



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

*[as delivered]*

**New York, 22 June 2015**

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Madam President, members of the Council,

I thank you for this opportunity to share UNAMA's perspectives on recent developments in Afghanistan.

Since my last briefing to the Security Council, there has been progress in meeting Afghanistan's challenges in three distinct but interrelated areas: the economic, the security and the political. Although such progress itself has been modest, this should not be undervalued.

It needs to be stressed that Afghanistan continues to be tested in meeting its benchmarks in all three areas. There is no room for complacency - failure in any one of these areas would have consequences for the overall success of the Afghan transition. It is absolutely clear that Afghanistan continues to need the support of the international community, as well as the sustained attention of this Council.

Madam President,

The economic contraction that followed the withdrawal of international military forces presents a continuing challenge to the Government to meet the fiscal gap; that is, the gap between the resources it can muster and the monies it must spend. Afghanistan is meeting and exceeding - admittedly modest - revenue targets. Nevertheless, Afghanistan is struggling to harness the resources to meet its governance commitments and its developmental priorities. At this time of continued low economic growth, we must also guard against the danger of an increasing shift into the illicit economy, particularly so in the case of burgeoning narcotics production.

Afghanistan is meeting its security challenges, but is nonetheless being increasingly tested. The Afghan National Security Forces [ANSF] have been undeniably stretched as they take on full security responsibilities. We have seen an intensification of conflict across the country, including in areas previously considered to be safe. Only yesterday, there were fresh challenges to Government security control in an area close to strategically important Kunduz City. And today there was a failed attack on parliament as it was about to review the nomination for the Minister of Defence.

While the ANSF face operational challenges, their commitment is beyond question and they are demonstrating resilience in the face of insurgent efforts to take and hold ground.

Foreign fighters from Afghanistan's northern neighbours and elsewhere present a particular challenge. There also remains considerable concern that ISIL, referred to in Afghanistan as Daesh, is seeking to establish a foothold. This demands greater regional involvement and collaboration to address this shared threat. It seems inequitable that Afghanistan should be shouldering the burden of taking on terrorists whose points of origin and eventual destinations are its neighbours.

The determined outreach from Afghanistan to its neighbours is encouraging. Stronger relations between the Governments of Afghanistan and Pakistan are particularly noteworthy, amidst growing recognition of their shared interests.

Ultimately, deeper collaboration on the full range of political, economic and social issues will promote regional stability and prosperity.

Madam President,

The intensification of the conflict was as predicted. There has been higher attrition on both sides, but the most tragic index of this intensification is the toll on civilians – so far this year 4,216 civilians have been killed or injured. Just two days ago, 16 civilians, mostly women and children, were killed when a bus hit an improvised explosive device. Tragic though this is, sadly it was not an isolated incident, rather a typical event.

Such incidents take a terrible emotional and social toll on families, especially surviving widows, often left in the most appalling economic circumstances. Many other Afghans continue to be affected by the conflict, including those who have been displaced. Humanitarian assistance is often impeded by continued insecurity and, lamentably, humanitarian actors have been targeted.

The United Nations will continue to provide humanitarian support to those affected. UNAMA will work to increase levels of trauma care and meet the short term needs of the increasing number of those internally displaced. UNAMA will also continue to advocate with all parties, including the Taliban, to strengthen measures to ensure the protection of civilians.

Madam President,

On the political front, there has also been modest progress. Since I last briefed you, all the members of the cabinet have been appointed, even though one remains to be confirmed. As of this morning, 21 provincial governors have been appointed and there has been agreement on other significant appointments.

After long delays, the Government has committed to appoint the Electoral Reform Commission within a week, and to provide clarity on the electoral calendar within a month. The term of office of the lower house of the National Assembly, the Wolesi Jirga, was due to end today, without the election of the new members having taken place. The lack of clarity on the future of the current Wolesi Jirga had caused consternation, with the potential for public discord. Thankfully, just three days ago, President Ghani decreed an extension of the Wolesi Jirga until elections can be held.

Despite political tensions, Afghan institutions were able to work together to find solutions on sovereign issues. The United Nations looks forward to a decision on the date of the next elections, as well as action to implement the commitment to electoral reform. These steps will go a long way to reassuring Afghans that the democratic institutions and processes are able to fulfil their proper roles and to meet public expectations.

The most difficult aspect of the National Unity Government partnership has been in effecting appointments. With these largely now completed, and the cabinet in place, we can expect to see a more effective functioning of the Government.

Now is the time for a surge in delivery of public services, fulfilment of election promises, and implementation of the reforms set out in London and as promised in the ministerial 100-day action plans. The upcoming Senior Officials Meeting, in less than three months time, of the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework presents an opportunity to demonstrate real progress on the mutual commitments of donors and Governments to supporting governance reforms.

Madam President,

In reference to the request by the Security Council that the Secretary-General initiate an examination of the role, structure and activities of all United Nations entities in Afghanistan, I am pleased to update that we have now agreed with the Government to establish a Commission, comprised of representatives of the Government, the international donor community, UNAMA and affiliated agencies, funds and programmes; co-chaired by UNAMA and the Government. The terms of reference have been shared with the members and the Commission will commence its work shortly and we anticipate having a report ready for the Council by the time of its September meeting on Afghanistan.

Madam President,

Peace would have a major positive impact on the capacity of the Government to address its economic, security and political challenges.

In the long term, peace is not a luxury, it is a necessity. Unless Afghans can find a way to live together in harmony, Afghanistan's political and security institutions and its economy simply may not be sustainable. Failure would have no beneficiaries.

Despite the disturbing security trends, or perhaps as a consequence, there has been a renewed interest in peace efforts to resolve the conflict.

In my last address I spoke of a unique alignment of circumstances that could be conducive to fostering peace talks.

Indeed, the essential ingredients for a peace process are present: a protracted violent conflict with little prospect of a military victory for either side; combined with clear signs of a growing interest in a peace process.

A conference hosted by the Qatari Government in early May reaffirmed the appetite for peace by a wide range of Afghans, showing the potential for progress to that end through dialogue. Since then, there have been several similar meetings in different locations, most recently in Oslo last week, which I attended.

These events confirm that Afghans want an end to the ever-present violence that does so much harm and which shows no signs of abating.

Madam President,

While the Government has repeatedly stated its readiness to engage in direct talks with the Taliban, what is still missing is a clear indication from the Taliban that they are ready to engage directly with the Government.

Without this direct engagement, no meaningful progress towards peace will be possible, a point that I continue to stress in my conversations with Taliban representatives. Conference pronouncements have been useful in clarifying positions, but can never be a format for a systematic engagement between empowered representatives on the conditions for, the agenda of, and the barriers to, an enduring peace. In short, a direct engagement is necessary for a negotiated agreement.

With leadership, peace is within reach. However, the intensification of the conflict is eroding the atmosphere for constructive negotiations. Just as the voices for peace are growing louder, so too are those who believe that peace is neither possible nor desirable or that the focus should now be on war.

It is thus critical that the international community as a whole, and the regional neighbours in particular, send the same message to all involved, unambiguously and forcefully: the time to begin direct peace and reconciliation talks is now.

UNAMA supports such a direct engagement between armed groups and the Government, has attempted to facilitate its realization and will continue to do so, in full consultation with the Government.

Madam President,

I would like to express, finally, my hope that, in this holy month of Ramadan, Afghans will be able to come together to worship in peace.

Thank you.

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