



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

[as delivered]

New York, 21 June 2017

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Good morning, Mr. President, Esteemed Members of the Security Council.

The months since my last briefing have been unusually tense in Afghanistan. The deteriorating security situation has brought underlying political tensions to the surface. At the same time, the willingness of the Government to take steps towards peace was demonstrated by their successful holding earlier this month of a Kabul meeting on regional peace and security, as well as the continuous implementation of the political agreement with former insurgent group Hezbi-i Islami. But without enhanced efforts by the National Unity Government to increase political inclusiveness, strengthen accountability and improve the Government's credibility, particularly in the security sector, we are likely to face more crises in an increasingly fragile environment. The events of the early morning of 20 June, when the Government's attempt to remove the final protest resulted in violence is a reminder of the need for caution, calm and unity.

Mr. President,

The most recent security and political crisis was sparked by a terrorist bombing in Kabul's centre on 31 May. This was followed by large street demonstrations protesting growing insecurity which turned violent, and then a suicide attack at a subsequent funeral of one of those killed in the demonstrations. Chief Executive Abdullah, Foreign Minister Rabbani and other senior political officials were near the blasts at the funeral but were thankfully unhurt. The political fault-lines that emerged are increasingly along an ethnic basis, which is particularly worrying at a time when the Islamic State is attempting to provoke sectarian strife in the country through attacks against Shia Muslims.

During the anti-government demonstrations on 2 June, we at UNAMA conducted extensive outreach to leaders on all sides, particularly leaders of political movements which were considering joining the protests. We urged restraint, warned of the negative consequences for everyone of loss of control, and requested them to give time to allow their grievances to be addressed without violence. Coupled with the intensive efforts by the government and members of the diplomatic community, the immediate risk of escalation was defused. We are grateful for the subsequent expressions from the government and political leaders outside the government that UNAMA's efforts contributed to calming the situation. I remain concerned, however, that without changes in governance practices we are likely to face future crises that might be more difficult to contain.

What is the root of the problem? There have been indications since last summer that Afghanistan's broad political consensus was fraying. In recent months, a growing number of political factions, some who were formerly part of the National Unity Government as well as a younger generation of political forces, have begun to criticise and demand reforms to the Government. They argue that it is not sufficiently consultative or inclusive. The Government,



on the other hand, claims that opposition groups block important reforms and stoke tension by calling for the Government to be replaced. Each side accuses the other of acting against the national interest. It appears to me undeniable that these perceptions have contributed to tensions that characterize today's political environment. The existence of opposition is natural in any political scene, but the amount of mistrust is growing and there is an increasing resort to uncompromising slogans and statements which can fuel further violent protest. Efforts at inclusiveness and building consensus for political stability are critical.

The 31 May suicide bomb exploded just outside the restricted diplomatic enclave in the middle of Kabul. It took more than 90 lives and injured close to 500 people—all Afghans. While there were no serious international casualties, a number of diplomatic facilities, including several UN buildings, were badly damaged. Some embassies have had to evacuate staff while their facilities are repaired. Despite these realities, it is imperative that the attack not be allowed to undermine international support for Afghanistan including development and economic assistance. The international community must not be intimidated nor succumb to the terrorists.

Mr. President,

The Government's ability to hold a high-level meeting of the Kabul process on regional peace and security in Kabul on 6 June, with the participation of 24 states or organizations, demonstrated its resilience and the determination of the international community to maintain its support for Afghanistan and the National Unity Government.

In his opening speech, President Ghani stated: "We are gathered in this conference because the world community signed a promise that terrorism would not be tolerated. And today we are demanding that the world makes good on this promise." In this regard, I welcome the General Assembly's endorsement of the Secretary-General's proposal to create a new office on counter-terrorism headed by an Under-Secretary-General.

The Afghan vision for peace is premised on the fact that a stable Afghanistan would lead to a stable and more prosperous region. Achieving this vision will require the strong determination of all states concerned, particularly of the region and the neighbourhood. The Afghan Government has requested at the Kabul conference for the international community to address this issue in all its facets. The nexus of crime, corruption, and terrorism eventually undermines all states and the state system, which is why states must unite to combat it. The proof of our commitment will be a stable Afghanistan.

On the Afghan side, the recent series of security incidents has demonstrated the urgent need for reforms in the security sector. I welcome the Government's commitment to transparent, merit-based appointments, and credible investigations of the events of 31 May, 2 and 3 June, 20 June, and other reforms in the ministries of the Interior and Defence.

Mr. President,

Afghanistan faces numerous internal challenges in addition to fighting an insurgency that seems to be gaining ground. These include deep rooted political tension, the difficulty of integrating socially and economically the thousands of Afghan refugees who return each day, an economy that is only very slowly recovering after the international drawdown in 2014, and pervasive corruption. The economy remains heavily dependent on development assistance. The private sector, as the biggest potential provider of employment, suffers from



a lack of investor confidence and pervasive corruption. As a result, economic growth can neither match population growth nor generate enough employment for the many young Afghans entering the labour market every year. Corruption undermines the legitimacy of the state. It prevents a real economy from emerging. It contributes to insecurity. Corruption is at the heart of the problem of impunity, which itself is at the heart of the ongoing human rights challenges. Afghans alone are not to blame, but the consequences of corruption disproportionately affect Afghanistan.

In April, UNAMA issued its first comprehensive report on corruption in Afghanistan. I was gratified by the intensity of the public's response to this report. Afghans understand the effects of corruption and impunity because they face them every day. Positive steps have been made to tackle this problem by the National Unity Government. Reforms that have begun to work in the Ministry of Defence are now being applied to the Ministry of Interior. The Anti-Corruption Justice Centre is proving to be an effective instrument.

UNAMA's Human Rights remains committed to provide credible data of the impact of the conflict of civilians, especially women and children. It continues to engage with all main parties to the conflict to support them in taking measures to limit harm against civilians. UNAMA's report on the treatment of conflict detainees for the period of 2015 and 2016 was published in April to coincide with the second periodic review of Afghanistan by the United Nations Committee against Torture. UNAMA welcomes the Government's renewed commitment to ratify the Optional Protocol to the Convention against Torture and to take further steps to eliminate the torture and ill-treatment of detainees. These efforts must be accelerated to increase accountability and increase public trust in the Government.

Mr. President,

The attack of 31 May and the events that followed should serve as a clarifying moment. We are at a point where we need to take conscious decisions to reverse negative trends and seek stability or face far worse. The recent crisis has illustrated the dangers of pushing narrow interests, be they domestic or international, in Afghanistan's fragile context. There are two specific issues in particular that we must focus on.

First, in the domestic sphere, preparation must be accelerated for the next round of elections, parliamentary and presidential. Decisions must be made regarding the use of technology, and the role and modalities of international electoral assistance. Work must start on voter registration. The electoral calendar must be made clear. In my discussions with Afghan political actors, especially outside of Kabul, it is clear that the lack of clarity on these issues is a major component of the growing political mistrust. We understand that the Independent Elections Commission will make an announcement as early as tomorrow regarding the date for parliamentary elections. I believe that this announcement will contribute to allaying the political tensions I have referred to in this briefing.

Second, as I have repeatedly stated in this forum and elsewhere, a genuine peace process with the Taliban is essential and urgent. In the 6 June Kabul meeting, the need for a *modus vivendi* between Afghanistan and its neighbours was stressed. At the same time, I encourage the people of Afghanistan to begin an internal dialogue on the meaning of peace and reconciliation. The Government and the Taliban need to engage directly with each other to define a political solution. In this regard, the appointment of the new Chair of the High



Peace Council is a welcome development, but it is only a first step towards the Council's revitalization and its new role in driving the peace process.

Mr. President,

UNAMA is doing all it can to help contain political tensions, using our long-standing relationships and our experience. I have been proud of the entire mission and Country Team for these efforts. I was honoured to welcome the Secretary-General to Afghanistan last week, where his visit clearly demonstrated his and this Organization's commitment to Afghanistan, solidarity with its people, and perseverance in the pursuit of peace.

We look forward as well to the results of the strategic review, which you have requested. We are hopeful and confident that it will ensure that we have the tools to continue to work for peace in Afghanistan.

On the eve of the important Muslim holiday of Eid, I wish to again reiterate my call for unity and urge restraint so that families and communities can enjoy a peaceful end of Ramadan.

Thank you.

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UNAMA is mandated to support the Afghan Government and the people of Afghanistan as a political mission that provides 'good offices' among other key services. 'Good offices' are diplomatic steps the UN takes publicly and in private, drawing on its independence, impartiality and integrity, to prevent international disputes from arising, escalating or spreading. UNAMA assists the process of peace and reconciliation; monitors and promotes human rights, including the protection of civilians in armed conflict; promotes good governance; and encourages regional cooperation. The Mission also promotes coherent development support by the international community.