

and I reiterated my deep and personal commitment to the special relationship between our two countries, a bond that has endured for generations and across party lines and that is essential to the security and prosperity of our two countries and the world. I look forward to meeting with the Prime Minister at the G-8/G-20 meetings in June, and Michelle and I invited Prime Minister Cameron and his wife Samantha to visit Washington this summer.

The President's News Conference With President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan May 12, 2010

President Obama. Good morning, everybody. Please be seated. I am very pleased to welcome President Karzai back to the White House. And I also want to welcome the President's delegation, including ministers from across his Government, whose presence speaks to the broad and deepening strategic partnership between the United States and Afghanistan.

This visit is an opportunity to return the hospitality that President Karzai showed me during my recent visit to Afghanistan. And that included a wonderful Afghan dinner that the President shared with us and where we were joined by members of his delegation. So, Mr. President, thank you and welcome to the United States.

More importantly, this visit is an opportunity for us to assess the progress of our shared strategy in Afghanistan and to advance the strong partnership between our two nations, one that's based on mutual interest and mutual respect.

I have reaffirmed the commitment of the United States to an Afghanistan that is stable, strong, and prosperous. Afghans are a proud people who have suffered and sacrificed greatly because of their determination to shape their own destiny.

There is no denying the progress that the Afghan people have made in recent years—in education, in health care, and economic development—as I saw in the lights across Kabul

I also send my best wishes to Gordon Brown and thank him for his friendship and his distinguished service as Prime Minister. He provided strong leadership during challenging times, and I have been grateful for his partnership. This historic election has been closely followed by the American people, and I have no doubt that the ties between our two countries will continue to thrive in the years to come.

when I landed, lights that would not have been visible just a few years earlier.

Nor, however, can we deny the very serious challenges still facing Afghanistan. After 30 years of war, Afghanistan still faces daily challenges in delivering basic services and security to its people while confronting a brutal insurgency.

Whether Afghanistan succeeds in this effort will have consequences for the United States and consequences for the entire world. As we've seen in recent plots here in the United States, Al Qaida and its extremist allies continue to plot in the border regions between Afghanistan and Pakistan. And a growing Taliban insurgency could mean an even larger safe haven for Al Qaida and its affiliates.

So today we are reaffirming our shared goal to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaida and its extremist allies in Afghanistan and Pakistan and to prevent its capacity to threaten America and our allies in the future. And we are reviewing the progress of our shared strategy and objectives: a military effort to reverse the Taliban's momentum and to strengthen Afghanistan's capacity to provide for their own security, a civilian effort to promote good governance and development, and regional cooperation, including with Pakistan, because our strategy has to succeed on both sides of the border.

Now, just over half of the additional military forces that I ordered to Afghanistan in December have now arrived, with the remainder

due by this summer. As part of our 46-nation coalition, allies and partners have increased their commitments as well. We're partnering with Afghan and coalition forces, and we've begun to reverse the momentum of the insurgency. We have taken the fight to the Taliban in Helmand Province, pushed them out of their stronghold in Marja, and are working to give Afghans the opportunity to reclaim their communities.

We've taken extraordinary measures to avoid civilian casualties. And I reiterated in my meeting with President Karzai that the United States will continue to work with our Afghan and international partners to do everything in our power to avoid actions that harm the Afghan people. After all, it's the Afghan people we are working to protect from the Taliban, which is responsible for the vast majority of innocent civilian deaths.

Meanwhile, the training and development of Afghan security forces continues so that they can begin to take the lead in security next year. Towards this end, we're working with the Afghan Government and our allies on a broader framework to guide the transition of responsibility for security, development, and governance in Afghan Provinces. I've also reaffirmed that the United States is committed to transferring responsibility for detention facilities to the Afghan Government.

To support the second part of our strategy, the civilian effort, more American diplomats and experts are now on the ground and are partnering with their Afghan counterparts. In his Inaugural Address and at the London conference, President Karzai committed to making good governance a top priority. And I want to acknowledge the progress that has been made, including strengthening anticorruption efforts, improving governance at Provincial and district levels, and progress towards credible parliamentary elections later this year. Of course, President Karzai and I both acknowledge that much more work needs to be done.

I also welcomed President Karzai's commitment to take additional steps that can improve the lives of the Afghan people in concrete ways, especially with regard to the rule of law, agricultural production, economic growth, and the de-

livery of basic services. I pledged America's continued support for these efforts, and I've asked Secretary Clinton to lead an American delegation to this summer's Kabul conference, where the Afghan Government will be presenting concrete plans to implement the President's commitments.

On the related subject of Afghan-led peace and reconciliation efforts, I appreciated the President sharing his plans for the upcoming consultative peace jirga, an important milestone that America supports. In addition, the United States supports the efforts of the Afghan Government to open the door to Taliban who cut their ties to Al Qaida, abandon violence, and accept the Afghan Constitution, including respect for human rights. And I look forward to a continued dialogue with our Afghan partners on these efforts.

In support of the final part of our strategy, a regional approach, we discussed the importance of Afghanistan's neighbors supporting Afghan sovereignty and security. I was pleased to host President Karzai and President Zardari of Pakistan together here at the White House a year ago, and our trilateral cooperation will continue. Indeed, Pakistan's major offensive against extremist sanctuaries and our blows against the leadership of Al Qaida and its affiliates advance the security of Pakistanis, Afghans, and Americans alike.

Finally, as we pursue our shared strategy to defeat Al Qaida, I'm pleased that our two countries are working to broaden our strategic partnership over the long term. Even as we begin to transition security responsibility to Afghans over the next year, we will sustain a robust commitment in Afghanistan going forward. And the presence here today of so many leaders from both our Governments underscores how we can partner across a full range of areas, including development and agriculture, education and health, rule of law and women's rights.

Together, we can unleash Afghanistan's vast potential. For example, I was pleased to welcome several remarkable Afghan women to our recent entrepreneurship summit here in Washington. And I look forward to formalizing a new strategic partnership between our countries lat-

er this year and to deepening the lasting friendship between our people.

As I've said on numerous occasions, there are many difficult days ahead in Afghanistan. We face a determined and ruthless enemy, but we go forward with confidence because we have something that our adversaries do not. We have a commitment to seek a future of justice and peace and opportunity for the Afghan people. And we have the courage and resolve of men and women from Afghanistan and our international coalition who are determined to help Afghans realize that future. And as I did at Bagram during my visit, I especially want to acknowledge the extraordinary sacrifices that are being made by American troops and civilians in Afghanistan every single day.

Our solidarity today sends a unmistakable message to those who would stand in the way of Afghanistan's progress. They may threaten and murder innocent people, but we will work to protect the Afghan people. They will try to destroy, but we will continue to help build Afghan capacity and allow Afghans to take responsibility for their country. They will try to drive us apart, but we will partner with the Afghan people for the long term, toward a future of greater security, prosperity, justice, and progress. And I'm absolutely convinced we will succeed.

That is the work that we have advanced today. And I again want to thank our partners, President Karzai and his delegation, for the progress we have made and can continue to make in the months and years ahead.

President Karzai.

President Karzai. Thank you, Mr. President. I'm very grateful, Mr. President, for the kind hospitality that you and your team offered during our—this visit to the United States. As always, you have been gracious and kind and very hospitable.

We began our visit the day before yesterday with an informal dinner with Secretary Clinton and Secretary Gates. And we yesterday had at the State Department with Secretary Clinton an extremely fruitful meeting of the groups of Afghan ministries and their counterparts in the U.S. Government, outlining the progress we have made in the past several years and our

aspirations for the future and our common objectives towards the future as we travel along.

Mr. President, I yesterday had the honor of visiting Walter Reed's hospital, where I visited with the wounded who had returned from Afghanistan and from Iraq. It was a very difficult moment for me, Mr. President, to meet with a young man—very, very young man—who had lost two arms and legs. It was heart-rendering, and there were other wounded too, just like I have seen in Afghanistan.

This shows the commitment that the United States has to bringing security to Afghanistan and, by extension, to the United States and the rest of the world and the difficult task that we have ahead of us in securing our future generations a better and more secure life.

Mr. President, I thank you again for the excellent meeting this morning, in which President Obama and I discussed the entire structure of Afghan-American relationship—the issues that we have together inside Afghanistan, the progress that we have made together, the campaign that still is going on against terrorism, the successes of the past years, which are numerous and great—for which I again express gratitude on behalf of the Afghan people to the American people and to you, Mr. President.

And I also thanked President Obama for adding considerable resources to the success in Afghanistan on becoming the President of the United States, for which, Mr. President, I convey the gratitude of the Afghan people. And I can reassure you that we will work with dedication and extreme care to have those resources spent well and in place for a better future for the Afghan people.

We also discussed during our meeting this morning the Afghan-American strategic partnership and the relations towards the future beyond the successes that we will certainly gain against terrorism, the issues related to the region and Afghanistan, Afghanistan's difficulties and concerns with regard to capacity, institution building, the buildup of the Afghan security forces, the Afghan economy, the issues of agriculture and energy, and all those issues of developmental importance to Afghanistan,

for which the United States is putting in considerable resources.

We also discussed the peace process and the upcoming peace consultative jirga in Kabul, for which, Mr. President, I am grateful to you for your support and very kind advice. We also discussed the parliamentary elections—the upcoming parliamentary elections in Afghanistan and the Kabul conference. We discussed in quite detail and in a very frank and productive manner the issues of protection of civilians and judicial—with respect to the judicial independence of Afghanistan.

I found it very happy and—for me to convey back to the Afghan people that I found a very supportive voice from President Obama on these accounts. And I'm very glad to report to you that we'll be setting up a team of our senior advisers to work out the exact timelines of the transfer of detention centers to the Afghan Government, which I consider to be a major point of progress in our conversations.

Mr. President, I once again would like to convey to you and to the people of the United States our deep, heartfelt gratitude to the help that America has provided Afghanistan. Because of that, it is once again on the world map in a significantly impartial way. Our flag is flying all around the world. We are present in all the important occasions. We once again have a voice as the people of Afghanistan. And this would have not been possible without the sacrifices and the resources that the United States and our other allies have put in.

Afghanistan is grateful. Afghanistan will definitely, with your help, succeed towards the future. There are, of course, issues that are still of concern to all of us. We have shortcomings in Afghanistan still. Afghanistan is still a very, very poor country. The work that we have done promises a better future for all of us, and Afghanistan will assure you, Mr. President, that it will take the right steps in bringing a better Government to Afghanistan for the benefit of the Afghan people and in partnership with the United States of America.

I thank you once again, Mr. President, for the tremendous hospitality.

President Obama. Thank you. All right, we've got time for two questions from the U.S. press,

two questions from the Afghan press. And so I will start with Mark Knoller of CBS Radio. Where's Mark?

Q. Right here, sir.

President Obama. There he is. Good to see you, Mark.

Prime Minister David Cameron of the United Kingdom/United Kingdom-U.S. Relations/Afghanistan-U.S. Relations

Q. Thanks. Gentlemen, it sounds from your statements as though you've been able to put aside the tensions and frictions that were in evidence a month or so ago. Can you tell us if you discussed those concerns that were raised at that time? And have you figured out how the relationship may have come off the tracks?

And, Mr. President, may I also ask you about your talk with the new Prime Minister of the United Kingdom yesterday? Are you worried in any way that the U.K.'s support in Afghanistan might wane?

President Obama. Well, I will take the second question first. I had a conversation with David Cameron yesterday. He's somebody who I had had the occasion of meeting when I had traveled to England previously. I find him to be a smart, dedicated, effective leader and somebody who we are going to be able to work with very effectively.

He reaffirmed—without me bringing it up—his commitment to our strategy in Afghanistan. And I am confident that the new Government is going to recognize that it is in the interests of all the coalition partners to help President Karzai succeed and to build a more prosperous and secure and stable Afghanistan, which in turn will help assure our long-term security.

And by the way, when we—when I had the conversation with Prime Minister Cameron, I—we also both reaffirmed the extraordinary special relationship between the United States and Great Britain, one that outlasts any individual party, any individual leader. It is built up over centuries, and it's not going to go away.

With respect to perceived tensions between the U.S. Government and the Afghan Government, let me begin by saying a lot of them were simply overstated. When I came into office, I

made it absolutely clear that I intended to resource an effective strategy in Afghanistan and work with the Afghan Government so that we have a strong, stable, prosperous Afghanistan. And I've used whatever political capital I have to make the case to the American people that this is in our national security interests, that it's absolutely critical that we succeed on this mission.

President Karzai agrees that we have to deal with the extremists that are disrupting life in Afghanistan. And our strategic approach has been entirely consistent. Now, obviously, there are going to be tensions in such a complicated, difficult environment, and a—in a situation in which on the ground, both Afghans and Americans are making enormous sacrifices.

We've had very frank discussions, and President Karzai agrees with me that we can't win through a military strategy alone, that we're going to have to make sure that we have effective governance, capacity building, economic development in order for us to succeed.

And I think that what we discussed this morning is a recognition on both sides that this transformation is not going to happen overnight, that a country that's come out of 30 years of war and dire poverty is not going to suddenly change across the board. Our job is to be a good friend and to be frank with President Karzai in saying, here's where we think we've got to put more effort. President Karzai's job is to represent his country and insist that its sovereignty is properly respected, even as he goes about the hard task of bringing about these changes in both his Government and his economy.

And so I am very comfortable with the strong efforts that President Karzai have—has made thus far. And I think that we both agree that we're going to have to make more efforts in the future. And there are going to be setbacks; there are going to be times where our Governments disagree on a particular tactic. But what I'm very confident about is, is that we share a broad strategy, one that I hope we can memorialize in a declaration by the end of this year.

President Karzai. Well, sir, the relationship between Afghanistan and the United States is now into its 10th year, in the form that it has since September 11, 2001. It's not an imaginary relationship, it's a real relationship. It's based on some very hard and difficult realities. We are in a campaign against terrorism together. There are days that we are happy; there are days that we are not happy. It's a mutual relationship towards a common objective.

And definitely, days have come in which we have had a difference of opinion, and definitely, days in the future will come in which we have difference of opinion. But the relationship between the two Governments and the two nations is strong and well rooted and has endured the past 10 years of extreme activity on both sides.

So I believe what you saw in the past few months is reflective of a deep and strong relationship. And in that sort of relationship, as President Obama rightly described, there are moments that we speak frankly to each other, and that frankness will only add to the strength of the relationship and contribute to the successes that we have.

The bottom line is that we are much more strongly related to each other today than we ever were before in this relationship. And that is a good message that I will take back to the Afghan people the day after tomorrow.

Pakistan/Afghan Civilian Casualties

Q. Thank you very much. First of all, thank you very much, Mr. President, to give this chance. There is a lot of issue in Afghanistan as long as I remember. First of all, I'm sorry, I should introduce myself. My name is Nazira Azim Karimi. I'm a correspondent for Ariana Television from Afghanistan.

Today I'm not talking about as a journalist, as a woman in Afghanistan. As long as I remember, regarding Afghanistan's situation, the only reason that Afghanistan is not civilized: Pakistan. You mentioned, President Obama, about Pakistan. Pakistan has two faces regarding Afghanistan. That's why all the time we have problem. The Pakistan Government is not really, really honest regarding—regard Afghanistan. I need your answer: What is

the new policy of United States to solve this problem?

And next question from President Karzai, I want to ask my question in Dari, and I want to answer it in Dari too.

[At this point, the reporter spoke in Dari, and no translation was provided.]

Thank you.

President Obama. Okay. I know you're going to translate that for us. [Laughter] He's very good at—[laughter].

Q. Yes. Civilian casualty.

President Obama. President Karzai and I have in the past met with Pakistan's President, President Zardari, as well as their intelligence officers, their military, their teams, and emphasized to Pakistan the fact that our security is intertwined.

I think there has been in the past a view on the part of Pakistan that their primary rival, India, was their only concern. I think what you've seen over the last several months is a growing recognition that they have a cancer in their midst, that the extremist organizations that have been allowed to congregate and use as a base the frontier areas to then go into Afghanistan, that that now threatens Pakistan's sovereignty.

Our goal is to break down some of the old suspicions and the old bad habits and continue to work with the Pakistani Government to see their interest in a stable Afghanistan which is free from foreign meddling and that Afghanistan, Pakistan, the United States, the international community should all be working to reduce the influence of extremists in those regions. And I am actually encouraged by what I've seen from the Pakistani Government over the last several months.

But just as it's going to take some time for Afghanistan's economy, for example, to fully recover from 30 years of war, it's going to take some time for Pakistan, even where there is a will, to find a way in order to effectively deal with these extremists in areas that are fairly loosely governed from Islamabad.

Part of what I've been encouraged by is Pakistan's willingness to start asserting more control over some of these areas. But it's not going to happen overnight. And they have been taking

enormous casualties; the Pakistani military has been going in fairly aggressively. But this will be an ongoing project.

And President Karzai and I both discussed the fact that the only way ultimately that Pakistan is secure is if Afghanistan is secure. And the only way that Afghanistan is secure is if the sovereignty, the territorial integrity, the Afghan Constitution, the Afghan people are respected by their neighbors. We think that that message is starting to get through, but it's one that we have to continue to promote.

President Karzai. Ma'am, we did discuss civilian casualties, the protection of civilians. I must report to you, ma'am, that since the arrival of General McChrystal in Afghanistan, there has been considerable progress achieved in this regard. There is a very open and frank attitude about that now.

The President expressed in fundamentally human terms his concern about civilian casualties, not only as a political issue but as a human issue, that President Obama remarked about, to which I have my respects to the President on this issue.

We not only discussed the ways and means of how to reduce civilian casualties—rather not have them at all—nitrates were discussed, and detentions were discussed, the way I made a remark about in my opening remarks. And you will see the agreements between us on this reflected in the joint communique that I hope is coming up or is already issued.

Mr. President.

U.S. Troop Levels and Progress in Afghanistan/ Afghan Civilian Casualties/Iran

President Obama. Suzanne Malveaux [CNN].

Q. Thank you, Mr. President. With the thousands of U.S. troops and billions of dollars in aid that still pour into Afghanistan, can you talk to the American people and give us a sense of where we stand, how close we are to winning this war in Afghanistan, and whether or not you'll be able to meet your goal of pulling out the majority of U.S. troops by July of 2011?

And to President Karzai, is there anything that you can do, your Government or your peo-

ple, to maintain that deadline, that endgame of July 2011?

And have you found your meetings with Iran's President, Mahmud Ahmadi-nejad, to be helpful or hurtful in your relationship with the Obama administration? Thank you.

President Obama. Well, Suzanne, first of all let's be clear about what July 2011 represents. What I have said is, is that having put in more troops over the last several months in order to break the momentum of the Taliban, that beginning in 2011, July, we will start bringing those troops down and turning over more and more responsibility to Afghan security forces that we are building up.

But we are not suddenly, as of July 2011, finished with Afghanistan. In fact, to the contrary, part of what I've tried to emphasize to President Karzai and the Afghan people, but also to the American people, is this is a long-term partnership that is not simply defined by our military presence.

I am confident that we're going to be able to reduce our troop strength in Afghanistan starting in July 2011, and I am in constant discussions with General McChrystal, as well as Ambassador Eikenberry, about the execution of that timeframe. But after July 2011, we are still going to have an interest in making sure that Afghanistan is secure, that economic development is taking place, that good governance is being promoted. And so we're going to still be putting in resources and we're still going to be a friend to the Afghan people in their efforts to stabilize. So that's something I want to make absolutely clear.

Now, to the American people, I think what they should know is, is that we are steadily making progress. It's not overnight, it's not going to be instant, but the sacrifices of those young people that President Karzai visited in Walter Reed, those sacrifices result over time in more and more of Afghanistan being under the control of the Afghan Government and our friend and ally, President Karzai, and less and less under the control of the Taliban.

As I indicated in my opening remarks, this is not just going to be a military solution. And so through the peace jirga that President Karzai is organizing, through the Kabul confer-

ence that sends a strong message about the Afghan Government's commitment to rule of law and good governance and human rights and women's rights, through all those mechanisms, more and more, the Afghan people start feeling confident in the Afghan Government. And as their confidence in the Afghan Government grows, their fear of the Taliban weakens.

And we are confident that that approach that has a strong military component to it, that is mindful of the enormous sacrifices that our troops and their families are making, that component is critical, but these other components are going to be critical as well. And if we marry those two approaches, then we are optimistic about success.

But there are going to be ups and downs. And one thing that I've tried to emphasize is the fact that there's going to be some hard fighting over the next several months. The fact that we are engaging—you look at a place like Marja; the Taliban controlled that area. And when you move in and you say, you're not controlling this area anymore, they're going to fight back. And they're tough, and they're going to fight. But what you're seeing, not only have we succeeded in driving the Taliban out of Marja, but it also is a model of the partnership between U.S. forces and Afghan forces.

And so you're starting to see Afghan Government forces, battle-ready, toughened, getting more experience. That then helps us to execute a transition so that more and more Afghan forces are able to take the lead. But this is going to be taking some time.

One last point I want to make—because President Karzai referred to the issue of civilian casualties, the Afghan journalist asked about it—let me be very clear about what I told President Karzai. When there is a civilian casualty, that is not just a political problem for me. I am ultimately accountable, just as General McChrystal is accountable, for somebody who is not on the battlefield who got killed. And that is something that I have to carry with me and that anybody who is involved in a military operation has to carry with them.

And so we do not take that lightly. We have an interest in reducing civilian casualties not because it's a problem for President Karzai,

we have an interest in reducing civilian casualties because I don't want civilians killed.

President Karzai. Exactly.

President Obama. And we are going to do everything we can to prevent that.

Now, war is tough and difficult, and mistakes are going to be made. And our troops put themselves at risk oftentimes in order to reduce civilian casualties. They will take a chance often in a field of battle where they're trying to deal with uncertain information, and they're not sure whether that's an attack coming or not, or which house these shots are being fired from. And because of General McChrystal's direction, oftentimes they're holding fire, they're hesitating, they're being cautious about how they operate, even though it would be safer for them to go ahead and just take these locations out, because part of what the American military stands for is that we distinguish between civilians and combatants, something, by the way, that our enemies do not do. And that puts us more at risk, and it makes it more difficult, but that's a burden that we're willing to bear.

But I want everybody to be clear, especially the Afghan people: I take no pleasure in hearing a report that a civilian has been killed. That's not why I ran for President. That's not why I'm Commander in Chief. That's not why our young men and women sign up. That's not why they sacrifice in the ways that President Karzai saw they sacrifice when they're in Walter Reed. And we are going to work together as assiduously as we can to make sure that those civilian casualties are reduced, even as we try to accomplish a mission and even as we are reminding ourselves constantly that the overwhelming majority of civilian casualties in Afghanistan are as a consequence of terrorist acts by the Taliban.

President Karzai.

President Karzai. Ma'am, on the July 2011, Afghanistan's Army and police are progressing steadily towards strengthening and towards institutionalizing. We plan to be conducting—providing security for our country in major parts of that country where we have the ability within the next 2 years.

And by the time my term of office completes in 4 years, 4½ years from today, Afghanistan is

working hard to provide security for the whole of the country through the Afghan means and Afghan security institutions. On the overall picture, President Obama spoke for both of us on the issue of July 2011.

On the question of Iran and my meeting with President Ahmadinejad in Tehran and his visit to Kabul, Afghanistan's position there is very clear from the very first day. And we have been clear with our brothers and counterparts in Iran on that as well and with our other neighbors. Afghanistan is a partner and a friend with the United States.

The United States is our greatest contributor to stability and reconstruction, as the provider of nearly 80 percent of the support that Afghanistan receives. And Afghanistan's desire to engage in a strong, steady, long-term relationship with America is one that we have expressed clearly and publicly and repeatedly.

We've also spoken with our American counterparts from the very beginning that Iran is our neighbor and a brother and we want to have the best of relations with them. They've had contributions to Afghanistan's reconstruction. We wish that Afghanistan remains friendly to both and is not a place where we are seen as a playground by our neighbors in any way.

So the United States has been very clear and supportive and understanding of Afghan position. And this has been reflected in the discussions between us. And in the declaration, the joint communique, there was a reference to Afghanistan having friendly relations with its neighbors, and Iran is one of our neighbors. But we are distinct and clear on our relation with America and with Iran as well. We wish both countries the best. And if there anything we can do to make things better, call us. [Laughter]

Ma'am.

Reconciliation Efforts With Taliban in Afghanistan

Q. I am Lina Rozbih, Afghanistan Service, Voice of America. I will ask President Karzai a question and then President Obama. One of the—

President Karzai. Voice of America's Afghanistan Service?

Q. Yes.

President Karzai. Good, good.

Q. Thank you. One of the purposes of your trip here is to gain the support of U.S. Government for reconciliation and reintegration of Taliban in Afghanistan. When you first initiated this strategy or plan, you were interested into talks with lower to middle level of Taliban. But you have increasingly shown interest into bringing Taliban leaders into the negotiations, while Taliban made it very clear that the only way for them to talk to the Afghan Government is the complete withdrawal of foreign troops from Afghanistan and the creation of a sharia-based government in that country. Are you sure that this strategy, after all the support that you will gain from international community, will be a successful one and it will not be yet another failed strategy in Afghanistan?

And my question for President Obama would be that Secretary Clinton yesterday mentioned in a gathering that U.S. support this initiative only if the Taliban put their weapons down, respect the Afghan Constitution, and cut all ties with Al Qaida. And we all know that Taliban, Al Qaida, are pretty much fighting for the ideology, not material gains. And it's very hard to differentiate between the two in Pakistan and Afghanistan since they are fighting as a united force in those countries. Do you think it's a doable strategy for Afghanistan? Thank you.

President Karzai. Ma'am—

[*President Karzai coughed.*]

Excuse me. Ma'am, exactly the last part of your question is my answer. [*Laughter*] Afghanistan is seeking peace because through military means alone we are not going to get our objectives of bringing stability and peace to Afghanistan and the defeat of terrorism.

Now, there are thousands of the Taliban who are not ideologically oriented, who are not part of Al Qaida or other terrorist networks or controlled from outside in any manner troublesome to us. There are thousands of them who are country boys who have been driven by intimidation or fear caused by, at times, misconduct by us or circumstances beyond their control or our control.

It is these thousands of Taliban who are not against Afghanistan or against the Afghan people or their country, who are not against America either or the rest of the world, and who want to come back to Afghanistan if given an opportunity and provided the political means. It's this group of the Taliban that we are addressing in the peace jirga. It is this group that has our intention.

Those within the Taliban leadership structure who, again, are not part of Al Qaida or the terrorist networks or ideologically against Afghanistan's progress and rights and Constitution, democracy, the place of women in the Afghan society, the progress that they've made, and are willing to march ahead with the rest of their people and their country towards a better future for Afghanistan, are welcome. And the jirga—the peace consultative jirga is intended for consulting the Afghan people, taking their advice on how and through which means and which speed should the Afghan Government proceed in the quest for peace.

President Obama. Well, I think President Karzai summed it up well. We've been very clear that we need ultimately a political component to our overarching strategy in Afghanistan. And as President Karzai described, the Taliban is a loose term for a wide range of different networks, groups, fighters with different motivations.

What we've said is that so long as there's a respect for the Afghan Constitution, rule of law, human rights, so long as they are willing to renounce violence and ties to Al Qaida and other extremist networks, that President Karzai should be able to work to reintegrate those individuals into Afghan society.

This has to be an Afghan-led effort, though. It's not one that's dictated by the United States or any other outside power. And I think that the peace jirga will allow for a framework to then move forward.

One of the things I emphasized to President Karzai, however, is, is that the incentives for the Taliban to lay down arms, or at least portions of the Taliban to lay down arms, and make peace with the Afghan Government in part depends on our effectiveness in breaking their momentum militarily. And that's why we

put in the additional U.S. troops. That's why General McChrystal is working so hard to clear out key population centers from Taliban control.

And so the timing, how the reconciliation process works, at what point do the Taliban start making different calculations about what's in their interests, and how the Afghan people feel about these issues, is in part going to be dependent on our success in terms of carrying out our mission there. So we are a very, I think, important partner in facilitating this potential reconciliation and effectively empowering the Afghan Government so that it is in the strongest possible position as these talks move forward.

Let me just say in conclusion, again, Mr. President, I am grateful for your visit. This is a reaffirmation of the friendship between the American people and the Afghan people.

When I came into office, I made it very clear that after years of some drift in the relationship, that I saw this as a critical priority. I also said to the American people that this was going to take some time and it was going to be hard, that we weren't going to see magical transformations immediately, but with slow, steady, persistent work on the part of both the United States and

the Afghan Government, that I was confident that, in fact, we could achieve peace and stability and security there and that that ultimately would make the American people more safe and more secure.

I am more convinced than ever that we have found a difficult, but appropriate strategy for pursuing those goals. And I'm confident that we're going to be able to achieve our mission. There are going to be setbacks. There are going to be times where the Afghan Government and the U.S. Government disagree tactically. But I think our overarching approach is unified. And I think the visit by President Karzai to the United States and his willingness to listen to our concerns, even as we listen to his, as he indicated, only makes the relationship stronger.

Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President's news conference began at 11:40 a.m. in the East Room at the White House. In his remarks, the President referred to Gen. Stanley A. McChrystal, USA, commander, NATO International Security Assistance Force, Afghanistan; and U.S. Ambassador to Afghanistan Karl W. Eikenberry.

Joint Statement by President Barack Obama and President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan

May 12, 2010

U.S. President Barack Obama and Afghan President Hamid Karzai, accompanied by senior-level delegations, convened wide-ranging discussions on May 11–12, 2010, aimed at deepening cooperation on the shared and mutual priorities of the United States and Afghanistan. These discussions on governance, security, economic and social development, and regional issues built on past sessions of the United States–Afghanistan Strategic Dialogue.

President Obama and President Karzai reaffirmed their growing cooperation and their commitment to the solid, broad, and enduring strategic partnership between the governments and peoples of the United States and Afghanistan. This partnership is based on shared interests and objectives, as well as mutual respect.

The two sides declared that a sovereign, stable, secure, peaceful, and economically viable Afghanistan that has friendly relations with all its neighbors and countries in the region is vital to regional stability and global security.

Securing Afghanistan's Future

President Obama recognized the courage and determination of the Afghan people to resist violent extremists and to ensure that their country does not once again become a safe haven for terrorists, including al-Qaeda. President Karzai expressed deep appreciation for the vital support of the 46 troop-contributing countries to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's (NATO's) International Security Assistance Force, including ongoing stabilization efforts.