



Briefing to the United Nations Security Council by the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, Mr. Nicholas Haysom

[as delivered]

New York, 17 September 2015

Mr. President, members of the Council,

When I last briefed you, I observed that Afghanistan continues to need the support of the international community, as well as the sustained attention of this Council as it faces down its difficult economic, security and political challenges. I remain firmly of that view. Afghanistan's path to stability and self-reliance cannot be taken for granted.

The current refugee exodus reflects the despondency of many Afghans. Afghans have clear memories of their recent but violent past, face an opaque future and now keenly monitor their environment for signs of international disengagement or, hopefully, of domestic stabilisation. A clear signal of continued international support will mitigate the uncertainty fuelling this exodus.

Mr. President,

Shortly after my last briefing, many points of friction emerged within the National Unity Government, and between the National Unity Government and elements of the political elite, driven, inter alia, by deteriorating security and economic conditions. Although neither of these were of the Government's making, charges of inaction and miscalculation surfaced in the media.

Since then, there have been a number of positive developments, including signs of progress in the functioning of the National Unity Government. With a few exceptions, all senior level national posts have now been filled and both the Council of Ministers and Cabinet are active. I continue to encourage President Ashraf Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah to finalize the appointments process, particularly those of governors, Minister of Defence and Attorney General.

The Government has also made progress in addressing the issue of electoral reforms by establishing the Special Electoral Reform Commission, one of its key commitments. The Commission, of which one of my deputies is a non-voting member, has already tabled its first set of recommendations. Cabinet has proactively endorsed seven and returned three for further study. The recommendation to change the electoral system will have, in particular, far-reaching consequences for the country's future political landscape. I therefore encourage the Government to build a consensus around this issue before it makes its final decision. Electoral

reforms are critical for the development of the country's democratic foundation and they should be a source of stability, bringing people together, not dividing them.

Mr. President,

A Senior Official's Meeting of the TMAF process was held in Kabul in early September. It was judged by participants to be a success. It proved to be an important element of the bridge between past donor commitments, and future pledges to meet Afghanistan's need for on-going support. The SOM, as we call it, during which a new mutual accountability framework was approved, provided an opportunity for the whole-of-government to establish its commitment to a credible reform agenda. This is necessary to give confidence to donors ahead of critical meetings in Warsaw and Brussels in 2016 at which donor commitments are expected to be renewed. It should however be noted that decisions to commit funds to Afghanistan beyond 2017 will be made, not at these conferences in 2016, but in capitals in the very coming months. Before then, the Government will need to deliver on its agreed performance indicators, and most notably indicators that demonstrate that corruption is being effectively tackled.

Afghanistan has benefited from exceptional levels of development assistance, even as global demands on aid budgets have multiplied. Participants at the SOM agreed on their mutual responsibility to ensure that this aid is more effectively targeted and delivered.

At the sixth Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA), held the day before the Senior Official's Meeting, the region affirmed the need for greater economic cooperation, integration and connectivity. The logic that informs this recognition, that economic growth and stability in Afghanistan benefits the entire region, was universally acknowledged. As was the recognition that the problems of the region, such as trans-boundary traffic in narcotics and people, cannot be resolved by one country alone.

Mr. President,

The conflict continues to take a horrid toll on Afghan civilians. In the first eight months of 2015, UNAMA documented the highest level of civilian casualties since it began records. The monitoring of civilian casualties by UNAMA's Human Rights Unit, it should be noted, has been recognized as a model of best practice both within and outside the United Nations. I say this because its findings, notably on responsibility for violence, have been contested by parties to the conflict.

Anti-Government elements continue to cause the majority of civilian deaths and injuries although casualties caused by Afghan security forces continue to rise. UNAMA is encouraged by recent statements made by President Ashraf Ghani to take official steps to reduce civilian casualties. We trust that the Government's civilian casualty mitigation policy will incorporate all of the elements set out in UNAMA's Mid-Year Report on the Protection of Civilians, in particular in relation to the transparent investigation of civilian casualty incidents. UNAMA stands ready to assist the Government of Afghanistan in this regard.

UNAMA also continues its dialogue with all parties to the conflict in order to reduce the toll of the conflict on civilians, increase protection and respect for basic human rights, and ensure humanitarian access to all parts of the country.

The Mission also encourages the Government to continue its efforts to implement the national plan on the elimination of torture, and in particular urges the ratification of the Optional Protocol

to the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman and Degrading Treatment. It welcomes the stated intention of the Government to take the first steps, at this session of the United Nations General Assembly, to this end.

Mr. President,

This year's conflict has been one of the most intense faced by the Afghan National Security Forces. However, while they are, once again, proving their mettle and resilience, as a number of analysts have observed, insurgents have demonstrated a capacity to mass large numbers of fighters in isolated areas. This has challenged the ANSF's ability to maintain the ground that they occupy or hold on to it once they have retaken contested sites. As predicated in earlier briefings, we anticipate the intensification of the violence in the country to continue through 2015.

Mr. President,

This underscores the importance of renewing a viable peace process.

As noted by the Secretary-General in his report, the real progress in launching such a process was suggested by formal talks between the Taliban and a government delegation in Murree in July. However, it appears that peace talks are on hold, firstly as a result of an internal succession dispute within the Taliban following the unexpected announcement of Mullah Omar's death. Secondly, as a result of a hiatus in Pakistan and Afghanistan's collaboration to create an inclusive Afghan-led peace process. A series of bombing in Kabul in early August precipitated a spike in anti-Pakistan sentiment and a hardening of rhetoric from the Afghan Government, including the President. The President complained that the hand he had extended to Pakistan in respect of mutual assistance in dealing with terrorism in both territories had not been reciprocated. He called on Pakistan to curtail the insurgency, notably that of the Haqqani network operating from Pakistan territory. After an exchange of high-level visits, including that by Pakistan National Security Advisor Sartaj Aziz, the level of accusation and counter-accusation has diminished and undertakings have been exchanged to renew constructive collaboration towards the ultimate objective of a stable Afghanistan.

I reiterate my call for direct engagement between the Taliban and the Government. A war-weary Afghan population is clamouring for peace and they deserve it. The threats faced by Afghanistan do not all emanate from its own territory. Many of the insurgents originate from neighbouring countries. It is entitled to call for international support, particularly from the region, in dealing with them. It is the responsibility of the leaders of the region and other stakeholders to prioritize support for a peaceful and secure Afghanistan. In this regard, UNAMA calls on all neighbours to play a constructive role in suppressing the threat of terrorism, including but not limited to ISIL, and in promoting an inter-Afghan peace process.

UNAMA will continue to engage, in the background, with the Government, the Taliban, neighbouring countries, and the international community to promote a process that will allow Afghans to find an arrangement by which they can live in peace. UNAMA, in regards to an inclusive peace process, welcomes the recent launch of Afghanistan's National Action Plan on United Nations Security Council resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security which will promote the participation of women in any national reconciliation process.

Mr. President,

As requested by this Council, UNAMA, on behalf of the Secretary-General, and in full consultation with the Government of Afghanistan and donors has conducted an examination of the role, structure and activities of all United Nations entities in Afghanistan. Discussion clarified the needs and expectations of Afghanistan. It allowed the United Nations to examine how it could best align its projects with Afghanistan's priorities, and focus on institutional strengthening and capacity building. It is our hope that the report will be useful to the Council in its future mandate deliberations.

I conclude by expressing my appreciation to Ambassador Tanin for whom this is the last Council debate as Afghanistan's Permanent Representative to the United Nations. I have appreciated his advocacy for his country and constructive engagement.

United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), Kabul, Afghanistan

For more information, please contact: Spokesperson-UNAMA@un.org

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