



“The war on terror is no one nation's war”

a speech by

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I would like to start by expressing my gratitude to the Nippon Press Club for providing this opportunity to share with you the last developments in Afghanistan.

We observe today an evolving situation in the war on terror. Eight years after the campaign to capture the culprits behind the tragic 9/11 attacks began, the right perspective has been regained in the war on terror in Afghanistan. Some recognize that the change this time has sadly more to do with public opinion within our allies' party politics than with what is at stake in the region at large. However, most see it as imperative that we never lose sight of the original goal: the total obliteration of the regional hotbed of terror and the transformation of both Afghanistan and Pakistan into normal states and thriving economies.

2008 for the most part has been a wake up call to us Afghans, our partners and the region. Earlier in the year, four reports namely Afghanistan Study Group, Atlantic Council, National Defense University and Oxfam International offered very bleak assessments on the current status. September and October headlines included comments by the Joint Chiefs Chairman Admiral Michael Mullen, British Brigadier Mark Carleton-Smith and the British Diplomat Sir Sherard Cowper-Cole, which were taken out of context and made out to be defeatist.

I wonder at times if the presence of so many negative headlines is a reflection of people around the world disbelieving in success in Afghanistan. At any rate, we see these as forewarnings not as doomsday prophesies. They serve as the basis for a modified approach to adequately address the latest tactics by the extremists, the flawed strategy to treat the war on terror not as a regional war, the nexus between the theatres of war in Iraq and our region and the need to harmonize the political, developmental and military components of the war on terror. With the discourse at hand, however, we wish to implore our critics to never lose sight of the progress that has been made.

Under the Taliban, there were only tens of miles of paved road in Afghanistan while we now boast over 8,000 miles of newly paved road; the number of Afghans with access to basic health facilities has risen from 9% to 85%; the number of children enrolled in school from under one million to nearly 7 million; there are currently 52,200 students enrolled in higher education institutions; more than 3 million people have benefited from rural water and sanitation projects;

some 3,000 cooperatives and farmers organizations have been created or strengthened with 20,000 members trained; 6.12million tons of wheat and other grains were grown in 2007/8, an increase of 1400 percent over 2002; Some 20,502 Community Development Councils have been established by the National Solidarity Programme, and are implementing community-led development projects in more than 80% of the Afghan settlements; the domestic production of electricity has tripled since 2002; more than 1,000 square kilometers of minefields have been cleared and more than 7,700,000 unexploded ordnances have been removed; there are now more than 80 radio stations and 30 TV stations, of which 60 radio stations and 16 TV stations are independent; 28% of seats in the Afghan Parliament belong to women; poppy harvests are beginning to fall with a 30% decrease from last year, a projected 31% decrease in the next, and an increase to 18 provinces being declared poppy-free from 15 last year. Afghanistan won its first Olympic medal in Beijing, and we are now registering voters for the upcoming 2009 general elections. A survey earlier this year by the Asia Foundation indicates that more than 70 percent of the population is optimistic about the future. A survey by Tolo TV puts 47 percent of the population at 14 or below and another of 70 percent of the people to be just under 20 and eager to realize their peaceful goals.

We hold no delusions about the mistakes that have impeded an even greater success to this point. Failing to remove incompetent individuals from key positions, not adequately attacking corruption within the government, or the drug problem that funds Taliban efforts and criminalizes our economy, and carelessly causing civilian deaths in missions on militants have coupled with our enemy's actions to hamper our cause. This year has seen an influx of kidnappings and violence in general, as well as attacks on aid workers, with the slaying of the courageous Kazuya Ito in August being especially prominent in our minds.

While this peak period of casualties does not match the severity of Iraq in the summer of 2006, the figures are alarming. This year an estimated 573 violent incidents occur each month, up from 44 in 2003 and, in fact, more soldiers lost their lives in Afghanistan in the months of June and July alone than have thus far in Iraq in all of 2008. The degradation of stability in no way should be translated to imply that surrender is our only option. Either we fight the insurgents along the Afghan-Pak border, or they will fight us everywhere.

Militarily, we and our stakeholders need to immediately undertake a major and fundamental reevaluation of the resources, number of troops and the scope of geographical area of the war on terror. Despite its importance, both the number of troops and the amount of resources including the availability of funds dedicated to supporting the military efforts have been but a fraction of what was invested elsewhere. Although the White House has approved an additional 8,000 soldiers to be stationed in Afghanistan early next year, the generals in charge argue that they need 20, 000. Given the difficult and inaccessible Afghan terrain, new attacks employed by the insurgents and the inadequate size of the Afghan National Army, we first must tackle the disproportionate ratio of combat potential available.

Increasing the troop level to an appropriate number will allow more accurate small scale operations and will subsequently cause a decrease in non-combatant casualties. Let me remind you that ill-founded propaganda of equating the coalition troops' presence with the Soviet invading army of the 80s is just absurd since a great majority of Afghans still welcome and support US, NATO and ISAF presence, for we see them as liberators rather than occupiers. However, civilian casualties or collateral damage need to be significantly reduced if the Afghan population is to continue its support for the coalition. Additionally, we cannot claim any success in the war on terror as we have naively confined our strategy to Afghanistan's borders.

It was in fact the new perspective in the war on terror by the military and politicians as well as the new administration by President Asif Ali Zardari calling the war on terror as his own that we finally see some progress. Reports already state that fewer foreign fighters are slipping into Afghanistan since the Pakistani army has addressed this war with a long overdue sincerity, as is evidenced by their increased and more focused attacks on Sunday in Bajur, an area considered a likely hideout for Osama bin Laden. And despite Pakistan's notorious Inter Services Intelligence (ISI)'s previous support for the Taliban and militants such as Baitullah Mehsud, the man widely believed to be behind the killing of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, the replacing of ISI senior staff has created hope. A proper level of security will foster economic and social development and the new civilian government headed by President Zardari needs to be supported extensively.

Developmentally, we must substantially increase the level of aid, avoid duplication of the process, emphasize Afghan ownership and enact additional initiatives to create sustainable development throughout Afghanistan. Aid per capita in Bosnia was 12 times greater and in East Timor 4 times higher, hence, more needs to be provided. As far as development along the terror-plagued communities is concerned, by establishing viable futures for the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan, militants will face greater difficulties in promoting their cause, recruiting new members, and intimidating the local population. Studies have shown that wages for soldiers in the Afghan army are much lower than those for drug runners, and the same is true for many vocations. If we expect poppy growers to leave behind their illicit trade, we must provide an agricultural alternative that is competitive. It is easiest to coax a militant to put down his gun when we offer employment which will sustain his family. International experts in various fields are needed in advisory roles throughout the region to facilitate tangible growth and development schemes. The bottom line is we must provide locals with a better life than that offered by terrorist groups.

From a political standpoint, we must tackle three issues. Firstly, we must create a division between al-Qaeda and the Taliban in general. In this context, President Karzai's appeal to H. M. King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia to call upon the Taliban to join the Afghan reconciliation process will help tremendously. Secondly, inviting non-rogue elements of the Taliban to join the political process must be pursued. Already around 6,000 militants, including some former Taliban regime officials, have joined the government reconciliation program. This in no way represents a surrender or a weak-willed reconciliation, as those elements willing to lay down their arms and accepting our constitution as the supreme law of the land have and will be welcomed.

We will not reach out to those who continue terrorist attacks on our people and our international friends, as was the case in the October 16th attack on a bus that left 27 innocent people dead. Nor will we negotiate terms that sacrifice the hard-won liberties of our people simply to appease those who are scared to fight on. Finally, we need to encourage more Peace Jirgas amongst the various groups between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In fact, it was just yesterday during the second round of the regional Jirga that both sides concluded talks "with the opposition in both countries." By

establishing a sense of ownership in the peace process, we will see more meaningful participation and better result.

We will not turn a corner in the war on terror unless we match our enemy's ferocity with a resolve backed by a greater vision for the region. Indeed the fighting has grown more intense and this is because a greater number of militants from around the world are currently focusing in one area. We have been presented with the opportunity to eliminate the enemies of peace where they have gathered, and if we do not bring the fight to them, know that these fanatics will take their horrendous acts of terror across the oceans and into our neighborhoods. Past incidents in London, Nairobi, Washington, Istanbul, and Madrid serve as a reminder that no country is safe from the terrorists.

We have to be clear that the war on terror is no one nation's war but rather a global struggle that requires universal solidarity. In this context, we are grateful that Japan aims to renew the OEF-MIO Mission in the Indian Ocean for an additional year. However, we don't believe that this Mission – given it only provides a small but necessary Japanese presence in the war on terror – should be used as an issue to cripple Japanese domestic politics again. In fact, we and our coalition partners in the war on terror would like to see a substantial, long-term increase in aid by Japan in addition to the Mission, unless a more direct share of the fighting burden can be taken on by the Japanese inside Afghanistan. We therefore call for a sincere, pragmatic and substantive political dialogue inside Japan over a plausibly different role in the war on terror but definitely a huge increase in reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan given the latest developments there.

Even if Japan decides on another form of engagement in the war on terror, we prefer Japan continue its Indian Mission until that shift takes place. Let us not forget that last year's unexpected pullout of Japanese ships from the Indian Ocean Refueling Mission was only welcome by the Taliban and their al-Qaeda cohorts.