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When Congress returns in September, the intelligence committees and leaders in both parties will need to complete work on the comprehensive reforms requested by Director McConnell, including the important issue of providing meaningful liability protection to those who are alleged to have assisted our Nation following the attacks of September 11, 2001.

NOTE: The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language version of this statement.

The President's News Conference With President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan at Camp David, Maryland

August 6, 2007

President Bush. Good morning. Thank you; be seated. Welcome.

I appreciate a man I've come to admire, President Karzai, for joining us. Laura and I had the honor of hosting the President for dinner last night. He and I spent a lot of this morning just sitting down alone talking about our common interests, common concerns. President Karzai is an optimistic man. He's watched his country emerge from days of darkness to days of hope.

President Karzai. Absolutely.

President Bush. I appreciate your stewardship. I appreciate your commitment to empowering your people. I appreciate your strong stance for freedom and justice, and I'm proud to call you an ally in this war against those who would wreak havoc in order to deny people a chance to live in peace.

We're working closely together to help the people of Afghanistan prosper. We work together to give the people of Afghanistan a chance to raise their children in a hopeful world, and we're working together to defeat those who would try to stop the advance of a free Afghan society.

We spent a fair amount of time talking about our security strategy. You might remember, it was last winter that people were speculating about the Taliban spring offensive and about how the Taliban had regrouped and were going to go on the attack inside Afghanistan. There was a spring offensive, all right—it was conducted by U.S., NATO, and equally importantly, Afghan troops. And we went on the offense because we understand that it is in our mutual interests to deny extremists the opportunity to derail this young democracy.

There is still a fight going on, but I'm proud to report to the American people that the Afghan Army is in the fight. The Government is in the fight, and the Army is in the fight. Afghan national security forces are increasing in strength; there's about 110,000 Afghans now defending their nation. And more Afghans are stepping up to serve, and it's in the interest of the United States to help you develop that national army and local police that will send a clear message to the people of Afghanistan that the governments can help provide an opportunity for people to raise their children in a peaceful world.

There are a lot of forces there in Afghanistan supporting this Government, and our 23,500 troops are proud to stand side by side with 26,000 troops from other nations. And we applaud those countries who have committed their troops to help Afghanistan succeed. We've committed more than $23 billion since 2001 to help rebuild the country. I think our citizens will be interested to know, for example, that 7,000 community health care workers have been trained that provide about 340,000 Afghan men, women, and children a month with good health care.

I remember talking a lot about how the Taliban prevented young girls from going to school in Afghanistan. American citizens recoil with horror to think about a government that would deny a young child the opportunity to have the basics necessary to succeed in life. Today, there are nearly 5 million students going to school in Afghanistan, a third of whom are girls. Still work to be done, don't get me wrong, but progress is being made, Mr. President, and we're proud of you, proud of the work you're doing.

We talked about the need to stem the narcotics trade. I'm sure the President will comment on this. He understands that it's very important for farmers to be incented to grow crop other than poppy, and that he knows

full well the United States is watching, measuring, and trying to help eradicate poppy cultivation. We spent more than a fair amount of time on it; we spent a lot of time on it. And it's important that we get this right. Mr. President, I appreciate your commitment to not only dealing with the poppy growers and the poppy crop but also dealing with corruption. It's very important that our societies emerge in such a way that the people have confidence in the capacity of government to conduct the affairs—conduct their affairs in a way that's aboveboard and honest and transparent.

And finally, I do want to congratulate you on the joint jirga that's coming up. This is a meeting between President Karzai, President Musharraf, and representative elements from parts of their respective countries, all coming together to talk about reconciliation and how we can work together—how you can work together to achieve common solutions to problems. And the main problem is to fight extremism, to recognize that history has called us into action. And by fighting extremists and radicals, we help people realize dreams. And helping people realize dreams helps promote peace. That's what we want.

You come from a part of the world, Mr. President, where there's a long history of violence and a long history of people seeking freedom. It's in the interests of the United States to be on the—tip the scales of freedom your way. You only do so with strong leadership, and I appreciate the leadership you're providing. So welcome to Camp David.

President Karzai. Thank you very much. Thank you very much, Mr. President, for receiving me in Camp David. You and the First Lady are generous and kind hosts, and thank you very much for that.

Mr. President, I am here today to once again thank you and the American people for all that you have done for Afghanistan, for our liberation first, and then for our stability and prosperity. We have gone a long way.

I have been here many times before in America, thanking the American people for what they have given to Afghanistan. I have spoken of roads; I have spoken of schools; I have spoken of clinics; I have spoken of health services; I have spoken of education; I have spoken of agriculture; I've spoken of lots of achievements. I've also had requests for help that you have delivered to us.

But today I'm going to speak about only one achievement that means so much for the Afghan people and, surely, to you and the rest of the world. That is that Afghanistan today, with the help that you have provided and our other allies have provided, can save—is saving the life of at least 50,000 infants after they are born and the life of 85,000 children under 5.

Mr. President, when you and I begin to think of the mothers who can have their babies safe today, then we know the value and the importance of this achievement. And thank you very, very much for this tremendous help. Afghanistan would have not had 85,000 children living today had you not been there to help us with the rest of the world.

President Bush. Thank you, sir.

President Karzai. That's a massive achievement, and I am happy about it. I'm sure you are too, and so are women and mothers around the world.

Mr. President, as we have gone a long way, progress has been made. We still continue to fight terrorism; our enemy is still there—defeated, but still hiding in the mountains. And our duty is to complete the job; to get them out of their hideouts in the mountains, and to bring justice to the people of Afghanistan, to the people of America, and to the people around the world who are threatened by these terrorists.

One of the significant steps that we have taken together with Pakistan to have an effective fight against terrorism, an effective fight against extremism and radicalism, was discussed during the dinner that you kindly hosted for me and President Musharraf. And the result of that is going to be seen in 2 days from today, the 9th of August, where in Kabul, we will have the joint Pakistan-Afghanistan jirga. I hope very much that this jirga will bring to us what we need, which I think it will. And thank you very much for this opportunity—you cause us to have a meeting and to have a result of that.

Mr. President, we have a long journey ahead of us. But what we have traveled so far has given us greater hope for a better future, for a better life. The Afghans are still suffering, but there are millions of Afghans

who are enjoying a better and more secure life, who can send their children to school, and who can work in their fields. And thank you very much for that.

Yes, we do have the problem of poppies and narcotics in Afghanistan. Afghanistan is committed to fighting it because this evil is first hurting us and then youth in the rest of the world. So this is for Afghanistan to work against and for the rest of us to work against. We are committed. It will take time; we are realistic about that. But the fight is there, and I hope your assistance will continue to be delivered to Afghanistan to fight narcotics. We have raised our army, indeed. We are working on our police. Our police needs a lot of improvement. And I'm glad that you have committed to helping us with the raising of better police in Afghanistan.

The fight against corruption is going on. We have developed a mechanism, worked through a commission headed by the Chief Justice of Afghanistan that will be ready in 2 months from now and will be announced to the Afghan people on hows and measures and the timeframe that we will need to have an effective fight against corruption in Afghanistan.

The rest, life, is going on well, with a lot of hope. We have a better administration, more capabilities. We can do lots of things on our own, and I'm sure your continued assistance will make life better for us. And thank you very much, Mr. President. Nice of you to receive me here.

President Bush. Thanks for coming. A couple of questions. Deb [Deb Riechmann, Associated Press].

War on Terror/Pakistan

Q. Mr. President, if you had actionable intelligence about the whereabouts of top Al Qaida leaders in Pakistan, would you wait for Musharraf's permission to send in U.S. forces, even if it meant missing an opportunity to take them out? Or have you and Musharraf worked out some deal about this already?

And President Karzai, what will be your top concern when you meet with Musharraf later this week?

President Bush. I am confident that with actionable intelligence, we will be able to bring top Al Qaida to justice. We're in constant communications with the Pakistan Government. It's in their interest that foreign fighters be brought to justice. After all, these are the same ones who were plotting to kill President Musharraf. We share a concern. And I'm confident, with real, actionable intelligence, we will get the job done.

President Karzai. When President Musharraf visits Afghanistan on the 9th of August to inaugurate the joint Pakistan-Afghanistan convention, or jirga, together with me, we will be discussing further improvements and relations between the two countries. The two countries are neighbors; they've been having extensive relationships with each other. We will be discussing improvement of those relations—on all aspects of them. We will also be discussing the possible outcome of the joint jirga between the two countries and how effectively, then, we can carry on the fight against terrorism in both countries and in the region as a result of that jirga. So it's a—it's going to be, I'm sure, a good meeting, ma'am.

Afghan press?

War on Terror

Q. I will ask in Pashto, and then I will translate my question. My question is for Mr. Karzai.

[*At this point, the reporter asked a question in Pashto, after which he provided his own translation as follows.*]

I will repeat in English too. Four years ago, in a press conference, Mr. President Karzai said Taliban do not pose any threat to Afghan people. So who do you think supported Taliban to threaten the security by doing kidnapings and taking the Government officials, and why?

President Karzai. Four years ago, I did say that, and I continue to say that. The Taliban do pose dangers to our innocent people; to children going to school; to our clergy; to our teachers; to our engineers; to international aid workers. They are not posing any threat to the Government of Afghanistan; they are not posing any threat to the institutions of Afghanistan or to the buildup of institutions of Afghanistan. It's a force that's defeated; it's a force that is frustrated; it's a

force that is acting in cowardice by killing children going to school.

Who is supporting them is a question that we have been working on for long time and since then. And I hope that the jirga between us and Pakistan will give us solutions to some of the questions that we have.

President Bush. One thing is for certain: We know the vision—their vision of how to govern. They've been in power. They've had the opportunity to show the world how they think and what they do. It's instructive for people to speak to a mother of a young girl about what life was like under the Taliban. These are brutal, coldblooded killers.

President Karzai. Yes.

President Bush. That's what they are. And the fundamental question facing those of us who believe in freedom is whether or not we confront them, and whether or not it's worth it—the effort—to spread an alternative to their hateful vision. And we've come to the conclusion it is. And that's why President Karzai stands right here at Camp David, discussing common concerns, common opportunities, about how to defeat a vision of darkness. That's what they are. They just don't believe in freedom. They don't believe it's possible to live in a society where people are allowed to express themselves in free fashion.

And it's really part of an ongoing challenge that the free world faces. The real question is whether or not those of us who have the blessings of liberty will continue to pursue policies—foreign policy, security policy aimed at not only protecting our homeland but aimed at laying a condition for peace to prevail.

Caren [Caren Bohan, Reuters].

Afghan Civilian Casualties/Iran

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. President Karzai said yesterday that he believed Iran was playing a helpful role in Afghanistan. Was he able to convince you in your meetings that that was the case, or do you still have concerns about Iran's role? And I have a question for President Karzai as well. Just wondering if the President was able to give you the assurances that you sought about the effort to reduce civilian casualties in Afghanistan?

President Bush. Let me comment on the civilian casualties, if I might. First, I fully understand the angst, the agony, and the sorrow that Afghan citizens feel when an innocent life is lost. I know that must cause grief in villages and heartbreak in homes. Secondly, I can assure the Afghan people, like I assured the President, that we do everything that we can to protect the innocent; that our military operations are mindful that innocent life might be exposed to danger, and we adjust accordingly.

Thirdly, it is the Taliban who surround themselves with innocent life as human shields. The Taliban are the coldblooded killers. The Taliban are the murderers. The Taliban have no regard for human life. And therefore, we've spent some time talking about—as the President rightly expressed his concerns about civilian casualty. And I assured him that we share those concerns.

Secondly, it's up to Iran to prove to the world that they're a stabilizing force, as opposed to a destabilizing force. After all, this is a Government that has proclaimed its desire to build a nuclear weapon. This is a Government that is in defiance of international accord, a Government that seems to be willing to thumb its nose at the international community and, at the same time, a Government that denies its people a rightful place in the world and denies its people the ability to realize their full potential. So I believe that it's in the interests of all of us that we have an Iran that tries to stabilize, not destabilize, an Iran that gives up its weapons ambitions. And therefore, we're working to that end.

The President knows best about what's taking place in his country, and of course, I'm willing to listen. But from my perspective, the burden of proof is on the Iranian Government to show us that they're a positive force. And I must tell you that this current leadership there is a big disappointment to the people of Iran. The people of Iran could be doing a lot better than they are today. But because of the actions of this Government, this country is isolated. And we will continue to work to isolate it because they're not a force for good, as far as we can see. They're a destabilizing influence wherever they are.

Now, the President will have to talk to you about Afghanistan. But I would be very cautious about whether or not the Iranian influence there in Afghanistan is a positive force—and therefore, it's going to be up to them to prove to us and prove to the Government that they are.

President Karzai. I had a good discussion with President Bush on civilian casualties. I'm very happy to tell you that President Bush felt very much with the Afghan people, that he calls the Afghan people allies in the war against terror and friends, and that he is as much concerned as I am, as the Afghan people are. I was very happy with that conversation.

Q. Mr. Karzai—can I ask my question in Dari first?

President Karzai. Please, yes.

Suicide Bombings

[*The reporter asked a question in Dari, after which she provided her own translation as follows.*]

Q. You have recently become a father, and also, you have recently pardoned a teenager who suicide himself, and you said he washed—he was brainwashed.

President Karzai. Brainwashed, yes.

Q. Yes. What do you think about the future of Afghanistan in view of this problem?

President Karzai. Well, ma'am, the man—the boy, I should say, that I pardoned was a 14-year-old boy from Pakistan's South Waziristan Agency. He was sent by his father to a madrassa to get education because he could not any more afford to have him in school, because his mother had a heart ailment, and they had to spend money on her treatment.

Having sent the boy to a madrassa, he disappeared from there. After a few months, his father heard that he was arrested in Afghanistan, and then he came to Afghanistan. And having seen that this was a teenage—rather, legally underage innocent boy used by terrorists to kill himself and to kill other innocent people, I felt that it was the right decision to pardon him, to give him a new opportunity for education and a new life, and to send a message to his mother that your child is going to be back with you. I am very glad I did that.

But this gives us a lesson about those who are the enemies of all of us, the enemies of people who use young children, who brainwashes them, and who forces them to kill themselves.

The message should be clear to the rest of the world about the evil that we are fighting, the heartless people that we are fighting, who don't even have any feeling for young children, for babies, for teenagers. Most of that, we know today, that the terrorists are buying and selling suicide bombers. We have received calls in our Government offices by handlers of suicide bombers that they want to sell them to us. So it's become a trade, a mean trade; merchants of death are around there. So it's our job to get rid of them.

President Bush. Thank you very much.

President Karzai. Thank you very much. Thank you.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11:17 a.m. In his remarks, he referred to President Pervez Musharraf of Pakistan. President Karzai referred to Abdul Salaam Azimi, Chief Justice of Afghanistan.

Proclamation 8164—Women's Equality Day, 2007

August 6, 2007

By the President of the United States of America

A Proclamation

On Women's Equality Day, we commemorate the adoption of the 19th Amendment to our Constitution and the strong leadership of extraordinary women who have made America a more perfect Union by advancing women's suffrage.

At the Seneca Falls Convention of 1848, a group of visionaries gathered to proclaim the ideas that "all men and women are created equal" and "endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights." That gathering grew into a national movement that led to the ratification of the 19th Amendment, guaranteeing women the right to vote. This achievement reflects the vision and determination of the suffragists who stood for a freer society and changed our Nation's history.