



Integrated Country Strategy

Afghanistan

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1. Chief of Mission Priorities

U.S. policy in Afghanistan -- and the work of Embassy Kabul -- are grounded in the fundamental objective of preventing attacks on the United States by terrorists enjoying safe haven or support in Afghanistan. Our policy priorities and operations center on ending the conflict between the Taliban and wider Afghan society that perpetuates instability and sustains an ecosystem for other insurgents and terrorists; supporting this country's security institutions and consolidating and sustaining the effects of U.S. counterterrorism efforts to date; creating a sovereign, unified, and democratic Afghanistan at peace with itself and its neighbors on a path to prosperity and self-reliance for the benefit of all its citizens; and shifting responsibility to Afghans for securing their borders and their institutions and meeting basic needs in a transparent and inclusive manner.

Achieving these objectives will continue to require robust diplomacy, as well as security and economic assistance, backed by the resilient security and life-support infrastructure that sustains Mission Afghanistan. Intense efforts to assess threats and manage risk, and assure the security of our personnel and facilities must continue to keep our people safe - as is close coordination with U.S. Forces, for as long as they remain in Afghanistan, to maintain unity of effort. Our sustained development assistance and capacity building must be tailored to accelerate the transition of core security and governance functions to the Afghan government.

Many factors shape the environment in which we pursue the above goals. On the negative side are the constant threat of violence by the Taliban, including the Haqqani network, ISIS-K and other terrorist group violence, adventurism by Afghanistan's neighbors, natural disasters and the COVID-19 pandemic. Poor and ill-resourced governance, weak political and economic institutions and structural economic problems exacerbate Afghanistan's challenges. We continue to work Afghan partners in the security forces, government, private sector and civil society on reform and to secure the gains of the past two decades, including to safeguard the rights of women and ethnic and religious minorities and in the context of any political settlement to war. Although the pressure of our new conditions-based strategy has brought both sides to the negotiating table in pursuit of a political settlement, elevated levels of violence have persisted throughout the country and threaten to undermine the nascent peace process.

Mission Afghanistan prioritizes success in the peace process for bringing about the stability that is essential to ensure this country is never again a base for terrorist threats against the United States, its allies, or its interests. To this end, we support the talks underway in Doha through direct diplomacy, engagement with the security sector, other assistance funding that may be directly or indirectly related to the peace process, and vigorous advocacy and dialogue with the Afghan public. We have done this against the backdrop of reduced staffing, both in Kabul and in the field.

Bringing about and implementing a peace settlement requires basic government functionality and political coherence. The 2019 election was the country's first Afghan-owned and -led (and majority Afghan-funded) electoral process. In technical terms, it reflected improvements, but turnout was suppressed by Taliban threats and violence, and the result was contested. Unfortunately the forces that have historically separated Afghans continue to undermine the power sharing agreement reached by President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah Abdullah in May 2020 to resolve that contested electoral outcome. The Afghan public is increasingly skeptical of the government's commitment to respect the rule of law, address corruption, and appoint senior-level officials based on merit rather than personal allegiance. We have continued our efforts to help Afghans increase government transparency, hold corrupt actors to account, and strengthen law enforcement. The November 23-24, 2020 Afghanistan Pledging Conference proved to be a unique opportunity for the United States and other international donors to send a clear message to Afghanistan about needed reforms and the implementation to advance international standards for the rule of law, effectively combat corruption, and protect human rights, in particular the rights of women and marginalized groups.

Transnational threats remain a significant challenge for this region. We will continue to build on strong cooperation with Afghan counterparts to track people, weapons, and illicit financial flows of concern to the United States. Criminal networks take advantage of Afghanistan's ungoverned physical spaces and gaps in regulation and enforcement, while terrorists benefitting from such conditions to spread extremist doctrines. Afghan security forces and government authorities collaborate with us to contain our common enemies.

A growing Afghan economy and job creation remain necessary predicates for stability and the development that makes it resilient. Challenges extend beyond these issues, relating to security. The COVID-19 pandemic caused great hardship and disruption. Capricious application of the law and regulations and an often business-unfriendly environment persist. Using capacity-building programs, high-level engagement, and the agenda of the Afghanistan Compact, we are working with partners in the government and business community who want to see investment, development, and increased trade take the place of donor dependence. At least up to the COVID-19 pandemic, every year we have seen the percentage of the budget that Afghans fund increase, and we will continue to help them take advantage of opportunities in mining and exports, especially to India.

A forty percent reduction in direct-hire American staff over the past two years (50% among State Department USDH) and staff relocations due to COVID have made it all the more critical improving the knowledge and technical capabilities for our talented staff, who need the right technology, infrastructure, and security, and as much mobility as possible. We see strength in our diversity. Mission Afghanistan has U.S. direct hires, local staff, contractors from all over the world, and third country national employees from other U.S. embassies (though COVID continues to require most local staff to remain off-compound, diminishing the productivity of their contributions to the mission). We continually reassess the size and configuration of the

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mission, so we can efficiently and effectively advance our core goals during this challenging period of Afghanistan's history.

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2. Mission Strategic Framework

Mission Goal 1: Achieve peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Mission Objective 1.1: A sustainable political settlement between the Afghan government and Taliban that reduces violence, respects Afghanistan's constitution, and upholds the rights of women and minorities.

Mission Goal 2: Government in Afghanistan is more stable, democratic, and accountable.

Mission Objective 2.1: An Afghan government that is more stable, democratic, responsive, and increasingly capable of performing key functions (CDCS DO3).

Mission Goal 3: Prevent the recurrence of terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan against the United States, while also strengthening law enforcement.

Mission Objective 3.1: A strategic partnership with Afghanistan that protects U.S. national security interests, including denying safe haven to terrorist groups and transnational criminal organizations.

Mission Goal 4: Economic prosperity in Afghanistan based on private sector led exports, and job creation with social gains in education, health, and women's empowerment.

Mission Objective 4.1: Private sector-driven, export-led economic growth is accelerated, leading to increased domestic revenues and budget sustainability, inclusive growth, and regional economic integration (CDCS DO1).

Management Objective 1: Security Program that facilitates U.S. diplomacy and keeps people and facilities safe.

Management Objective 2: Implement the Kabul Master Plan.

Management Objective 3: Ensure appropriate staffing to achieve mission objectives.

3. Mission Goals and Objectives

Mission Goal 1: Achieve peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Description and Linkages: Goal 1 advances Pillar IV of the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS), “Advance American Influence” and also bolsters the NSS’s Priority Action for South and Central Asia by seeking to partner with Afghanistan to promote peace and security in the region. This objective also supports a fundamental pillar of the U.S. government’s South Asia strategy that calls for the possibility of a political settlement between the Afghan government and the Taliban and that aims to create the conditions for a political process to achieve a lasting peace that reduces violence and includes protections for women and minorities.

Mission Objective 1.1: A sustainable political settlement between the Afghan government and Taliban that reduces violence, respects Afghanistan’s constitution, and upholds the rights of women and minorities.

Justification: The United States seeks an Afghanistan where a political settlement is reached between the Afghan government and the Taliban which aims to create the conditions for a political process to achieve a lasting peace that reduces violence and includes protections for women and minorities. Risks associated with not achieving these Mission Objectives include the persistence of terrorist threats that impact the security of the U.S. homeland and our allies, increased displacement internally or across borders, and cross-border terrorism that raises the prospect of instability in the region.

Mission Goal 2: Government in Afghanistan is more stable, democratic, and accountable.

Description and linkages: Goal 2 promotes stability in Afghanistan and USG national security interests aligned with the U.S. government’s South Asia Strategy. If the Afghan government is better able to provide access to a transparent, inclusive, and accountable justice system, conduct credible elections, deliver basic services, reduce corruption, and engage with citizens; then it will strengthen its legitimacy and promote conditions for peace. It supports the Afghan government to achieve such capabilities, and to become a stronger partner in the pursuit of bilateral, regional, and U.S. national security priorities.

Mission Objective 2.1: An Afghan government that is more stable, democratic, responsive, and increasingly capable of performing key functions (CDCS DO3).

Justification: To achieve Mission Goal 2, the Mission works with the Afghan Government to strengthen judicial and corrections system capacity and access to justice services based on Afghan law—including for vulnerable populations such as women, children, minorities, returned refugees, and the indigent, supports the Afghan government’s efforts to conduct elections and bolster the accountability and transparency of Afghan government systems, including at the sub-national level. Risks associated with not achieving this goal include poor government effectiveness and credibility that undermines their legitimacy and negatively affects the conditions needed for peace and stability.

Mission Goal 3: Prevent the recurrence of terrorist threats emanating from Afghanistan against the United States, while also strengthening law enforcement.

Description and Linkages: Goal 3 advances Pillar IV of the 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) by giving priority to strengthening states as a means to avoid threats to the American homeland created by instability. The NSS Priority Action on Fragile States, by engaging in Afghanistan, we seek to prevent the reemergence of terrorist safe havens. This Goal also supports NSS South and Central Asia Priority Actions, which seek a stable and self-reliant Afghanistan, promote peace and security regionally, increase the legitimacy of its government, and reduce the appeal of violent extremist organizations. It also supports the third pillar of the US government’s South Asia Strategy to stop the resurgence of safe havens that enable terrorist threats to America, and to expand authority for American armed forces to target the terrorist and criminal networks that sow violence throughout Afghanistan.

Mission Objective 3.1: A strategic partnership with Afghanistan that protects U.S. national security interests, including denying safe haven to terrorist groups and transnational criminal organizations.

Justification: Our strategic partnership with Afghanistan will protect U.S. national security interests through train, assist, and advise programs, building institutional security capacity through reform-oriented reforms, and by strengthening institutional border security and law enforcement mechanisms and bodies.

Mission Goal 4: Economic prosperity in Afghanistan based on private sector led exports, and job creation with social gains in education, health, and women’s empowerment.

Description and Linkages: Goal 4 advances Pillar II and III of the 2017 National Security Strategy and the U.S. government’s Strategy for South Asia by partnering with Afghanistan’s government, private sector, civil society, health, and education institutions to promote a self-sufficient, inclusive, and resilient economy and stronger, mutually beneficial relationships between Afghanistan and key regional partners. This goal also supports the State-USAID 2018-2022 Joint Strategic Plan (JSP).

Mission Objective 4.1: Private sector-driven, export-led economic growth is accelerated, leading to increased domestic revenues and budget sustainability, inclusive growth, and regional economic integration (CDCS DO1).

Justification: The United States seeks an Afghanistan that is economically self-sufficient and driven by private sector-led growth across a range of sectors including trade, agriculture, energy, telecommunications, and services. Efforts will focus on the promotion of economic linkages that bolster connectivity and seek a stable and self-reliant Afghanistan that is economically integrated in the region. Expanding economic growth in export-oriented sectors, promoting market-oriented economic and governance reforms, as well as advancing bilateral relationships and leveraging international institutions and agreements to open markets, secure commercial opportunities, and foster investment and innovation will be critical activities. To promote inclusive growth, the efforts will focus on strengthening women's empowerment and improving the quality of education and health services. Overall, the goal remains to transition Afghanistan from an assistance recipient to an enduring economic partner able to attract foreign investment and secure its own financial needs, and to promote prosperity through sustained economic growth and job creation. Risks associated with not achieving these Mission Objectives include an increase in unemployed youth, a sustained or expanded informal private sector, and a rise in poverty that could provide fertile recruiting grounds for extremists, and a continued lack of regional integration which would impede broader U.S. security and self-sufficiency goals.

4. Management Objectives

Management Objective 1: Security Program that Facilitates U.S. diplomacy and keeps people and facilities safe.

Justification: The dynamic and fluid security environment in Afghanistan requires a robust security platform and risk management processes to facilitate U.S. Mission goals and objectives. We constantly review intelligence as an interagency and adjust our security posture and movements of Chief of Mission personnel using a deliberate, risk management approach. Meanwhile, we will continue to improve our vetting processes to identify potential insider threats, as well as be ready to sustain safe, secure, and effective operations without support from international military forces. We will also continue to assess our physical and technical security platforms, consolidate personnel on secure facilities, and conduct complex exercises with our Afghan and international partners to increase our emergency readiness, including planning for potential evacuations of U.S. citizens.

Management Objective 2: Implement the Kabul Master Plan.

Justification: Construction projects were paused in 2019 for strategic review by M, OBO, DS, and Embassy Kabul. They concluded that projects that address security and critical life safety infrastructure should proceed. These projects include a new Perimeter Wall (Shash Darak road), supplemental Waste Water Treatment Plant (WWTP), renovation of the West Dining Facility, electrical and hydronic piping upgrades. A security operations center at Camp Alvarado is also critical to Post. Presently approved projects should be awarded in 2021, with construction commencing in FY2021 and FY2022. Future construction includes the Kabul Embassy East Compound plan for hardened housing, East and West Compound Perimeter Wall, demolition of the Marriott Hotel site, electrical switchgear upgrades and build out of Camp Alvarado (Phase III -- hardened housing, office space) and will commence in FY2023. With absorbing U.S. and TCN staff from closing locations, Embassy Kabul currently faces a housing crisis, and our support infrastructure is stressed.

Management Objective 3: Ensure appropriate staffing to achieve mission objectives.

Justification: The dynamic security environment and changes in size and scope of U.S. forces will impact our staffing requirements. Staffing at the Embassy compound will be constrained by the number of housing units. The Mission will continuously and deliberately reconcile staffing needs with foreign policy objectives to ensure it maintains the optimal number of personnel necessary to achieve key objectives. The Mission requests the Department urgently initiate a working group effort to identify and remove non-location-specific functions from Embassy Kabul, reducing positions across employment categories currently performing these functions in a dangerous and expensive location.