

put in the additional U.S. troops. That's why General McChrystal is working so hard to clear out key population centers from Taliban control.

And so the timing, how the reconciliation process works, at what point do the Taliban start making different calculations about what's in their interests, and how the Afghan people feel about these issues, is in part going to be dependent on our success in terms of carrying out our mission there. So we are a very, I think, important partner in facilitating this potential reconciliation and effectively empowering the Afghan Government so that it is in the strongest possible position as these talks move forward.

Let me just say in conclusion, again, Mr. President, I am grateful for your visit. This is a reaffirmation of the friendship between the American people and the Afghan people.

When I came into office, I made it very clear that after years of some drift in the relationship, that I saw this as a critical priority. I also said to the American people that this was going to take some time and it was going to be hard, that we weren't going to see magical transformations immediately, but with slow, steady, persistent work on the part of both the United States and

the Afghan Government, that I was confident that, in fact, we could achieve peace and stability and security there and that that ultimately would make the American people more safe and more secure.

I am more convinced than ever that we have found a difficult, but appropriate strategy for pursuing those goals. And I'm confident that we're going to be able to achieve our mission. There are going to be setbacks. There are going to be times where the Afghan Government and the U.S. Government disagree tactically. But I think our overarching approach is unified. And I think the visit by President Karzai to the United States and his willingness to listen to our concerns, even as we listen to his, as he indicated, only makes the relationship stronger.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11:40 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, USA, commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan; and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl W. Eikenberry.

Joint Statement by President Barack Obama and President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan *May 12, 2010*

U.S. President Barack Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai, accompanied by senior-level delegations, convened wide-ranging discussions on May 11–12, 2010, aimed at deepening cooperation on the shared and mutual priorities of the United States and Afghanistan. These discussions on governance, security, economic and social development, and regional issues built on past sessions of the United States-Afghanistan Strategic Dialogue.

President Obama and President Karzai reaffirmed their growing cooperation and their commitment to the solid, broad, and enduring strategic partnership between the governments and peoples of the United States and Afghanistan. This partnership is based on shared interests and objectives, as well as mutual respect.

The two sides declared that a sovereign, stable, secure, peaceful, and economically viable Afghanistan that has friendly relations with all its neighbors and countries in the region is vital to regional stability and global security.

Securing Afghanistan's Future

President Obama recognized the courage and determination of the Afghan people to resist violent extremists and to ensure that their country does not once again become a safe haven for terrorists, including al-Qaeda. President Karzai expressed deep appreciation for the vital support of the 46 troop-contributing countries to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) International Security Assistance Force, including ongoing stabilization efforts.

He paid special tribute to the American men and women who have made the ultimate sacrifice alongside Afghan and international forces to secure a better future for the Afghan people. Additionally, both countries expressed regret over the tragic loss of civilian lives and committed to redouble efforts to prevent civilian casualties.

President Obama and President Karzai recognized the Afghan Government's deep resolve to assume increasing responsibility for security. They welcomed NATO's intent, endorsed by foreign ministers in Tallinn on April 22–23, to develop with Afghanistan a joint security transition framework that can be announced later this summer. Additionally, President Karzai noted his determination to see the Afghan National Security Forces conduct the majority of operations in the remaining insecure areas of Afghanistan and to take full responsibility for Afghanistan's physical security.

The Presidents further recognized that developing the Afghan National Security Forces' capabilities is necessary to facilitate implementation of an orderly, conditions-based security transition process. Towards that end, the Afghan Government welcomed the United States' pledge of continued support to train, equip, and sustain the Afghan National Security Forces, so they can increasingly take the lead in securing and defending their country against internal and external threats. President Karzai joined President Obama in reiterating the need for continued international military assistance to train and equip the Afghan National Security Forces.

Additionally, the United States reaffirmed its commitment to transitioning responsibility for detention facilities to the Afghan Government. This process will begin at the Parwan detention facility in January 2011. Both Presidents recognized that a successful transition will be an important milestone toward achieving President Karzai's inaugural pledge of having the Afghan Government assume full responsibility over detention operations. As part of this transition process, President Karzai welcomed continued U.S. assistance to build a safe, secure, and humane corrections system. Underscoring the United States' respect for

Afghanistan's sovereignty, President Obama also emphasized his strong desire to see all search, arrest, and detention operations be carried out by the Afghan National Security Forces. He and President Karzai directed their senior defense advisors to accelerate and further clarify the timeline for the transition process, and also to consider additional steps to address this Afghan Government priority.

President Obama and President Karzai recognized the importance of Afghan-led peace and reconciliation efforts. Towards that end, the United States pledged its support for Afghanistan's reintegration and reconciliation processes, which allow an honorable place in society to those who cut ties with al-Qaeda, cease violence against the Afghan state, and accept the Afghan Constitution, including its protections of human rights and women's equality. The United States also welcomed planning towards the Consultative Peace Jirga and expressed support for an inclusive process that includes broad representation from across all of Afghan society—both men and women—and takes into account their concerns and priorities.

Strengthening Governance and Expanding Economic Opportunity

The United States reiterated its commitment to helping ensure that the Afghan Government is able to meet the needs of its people through developing its own institutions and resources. President Karzai expressed deep appreciation for the United States' long-term civilian commitment to supporting the Afghan people. President Obama pledged continued reconstruction and economic assistance, and he commended Afghanistan's commitment to develop a plan for more effective and accountable civilian government institutions at the national and sub-national levels. He emphasized the joint efforts by both governments to build Afghan Government capacity and pledged continued technical assistance to improve the accountability, professionalism, financial management, and oversight capacity of key Afghan ministries and institutions so that they can assume greater responsibility for Afghanistan's economic development. In this regard, the

United States supports the Afghan Government's intention to launch a number of key infrastructure projects, which are vital for sustainable economic growth and private sector development. Both Presidents also reaffirmed the need for continued progress toward the United States goal of directing at least 50 percent of U.S. assistance through the Afghan Government and for additional mechanisms to enhance coordination of U.S. assistance not yet flowing through the Afghan Government. Additionally, the United States pledged to expand efforts to hire local staff and procure an increasing percentage of supplies from Afghan sources.

Countering Corruption and Enhancing Accountability

Both countries recognized that fighting against corruption emanating from any source in Afghanistan remains a top priority. President Obama noted his commitment to improving oversight of all U.S. government contracting procedures. President Karzai reaffirmed his inaugural pledge to bring to justice those involved in corrupt activities. Towards that end, the two countries resolved to work jointly to improve accountability in Afghanistan by strengthening key judicial and oversight mechanisms. The United States pledged technical and financial assistance to support President Karzai's efforts to strengthen the powers and authorities of the Major Crimes Task Force and the High Office of Oversight. President Karzai underscored the important roles of the Independent Directorate for Local Governance and Civil Service Commission in appointing competent sub-national officials. He also recognized efforts to expedite reforms aimed at improving and expanding access to the formal justice sector by increasing capacity and reducing corruption in state justice institutions.

Sustaining Afghanistan's Democratic Progress

President Obama welcomed recent steps and commitments undertaken by the Afghan Government to strengthen Afghanistan's electoral institutions. He and President Karzai recognized the importance of holding transparent and credible Parliamentary elections in 2010.

The United States welcomed the leadership of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan in coordinating international assistance in support of the further strengthening of Afghanistan's electoral process. It pledged additional technical and financial support to Afghanistan's democratic institutions.

President Karzai and President Obama reiterated the need to respect and defend fundamental human and civil rights set out in the Afghan Constitution, the United Nations Charter, and international agreements and conventions to which Afghanistan is a party. Towards that end, they underscored the importance of empowering Afghan men and women from all backgrounds to contribute peacefully to the development of Afghanistan. Recognizing that Afghanistan cannot prosper if half of its citizens cannot contribute fully, President Karzai and President Obama stressed the vital role Afghan women play in rebuilding their society and decided that additional measures must be taken to safeguard their rights. The two leaders reaffirmed that women's empowerment and civic participation are critical to Afghanistan's economic stability, security, good governance, and development.

Role of Regional Cooperation and the International Community

President Obama joined President Karzai in calling on the international community to sustain its long-term support for Afghanistan. Both Presidents stressed the importance of a robust and effective United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, and pledged to cooperate with UN-led efforts to coordinate the efforts of international donors.

Towards that end, President Obama announced that Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton is to head the U.S. delegation to the Kabul Conference, to be hosted by the Afghan Government on July 20. He reiterated that the U.S. delegation looks forward to joining other international donors in discussing and supporting the Afghan Government's concrete implementation plans for accelerating efforts to build its capacity to provide its citizens with economic opportunity, security, and good gov-

ernance, as committed to at the London Conference in January 2010.

President Obama and President Karzai underscored the importance of regional cooperation in promoting regional security and in combating illicit financial, criminal, and terrorist networks. Both Presidents also acknowledged the important support of Afghanistan's neighbors in facilitating trade and transit in the region, including for supplies needed for the stabilization and further development of Afghanistan.

A Forward-Looking, Long-Term Partnership

The United States and Afghanistan committed to a series of intensive, senior-level bilateral discussions to conclude with the signing of a strengthened U.S.-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Declaration in 2010, building on the U.S.-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Decla-

ration of 2005. Both Presidents concurred that these discussions would constitute a reinvigorated U.S.-Afghanistan Strategic Dialogue and focus on themes critical to our long-term relationship and enduring commitment, including: sovereignty, security, democratic development and institution building, economic and social development, and regional issues. The strengthened Strategic Partnership Declaration is expected to: reiterate the United States' and Afghanistan's shared vision and commitment to Afghanistan's future; clarify how Afghanistan plans to increasingly take on responsibility for its own security, justice, and development; and articulate how the United States plans to work with Afghanistan to enhance its ability to contribute to regional stability and prosperity.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

Statement on Financial Regulatory Reform and Consumer Protection Legislation

May 12, 2010

Throughout the debate on Wall Street reform, I have urged Members of the Senate to fight the efforts of special interests and their lobbyists to weaken consumer protections. An amendment that the Senate will soon consider would do exactly that, undermining strong consumer protections with a special loophole for auto dealer-lenders. This amendment would carve out a special exemption for these lenders that would allow them to inflate rates, insert hidden fees into the fine print of paperwork, and include expensive add-ons that catch purchasers by surprise. This amendment guts provisions that empower consumers with clear information that allows them to make the financial decisions that work best for them and simply encourages misleading sales tactics that hurt American consumers. Unfortunately, countless families, particularly military fami-

lies, have been the target of these deceptive practices.

Claims by opponents of reform that this legislation unfairly targets auto dealers are simply mistaken. The fact is, auto dealer-lenders make nearly 80 percent of the automobile loans in our country, and these lenders should be subject to the same standards as any local or community bank that provides loans. Auto dealer-lenders offering transparent and fair financing products to their customers should welcome these reforms, which will make their competitors who don't play by the rules compete on a level playing field.

We simply cannot let lobbyist-inspired loopholes and special carve-outs weaken real reform that will empower American families. I urge the Senate to continue to defeat the efforts of special interests to weaken protections for all American consumers.