



FRIENDS COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL LEGISLATION

... a Quaker lobby in the public interest

October 8, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We write to urge you not to send more U.S. troops to Afghanistan. Instead, we urge you to implement a policy built on the insight you expressed shortly after your inauguration when you said, "One of the things that I think we have to communicate in Afghanistan is that we have no interest or aspiration to be there over the long term." An effective way to communicate this message to Afghans is to start drawing down U.S. troop levels now.

War is not the answer to the perplexing problems in Afghanistan. The presence of foreign troops has become the most important element driving the insurgency. Escalating the U.S. troop presence will increase anti-U.S. sentiment further and escalate the violence. It will also undermine prospects for successful diplomatic and development efforts in the region. The U.S. problem in Afghanistan is not that it is losing the war against the Taliban but that the U.S. war in Afghanistan is helping the Taliban to grow and win.

An initial withdrawal of U.S. forces should be followed by other steps to reduce the U.S. and NATO military footprint in the country. We urge you to:

- **Implement a systematic de-escalation of military operations leading to a ceasefire.** Recent months have seen the most intense fighting and the highest number of U.S. casualties since the initial invasion in 2001. The U.S. has nothing to gain from more aggressive military operations. De-escalation will not strengthen and may even weaken the insurgency.
- **Negotiate a status of forces agreement with the Afghan government that includes a timetable for withdrawal.** Besides a credible election process, which is also needed, nothing will legitimize an Afghan government more than to be seen to negotiate as an equal with the United States and to secure a U.S. commitment to leave the country.
- **Until they are withdrawn, concentrate remaining U.S. and other foreign forces in areas of the country where the Taliban is not yet in control but where it is making inroads against the Afghan government.** Instead of using U.S. troops to challenge the Taliban in areas it has controlled for years, the focus should be on preventing the Taliban's expansion. That focus would mean a shift in strategy to preventing war fighting, not fighting a war.

Reducing the foreign military footprint is a necessary but far from sufficient strategy to stabilize Afghanistan. Changes in U.S. diplomatic and development efforts are also needed. We urge you to:

- **Press the Afghan government to hold a legitimate run-off presidential election or an emergency national council, a *loya jirga*, this fall.** The former advisor to Gen. David Petraeus,

David Kilcullen, is right to say that only a legitimately elected Afghan president can enact essential reforms. Fraud has damaged the first-round presidential election beyond repair. Proceeding without a new election or *loya jirga* will make matters worse.

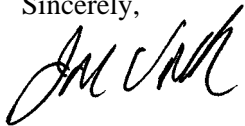
- **Support negotiation and reconciliation among all Afghan groups, including the Taliban.** The United States and the Afghan government have so far made only half-hearted efforts to promote reconciliation. Worse, in the early years of the war the U.S. actually rebuffed and imprisoned Taliban elements who sought to ally themselves with the government. Some Taliban may reject reconciliation, but they, not the Afghan government, should bear the onus of rejection.
- **Move forward with determined regional diplomacy that recognizes the critical importance of gaining Pakistani, Indian, and Iranian cooperation.** Saudi Arabia, Russia and China also have important roles to play, but adverse actions by Pakistan, India, or Iran would exact a toll on Afghan stability and U.S. involvement. U.S. diplomacy must seek to bring all of these countries into a common project to stabilize Afghanistan.
- **Focus development aid on building the rule of law and supporting Afghan civil society.** Support is especially needed to help build a civil justice system comprised of an effective police force and credible courts. The corruption and ineffectiveness of the existing Afghan government police and court system has been one of the Taliban's greatest assets. The goal should be to build an Afghan government that can become an attractive alternative to Taliban rule in the eyes of most Afghans and to support Afghans in developing their own political and economic future. The U.S. military is ill-equipped to direct or implement such assistance. U.S. aid should be directed by civilians and channeled through Afghan-led initiatives and multinational trusts as much as possible.

Success in Afghanistan requires a very different course from the one pursued by the previous U.S. administration and a very different course from the options now being discussed which rely on military force.

We urge you to set U.S. policy toward Afghanistan on a course characterized by de-escalation of the military counterinsurgency campaign, promotion of multilateral civilian-led development aid, and diplomacy for international cooperation to stabilize Afghanistan. Peace is possible through peaceful means in Afghanistan.

As you consult with your advisors and weigh U.S. options, our FCNL community of faith pray that you will be given the foresight and wisdom that was so missing when another president decided what to do in Vietnam.

Sincerely,



Joe Volk
Executive Secretary, Friends Committee on National Legislation