsible for just 2% of the total opium production. The three most troubled provinces, which also are also responsible for the highest amount of opium production, are Helmand, Kandhar, and Uruzgan.

The province of Helmand, where more than half of Afghanistan’s poppy cultivation takes place, is also the territory most affected by the insecurity. We know of strong ties with terrorists, criminals and drug-traffickers, groups who favor an environment with the characteristic of instability, acting with impunity. The terrorist activities constitute the principal factor in making the production of drugs in Afghanistan easy and the terrorists are thus also the most important beneficiaries of it.

The Corruption

Another negative consequence of the instability is the corruption. The 2008 Perception Index of corruption published by Transparency International put Afghanistan among the most corrupted along with other battle fields such as Iraq, Somalia, Myanmar and Sudan.

We know that corruption forms a serious threat to the establishment of the State and the development of Afghanistan. Aside from the waste and the squandering of public funds, the unfortunate effects of corruption include the
inefficiency of the public services which is especially and enormously detrimental to the poor.

It’s important to underline that one of the major causes of corruption is money coming from the proceeds of illegal drug dealing, which finances the public sector corruption made easy by the low salaries of civil servants.

Actually, according to the UNODC figures, 90 to 160 million dollars in drug money goes to the Taliban each year. The rest of the money is seized by other terrorist groups.

The government of Afghanistan has initiated steps to fight this plague. The anti-corruption law has been approved and a control organization has been implemented. It’s The High Authority mission to supervise and coordinate an anti-corruption strategy. This has been adopted in conformity of the United Nations Convention against corruption ratified by Afghanistan. The goal is to eliminate corruption in the public and private sector in order to improve efficiency and transparency and to create a clear environment proper for investment, which is necessary for the economic growth and the decrease of poverty.

The efforts of the government, also includes reforming the legal and judiciary systems and particularly the offices of the Attorney General and the Supreme Court. Also special court rooms (for public safety) have been suited to examine only corruption cases. Moreover a separated anti-corruption department has been implemented under the authority of the Attorney General.

Following these actions, thousands of civil servants, judges, high ranking police officers and others have been removed from office, prosecuted and condemned. In taking action against tax fraud in custom the State’s revenue has been increased by 50%.
It is also important to underline that a great part of the money spend in Afghanistan comes from foreign aid. This domain too needs more transparency. The entire budget of development and a part of the ordinary budget of the country are financed by friendly countries such as USA, Japan, The Netherlands and other countries and International Organizations such as European Union, World Bank and others. This help has contributed in a significant (an important) way to the improvement of living standards in Afghanistan. By improving the management of this help, we can use it more efficiently. It’s important to say that only 1/5th of the foreign aid passes through Afghan government, all the rest is distributed directly by the donors themselves. Often we have the impression that the entire help passes through the hands of the government who mismanaged it. But truth is that corruption exists in Afghanistan. Some of its causes are innate to the government whereas others are external to it

Conclusion

As we all know, there are still many challenges to overcome in Afghanistan, and the next year will be a difficult one, indeed a turning point for the future. The Afghan president has renewed his pledge to the fight against corruption and to the reinforcement of security. At the same time, the international community starts to ponder on an improved general strategy for Afghanistan with the strategic plan devised by General MacChrystal and the European Blue Book. All these could mean that we are headed in the right direction of the difficult but not impossible process of stabilization and reconstruction of Afghanistan.

The Elections
We know that the media have been very critical concerning the elections. They expected an electoral process up to the European standards and they were disappointed.

But in response to this dissatisfaction, it must be said that the elections took place under very difficult conditions despite the considerable efforts of the International community and the Afghan government in the preparation and organization of these elections.

In regard to the presidential and provincial elections of the 20\textsuperscript{th} of August 2009, we have identified various positive factors which I would like to enumerate:

First of all, the fact that elections were taking place is in itself a great success. We know that the Taliban called to boycott the vote directly threatening the 16 million electors called to the polls. Many feared that the voting will be jeopardized.

Secondly, the registration of about 5 million new voters by the independent electoral commission has been added to the 11 million voters already registered in 2004. These registrations going on, without violence, in the days preceding the vote are testimony to the courage and determination of the population. During this process Afghan security forces and FIAS played an important part in the logistic support.

Thirdly, the electoral campaigns were done properly and that is something to congratulate ourselves on. Originally there were 41 registered candidates, including two women. On the voting day 30 candidates participated in the debates and meetings, traveling through the different provinces. These candidates played fairly well the game with the press and the media. One of the positive aspects of the campaign lies in the absence of ethnic, linguistic or regional fractures. The candidates originating from the North also campaigned
in the South and vice-versa. On the same day, elections for the provincial councils took place with over 3000 candidates for the 420 seats.

Fourthly, the elections took place without too much violence despite the multiples attacks of limited impact and threats uttered by the Taliban. We know of fingers and even ears and noses being cut off with the intention of scaring and obstructing the voters. Nonetheless, 95% of the 25450 voting bureaus opened. In the North, the Center and the West almost all voting offices opened. The only problems to this regard were noticed in some of the villages in the South and East of the country.

Lastly, despite the unfortunate loss of 18 FSNA individuals and 9 civilians, the elections were a success in regard to the security. Almost 6 million Afghans bravely participated in these elections, defying terrorist threats.