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TO: Interested Parties
FROM: Matt Bennett, Vice President for Public Affairs;
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RE: A "Dual Track Strategy" for Afghanistan

With the change in administrations, the most pressing national security debate involves the future of Afghanistan. On the one hand, President Obama is pursuing a dual track strategy—deploying more troops to Afghanistan to stabilize the country (and to maintain pressure on al Qaeda and their allies across the border in Pakistan) and restructuring development aid and regional diplomatic efforts. But a rising chorus of voices on the other side of the debate is arguing that the United States should pursue only a single track, by withdrawing its military forces and focusing solely on development.

Many in this growing group of critics believe that recent setbacks in our stabilization efforts reflect something fundamental about the history of Afghanistan. They argue not only that we *are not* succeeding, but that we *cannot* (and even that we *need not*) succeed in Afghanistan for American security interests to be protected.

While simple lessons from history are convenient and pessimism is understandable after the catastrophes of the Bush years, these critics are wrong, and the basic premise of their claim clouds the real debate over the future of Afghanistan. *Success in Afghanistan not only is possible, it is a fundamental part of providing for American national security.* We therefore believe that the President is right, and progressives should support a **dual track strategy** for Afghanistan that uses both hard and soft power—force, combined with development and diplomacy, to stabilize the nation and deny our enemies a safe haven.

I. Countering the Myths about Afghanistan Policy

To maintain support for US efforts in Afghanistan, progressives must debunk the prevailing myths about Afghanistan policy: first, that foreign powers cannot succeed militarily in Afghanistan; and second, that a policy focused solely on providing development aid is a viable strategy.

A. The Graveyard of Empires Myth

In 2001, an article by Milton Bearden in *Foreign Affairs* proclaimed Afghanistan to be "the graveyard of empires."¹ Many of the recent critics of US involvement have adopted this clever phrase, but they are ignoring the substance and conclusions of his article. Bearden argued that after 9/11, the United States had little choice but to invade Afghanistan; his advice centered not on keeping our forces out, but rather on ensuring that Afghans were empowered to choose their own leaders.

These critics now assert that the history of the country stretching back to Alexander the Great shows that no foreign power has ever succeeded in Afghanistan, and they conclude that US efforts there are doomed to failure. They argue that British and Soviet experiences in particular reveal that the Afghan countryside is difficult to control and that the Afghan public's inherent xenophobia has led them to expel foreign armies.

For example, Andrew Bacevich at Boston University has argued that "[o]ne of history's enduring lessons is that Afghans don't appreciate it when outsiders tell them how to govern their affairs—just ask the British or the Soviets."² Along the same lines, Robert Dreyfuss and Katrina vanden Heuvel have written in *The Nation* that the Afghan war is basically "unwinnable," citing the Soviet experience in particular.³

Yet the Soviet and British experiences are not fundamentally analogous to the current conflict. In both cases, the invading superpower (the Soviets and the British) were not simply battling local warlords; rather, they were fighting local forces that were heavily financed and armed by another great power (the Americans and the Russians, respectively). As any reader or viewer of *Charlie Wilson's War* can tell you, the Soviets were crushing the Mujahedeen until another superpower—the United States—started a massive effort to fund, arm and train the Afghan insurgency.

Moreover, the US invasion of Afghanistan following 9/11 suggests that the Afghan past is not necessarily prologue. Indeed, the US was quite successful initially: we quickly routed the Taliban government and then joined with NATO to begin to rebuild the country. In 2005, 500,000 girls registered for school for the first time.⁴ Electricity production in Afghanistan tripled from 2003 to 2006.⁵ And UNICEF's health, immunization, and protection programs had reached every province of the country by May 2004.⁶

Polling indicates these efforts were succeeding in winning hearts and minds as well, thereby dispelling the myth that Afghans would not work with outsiders to rebuild and secure their nation. In 2005, 68 percent of Afghans were confident of US efforts in the country. That number dropped in 2006 but remained above 50%. Even in 2007, as the quagmire in Iraq continued to drag American attention and resources away, 77% of Afghans still supported US involvement in the country, and confidence in US forces was higher in areas perceived to have a strong US presence.⁷

To be sure, Afghanistan has proven to be a difficult place for foreign armies. While we are not fighting a proxy war against another hyper-power, we are facing a well-financed and well-equipped insurgency. Consequently, the path ahead for the US and NATO is long and hard. However, our own very recent history has belied the claims that history or fate has doomed any international efforts to create a sufficiently stable Afghanistan.

B. The Development-Only Myth

Critics of the present Afghanistan policy have argued that instead of sending more troops, we should withdraw militarily and simply provide more aid. In an op-ed for the *Washington Post*, former Senator George McGovern called for a five-year

'time-out' to war and instead provide school lunch to every child in Afghanistan.⁸ Author and former British Foreign Service officer Rory Stewart has made a similar argument in the *New York Times*, *Time* and elsewhere.⁹

But history teaches that without significant security, there can be no meaningful development aid. Previous US efforts to provide aid in such situations have failed dramatically and served only to empower local warlords and enemies of the United States. The chaos in Iraq from 2003-2007 shows this plainly, as do two other recent examples:

- In 1992, in response to the humanitarian crisis in Somalia, President Bush authorized *Operation Provide Relief* to airlift food into the country. Because of the lack of security on the ground, the aid was largely swept up by roving gangs and warlords, who used it to buy support and consolidate power. The population was left to starve and was forced to become even more dependent on the warlords to survive. This ultimately led to an attempt by the United States to restore order and arrest the warlords, which ended with the "Black Hawk Down" disaster in Mogadishu.
- In 1994, the US tried to respond to the military coup in Haiti by deploying the *USS Harlan County* to the country. 200 trainers and engineers boarded the ship on a mission to undertake construction and civil projects and conduct basic military training. However, due to chaos in Port-au-Prince, the ship had to beat an embarrassing retreat. Later, armed US forces deployed to Haiti to create a secure environment and address civil strife in the failing country.

Similarly, we can see that a development-only approach in Afghanistan is also proving to be a myth. This is on display right now in the more unstable parts of Afghanistan, where the Taliban and local warlords are in effective control. Development cannot take hold where the Taliban is destroying schools, murdering aid workers and spraying acid into the faces of young girls.¹⁰

Whether or not Afghanistan is at risk to become another Somalia or Haiti, all agree that we cannot cut off development aid. But it is just as clear that an attempt to do development without security would mean that our efforts to provide relief there are doomed to fail.

II. A Dual Track Strategy for Afghanistan

To succeed in Afghanistan, the United States must undertake a dual track strategy that focuses on restoring security while using diplomacy and development aid to create basic stability. As part of this strategy, we must finally define what "success" in Afghanistan means. The previous goal of erecting an American-style democracy in there was another in a long line of unrealized Bush administration fantasies. Instead, as Obama administration officials have noted recently, success in Afghanistan would include a small, stable central government that is responsible for security and justice.¹¹ This government should have the ability to prevent al Qaeda's return to Afghanistan and ensure basic human rights for the Afghani people. Our role in helping them get there has two tracks, one using hard power, the other soft.

Track One: Restoring Security in Afghanistan

1. Increase Troop Strength and Secure the South

For many years, Third Way has been calling for an increase in the American military presence in Afghanistan.¹² Now, with President Obama sending needed reinforcements, the US will combine an additional 30,000 US troops deploying to Afghanistan with 10,000 NATO or Afghan security forces, so the international mission finally will near the troops-to-population ratio in southern Afghanistan recommended by the US Army Counterinsurgency Manual.¹³ Reaching this ratio would allow forces to undertake a more sustained and sophisticated effort against the Taliban in one of its two power centers in Southern Afghanistan and would allow the United States to reduce the air strikes that are in some cases alienating the public.

2. Cut Off Enemy Supply Lines

Unlike the Soviets and the British, the United States does not face another great power fueling the insurgency in Afghanistan with money and sophisticated weapons. However, the poppy trade is providing a lifeline for our enemies. Southern Afghanistan accounts for 90% of the world's opium production and provides the Taliban with \$300 million annually.¹⁴ Thus, attacking the drug trade is a key to succeeding in Afghanistan. A comprehensive approach would:

- Provide international agriculture advisors to assist in crop substitution;
- Change US law to include Afghanistan in its "poppies to morphine" program;
- Target drug dealers by releasing the DEA's list of Afghani drug lords and signing an extradition treaty that would allow captured drug lords to be tried in US courts;¹⁵ and
- When necessary, forcefully eradicate opium crops by hand or aerial spraying of non-harmful herbicides.

3. Strengthen the Afghan National Security Forces

Ultimately, the forces that will provide security for Afghanistan and connect the Afghani people to the central government are the Afghan National Army and Police. But, the US team advising the Afghan National Army is staffed at half its authorized size, and the police training team has only a third of its needed staff.¹⁶ Such shortages are unacceptable for such a critical mission. The United States must provide more advisors to fill these positions and press NATO allies to fulfill their commitment to provide 400 trainers.¹⁷

Track Two: Building Stability through Diplomacy and Development

1. Use Regional Diplomacy to Secure Afghanistan's Future

While history is clear that we must avoid a proxy war in Afghanistan, we have allowed India and Pakistan to resume their proxy battles and undermine international diplomatic efforts. All regional powers, including Iran, China and Russia, must be brought together to resolve outstanding disputes, such as a final

agreement on the Durand Line border between Afghanistan and Pakistan and the dispute in the Kashmir. Such negotiations would free these countries to work for a more stable Afghanistan rather than pursue their narrow interests in chaos. Moreover, the tribal areas in Pakistan are providing a safe haven for al Qaeda and the Taliban, and negotiations should seek to pressure and reward Pakistan for stabilizing this cancerous region and rooting out the terrorists.

2. Redirect Aid to Reward Success

As Rory Stewart has noted, international aid programs have perversely rewarded failing provinces in Afghanistan while ignoring more stable ones, leading some Afghan leaders to joke that they need to set off bombs to get aid.¹⁸ This structure needs to be reversed—success should be rewarded. The international community should begin funneling its aid to more secure provinces in central and northern Afghanistan and away from the insecure south. This would create an incentive in the country for local leaders to work for security, rather than the current system that allows corrupt local officials to pocket cash while chaos reigns around them.

3. Create an International Endowment for Afghanistan

Even a small Afghan central government will be unable to provide for its own security forces for decades to come. However, a functioning government cannot count on international aid when it considers future budgets. Thus, the Afghan government needs a source of income that will help it transition and allow it to undertake normal budgeting processes.

The international community can create an endowment fund for Afghanistan that would operate much like endowments do for US universities. While this fund would not provide for the central government's entire budget, it would present a steady and predictable revenue stream that would allow for future budget assumptions. An international agreement would need to be reached on how to manage and initially fund the endowment, but major economic powers and the Gulf States all have a vested interest in a successful Afghanistan.

Conclusion

The calls from many quarters for disengagement from Afghanistan are growing louder and more worrisome. A website, www.getafghanistanright.com, and commentators of every stripe have begun to pressure Congress and the President not only to avoid a military escalation in Afghanistan but to begin to get US and NATO troops out. Their reasons vary: Katrina vanden Heuvel even claims that "it would be difficult to find a less attractive place strategically than Afghanistan from which to direct an international terrorist network or threaten US interests."¹⁹ Of course, history and Osama bin Laden would argue that a failed Afghanistan is, in fact, a very attractive place to direct an international terrorist network.

Newsweek magazine's cover story last week asked whether Afghanistan will be "Obama's Vietnam." But after reviewing a litany of real worries about the war effort there, the cover story pointed to studies last year by retired General Jim Jones

(before he became National Security Advisor) finding that, unlike Vietnam, “American cannot afford to lose in Afghanistan.”

We believe that creating a secure situation in Afghanistan that prevents the return of the Taliban and al Qaeda remains a clear national security priority for the United States. The road ahead is difficult and will require a lengthy commitment by the international community and the US. However, with a tough and smart, “dual track strategy,” we can overcome the mistakes of the Bush years and achieve success in Afghanistan.

¹ Milton Bearden, “Afghanistan, Graveyard of Empires,” Foreign Affairs, Nov./Dec. 2001.

² Andrew Bacevich, “The Things We Need to Do Now,” Newsweek, Nov. 29, 2008.

³ Robert Dreyfuss, “Hey Obama, Don’t Let Afghanistan Be Your Quagmire,” The Nation, Jan. 7, 2009; Katrina vanden Heuvel, “Obama Must Get Afghanistan Right,” The Nation (online), Jan. 8, 2009.

⁴ “Peace and Development in Afghanistan-Security for Us,” German Federal Government Report, Aug. 2008.

⁵ CIA World Factbook.

⁶ Edward Carwardin, “Afghanistan After the War,” UNICEF, May 30, 2004.

⁷ Gary Langer, “Poll: Afghans’ Criticisms of U.S. Efforts Rise; In the Southwest, Taliban Support Grows,” ABC News, Dec. 3, 2007.

⁸ George McGovern, “Calling A Time Out,” Washington Post, Jan. 22, 2009.

⁹ Rory Stewart, “The Good War Isn’t Worth Fighting,” New York Times, Nov. 22, 2008; Rory Stewart, “How to Save Afghanistan,” Time, July 17, 2008.

¹⁰ “Two Schoolgirls Blinded in Acid Attack in Afghanistan,” CNN, Nov. 15, 2008.

¹¹ Anne Gearan, “Gates Says More Troops for Afghanistan by Summer,” AP, Jan. 28, 2009.

¹² See “Taking the Fight to Our Enemies: A 50-50-50 Plan for American National Security” and “Finishing the Job in Afghanistan.”

¹³ Dexter Filkins, “Taliban Fill NATO’s Big Gaps in Afghan South,” New York Times, Jan. 22, 2009.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ For a fuller description of these proposals see, Peter Bergen, “How Not to Lose Afghanistan (and Pakistan),” New America Foundation, Oct. 10, 2008.

¹⁶ Nathaniel Fick and John Nagl, “Counterinsurgency Field Manual: Afghanistan Edition,” Foreign Policy, Jan./Feb. 2009.

¹⁷ Vincent Morelli and Paul Gallis, “NATO in Afghanistan: A Test of the Transatlantic Alliance,” Congressional Research Service, Oct. 23, 2008.

¹⁸ Rory Stewart, “The Good War Isn’t Worth Fighting,” New York Times, Nov. 22, 2008.

¹⁹ Katrina vanden Heuvel, “Obama Must Get Afghanistan Right,” The Nation (online), Jan. 8, 2009.