

Joint Statement by President Obama and President Ashraf Ghani Ahmadzai of Afghanistan

March 24, 2015

President Barack Obama welcomed Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah, and the accompanying Afghan delegation to Washington from March 22–26, 2015.

The visit offered an opportunity to renew U.S.-Afghan relations, review the joint achievements of the last 13 years in Afghanistan, and to discuss the actions each country needs to take to ensure that the social, economic, security and human rights gains made over that period are sustained and advanced.

President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah expressed deep appreciation for the contributions, sacrifices and sustained commitment of the United States that made these achievements possible and underscored that this support is paying dividends for Afghans, Americans, and the international community alike. The Afghan economy has grown more than fourfold over the last 13 years and young Afghans are attending school at unprecedented levels, with girls and women comprising a growing percentage of these students.

The leaders further noted the success of joint counter-terrorism efforts to date and emphasized that sustained U.S. and other international assistance will be important to enable the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to address the significant security challenges facing Afghanistan and the wider region. President Obama and President Ghani reiterated their commitments under the U.S.-Afghanistan Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA) and the U.S.-Afghanistan Security and Defense Cooperation Agreement (also known as the Bilateral Security Agreement, or BSA) to advance common objectives in these and other areas. The Presidents welcomed the decision of Secretary of State Kerry and Foreign Minister Rabbani made on March 23 at Camp David to meet again in Kabul this year to restart the U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Commission meetings and to review progress in the implementation of the SPA.

Promoting Our Shared Democratic Values

President Obama commended President Ghani, Chief Executive Abdullah and the Afghan people on the landmark 2014 presidential election resulting in the first democratic and peaceful transfer of power in Afghanistan's history. President Ghani noted that the broad based and inclusive National Unity Government that emerged from that election enjoys the full support of the Afghan people. President Obama welcomed the recent announcement of a slate of cabinet nominees. President Ghani reaffirmed the new Afghan government's commitment to maintaining and expanding the role of an independent, vibrant civil society and to protecting the human rights of all Afghans. President Obama encouraged a strong partnership between President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah and welcomed the National Unity Government's goals of promoting security, economic growth, democracy and human rights, in particular the rights of women and minorities. President Obama further welcomed the announcement of the establishment of the Afghan Special Commission for Electoral Reform envisioned in the September 2014 political framework as a means to further the national unity

government's goals in this area and offered financial support for Afghan electoral operations and reform efforts.

Advancing Long-Term Security and Strengthening the Peace Process

President Ghani and President Obama reaffirmed their shared commitment, reflected in the SPA and BSA, to closely cooperate in preventing terrorists from ever again using Afghan soil to threaten Afghanistan, the region, or the world. President Obama hailed the successful completion of the security transition, the end of the NATO-led combat mission, and Afghan forces taking the lead on, and full responsibility for, security throughout Afghanistan. The leaders also acknowledged the important continuing role of NATO's new Resolute Support Mission in supporting the further development of the ANDSF's capabilities.

Both Presidents saluted the courage and growing capability of Afghan security forces, including their success in securing the elections last year. The leaders joined in paying their respects to the families of Afghan soldiers and civilians who have been killed or injured in the 13-year war. President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah also offered condolences to the families of American soldiers and civilians who were killed and injured while serving in Afghanistan, and on behalf of the Afghan people, expressed gratitude to the American people for their sacrifices and continued support.

Both sides agreed on an early formation of the Joint Commission to oversee the implementation of the BSA and President Obama affirmed ongoing U.S. support for Afghan security forces. Based on President Ghani's request for flexibility in the U.S. draw down timeline, the U.S. will maintain its current posture of 9,800 troops through the end of 2015. The specific trajectory of the 2016 U.S. troop drawdown will be established later in 2015 to enable the U.S. troop consolidation to a Kabul-based embassy presence by the end of 2016. This flexibility reflects the re-invigorated partnership with Afghanistan, which is aimed at making Afghanistan secure and preventing it from being used to launch terrorist attacks. Reconciliation and a political settlement remain the surest way to achieve the full retrograde of U.S. and foreign troops from Afghanistan in a way that safeguards international interests and peace in Afghanistan, as well as U.S. national security interests. Consistent with the principles of the SPA and BSA and as part of the broader bilateral security relationship, the two Presidents agreed to continue a dialogue on U.S. and Afghan counterterrorism (CT) objectives, to include the development of a joint CT partnership strategy through and beyond 2016.

While reaffirming their determination to cooperate against those who advocate violence and extremism, President Obama and President Ghani also stressed the need for an Afghan-led peace process, enjoying regional support, in particular from Pakistan, noting that as a part of the outcome of any such process, the Taliban and other armed opposition groups must end violence, break ties with international terrorist groups, and accept Afghanistan's constitution, including its protections for the rights of women and minorities. President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah emphasized their mutual and strong determination to advance a reconciliation process based on these principles. President Obama reaffirmed strong U.S. support for an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace process and committed to make available additional financial support for the Afghan Peace and Reintegration Program (APRP) to facilitate the peaceful reintegration of former combatants into their local communities.

President Obama welcomed recent developments in Afghan-Pakistani relations. Both leaders emphasized the importance of continued efforts to advance Afghan-Pakistani dialogue aimed at building trust and producing tangible progress in the peace process, and improving the security situation in Afghanistan, Pakistan and the region at large.

Reinforcing Regional Security and Cooperation

The leaders called on all countries in the region to support Afghanistan's security, stability and prosperity. Both presidents endorsed efforts to deepen the Heart of Asia-Istanbul Process and expressed appreciation to China for hosting the October 2014 Heart of Asia summit and to Pakistan for hosting the next meeting later this year. President Obama welcomed steps by the National Unity Government to integrate Afghanistan more fully into the regional economy through various regional organizations, processes and programs and committed continued U.S. support for those efforts. President Ghani presented a development strategy built around regional connectivity, good governance, and investments for productivity. Central to this strategy is cooperation between Afghanistan and the region through trade, transit and investments. The two Presidents agreed to work to bring together like-minded countries to discuss Afghanistan and regional integration efforts at a high-level meeting on the margins of the 2015 United Nations General Assembly meeting.

Fostering Social and Economic Development

The leaders acknowledged the significant challenges Afghanistan is facing as it strives to overcome its current budgetary gap, and become increasingly economically and fiscally self-reliant. Emphasizing that economic reform is a central pillar of the National Unity Government's agenda, President Ghani briefed President Obama on specific steps the Afghan government is taking to combat corruption, increase transparency, reduce poverty and create jobs. President Ghani noted that in addition to many recent achievements, Afghanistan continues to face formidable challenges, including the need to root out corruption and strengthen good governance, build the foundation for sustainable and inclusive economic growth, increase regional connectivity, and address illicit drug production in Afghanistan. In support of these efforts, President Obama and President Ghani announced a New Development Partnership that would focus up to \$800 million in U.S. economic assistance on urgent Afghan priorities tied to Afghan achievements of specific development results and implementation of key policy reforms. President Obama also welcomed the recent successful negotiation of an IMF Staff Monitored Program for Afghanistan. President Ghani committed to take action on all necessary steps needed to implement this program.

Both Presidents further welcomed the decision to resume regular meetings of the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement Council and the agreement to expand capacity-building cooperation between the U.S. Treasury Department and relevant Afghan government agencies as set forth in the agreement signed by Treasury Secretary Lew and Finance Minister Hakimi on March 23 at Camp David.

President Obama and President Ghani agreed that Afghan prosperity depended on the development of the country's human capital. To this end President Ghani reiterated the Afghan government's determination to educate all Afghan boys and girls. President Obama expressed U.S. intent to provide sustained support for education in Afghanistan. Noting the significant impact that educational and cultural exchanges have had on Afghan and American society, and the U.S. commitment in the SPA to promote such programs, President Obama announced the U.S. intention to increase the number of Fulbright fellowships available to qualified Afghan students by 50 percent for the next five years, making this one of the largest Fulbright programs in the world. In addition, President Obama announced the establishment of an \$18 million USAID scholarship program to support women attending universities throughout Afghanistan. The two presidents also welcomed the decision of the Smithsonian Institution to host a major exhibition of contemporary Afghan handicrafts in 2016.

Strengthening Afghan Institutions and Governance

President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah outlined the National Unity Government's efforts to improve government performance, effectiveness, efficiency, and combat corruption. They also underscored the National Unity Government's commitment to upholding the rule of law and reforming the judiciary. They stressed that restoring Afghan people's confidence in justice institutions is a top priority for the Afghan government. President Obama and President Ghani agreed on the importance of cooperating to provide justice sector personnel with the skills and qualifications needed to counter narcotics, ensure safe and humane corrections, expand legal education, protect the rights of women and girls, and provide other essential justice services.

Conclusion

This visit constituted the first meeting among President Obama, President Ghani and Chief Executive Abdullah since the inauguration of the National Unity Government last September and marked a pivotal moment in the U.S.-Afghan partnership. Looking back, it was an opportunity to review the remarkable strategic, political and economic achievements of this partnership and the successful completion of the security transition in Afghanistan. Looking forward, both presidents endorsed a vision of a sustained relationship rooted in shared values, interests and sacrifices, bound by mutual commitments enshrined in the U.S.-Afghanistan Enduring Strategic Partnership Agreement.

NOTE: An original was not available for verification of the content of this joint statement.

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