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Speaking notes of Amb. Robin Raphel, State Department (USA)

Introduction

- I would like to comment on Afghanistan in 2014 and beyond from the U.S. perspective, recognizing that Afghans and others from the region might have a different angle on the issues.
- First, I want to reiterate that the future of Afghanistan is ultimately up to Afghans. There is much we can do to support them, as we have for the last decade, but as 2014 approaches, Afghans are increasingly and rightly taking the lead and determining how they want to build their country.
- For our part, my colleagues and I who have been working on Afghanistan over the last decade **are optimistic about the future of Afghanistan** going into 2014 and beyond. We see the glass as half full.
- Afghanistan is in the midst of **three major transitions**.
- The first is the looming **political transition**, which includes the 2014 elections, as well as reconciliation among all competing factions in Afghanistan, including the Taliban, and the consolidation of social gains made in services such as education and health, and women's rights.
- The second transition is the **economic transition**, which will accelerate as the coalition forces withdraw, and the Afghan economy begins to rely more fully on Afghan resources.
- And the final transition is the **security transition** that has already largely taken place throughout the country, as Afghan National

Security Forces now actively plan and lead security missions throughout Afghanistan.

- The Afghan Government continues to be a strong, if perhaps at times difficult, partner in its own transformation. It has made significant progress on the preparations and reforms necessary to achieve sustainable stability for Afghanistan.

Three Major Transitions

- **Political Transition**
 - Elections in 2014
 - There is no more important event over the next year in Afghanistan than the peaceful transfer of authority from President Karzai to his successor following the 2014 elections. The success of this political transition is critical to Afghanistan's stability and democratic development. And a successful transition to a new president is essential for the international community to meet its long term commitments to the country made at Chicago and Tokyo in 2012. At present, there are signs that Afghanistan will be able to hold successful elections in April 2014:
 - Voter registration is underway, candidate registration and vetting has been completed, two key electoral laws have been adopted, elections commissioners and complaints commissioners have been appointed, and Afghan security ministries, in close coordination with the Afghan National Security Council, are working with the Independent Elections Commission to prepare for the elections. I would add that these are all steps that Afghans themselves identified as key.

The role of the U.S. and others in the international community is to support an inclusive and effective process, not a candidate or party. The international

community, including the U.S., has already invested heavily in that process and in voter education to help prepare the electorate for Election Day, and will continue this support in the coming months.

○ Elections Fraud?

- We are aware of challenges facing the 2014 elections, including the potential for fraud. However, we are encouraged by actions Afghans are taking to fully comply with their own laws and Constitution to minimize the possibility of fraud.
- We will continue to support Afghan electoral authorities, the Afghan government, Parliament and civil society in their efforts to strengthen the electoral system and to minimize electoral fraud.
- The Afghan Government has also taken steps to ensure security for poll workers, the independent election commission and other elections-related workers; we will continue to monitor security trends as the elections near.
- At the same time, while a credible electoral *process* is necessary for a successful presidential transition, a credible electoral *outcome* is also important. Afghans—including those who lose the elections and those who voted for a losing candidate—must accept the results. The next president must be seen as legitimate by Afghans throughout the country, and he—and it will be a “he” as there are no women presidential candidates—must be a leader who can help unify the country and work closely

with the international community to meet the many challenges ahead.

○ Reconciliation

- The U.S. has long supported an inclusive political process in which Afghans sit down with other Afghans to determine the future of their country.
- A key participant in this process is the Taliban. We have repeatedly called for the Taliban to talk to the Afghan government about peace and reconciliation; we have also encouraged all those with influence on the Taliban to convey the same message.
- We have also joined the Afghan government and others in the international community in saying that the outcome of any peace and reconciliation process must include the Taliban and other insurgent groups breaking ties with al Qaeda, ending violence, and accepting Afghanistan's constitution, including its protections for women and minorities.

○ Doha Process

- We all know that the opening of a Taliban office in Doha did not go as we had hoped. But it appears that this was due to a genuine misunderstanding, and not intentional bad faith on the part of the Taliban.
- The U.S. for its part remains committed to reconciliation, and continues to support steps the sides can take to make this a reality.
- But the ball is currently in the Taliban's court. It is not for the US government to negotiate a separate peace with the Taliban; that is the responsibility of the Afghan Government, together with representative from

all parts of the political spectrum. I would reiterate that this ultimately must be an Afghan process.

○ Social and “human development” Progress

- It is undeniable that enormous progress has been made in the arena of social development and women’s rights.
- We believe “the genie is out of the bottle”, and that civil society will continue to work with international community and the Afghan Government to ensure that gains in education and health are consolidated and preserved, and that women maintain their place at the table in all aspects of society from politics to the professions.
- The statistics, which many of you are already familiar with, speak for themselves – school enrollment, literacy rates, life expectancy, access to information have all increased markedly. The gains for women are particularly remarkable: 27% of the parliament is female, exceeding the 25% mandatory quota. Some 20% of the civil service is female. 40% of school children are girls, up from nearly zero percent a decade ago. And in addition, there have been stunning decreases in maternal mortality rates and increases in female life expectancy.
- Ensuring women’s voices are heard at all levels – national, provincial and local – and are included in process of rebuilding their nation will contribute to greater stability and prosperity in Afghanistan over the longer term as it has in so many developing nations around the world.
- Continued collaboration to advance the status of women in society and ensure their constitutional rights is part of the U.S. Strategic Partnership Agreement with the Government of Afghanistan, and the Tokyo Mutual Accountability Framework.

- In short, Afghanistan is not the same place it was under the Taliban. Cell phones are everywhere. Media has flourished, with scores of channels and radio stations. Afghanistan is now connected to the world in a way it never was before, and the world is watching. This focus on Afghanistan will also be instrumental in ensuring that social progress, particularly the rights of women and girls, is at the forefront as the political transition continues.

- **Economic Transition**

- Afghanistan's economy has been growing steadily at an average rate of 9 percent over the last decade. GDP in 2012 was \$22.5 billion, almost five times greater than in 2002.
- With such strong momentum behind it, Afghanistan is better prepared to absorb the inevitable downward pressure that will come with the drawdown of international troops.
- In addition, the Afghan government and the international community have been focused in recent years on mitigating the effects of troop withdrawal.
- The U.S. has reoriented its civilian assistance to maximize sustainability, consolidate gains in the social sectors like education and health, build the capacity of the government to deliver services and collect revenues, and increase regional integration. There is less of a focus on stabilization and new infrastructure, and more focus on maintaining infrastructure that has already been built.
- With the international community, the U.S. has made commitments to ensure that substantial levels of assistance will continue beyond 2014, as long as Afghans continue to

undertake the economic and political reforms that strengthen governance. The United States and its international partners committed at the 2012 Tokyo conference to provide \$16 billion over four years for Afghanistan's development, and to continue providing assistance at or near levels of the past decade beyond that.

- Moreover, the Afghan Government is moving towards greater self-reliance, implementing structural reforms necessary to increase revenue generation and encourage private-sector investment.
- We have sought to put more of our assistance on-budget, through Afghan government mechanisms, subject to appropriate oversight, to build capacity within the Afghan government and ensure that as many resources as possible go to programs rather than contractor overhead. This will be particularly important as assistance levels begin to decline in the coming years.
- This gradual and predictable decline of assistance is appropriate. Over the past decade, international assistance has helped to build infrastructure and increase the capacity of the Afghan Government to provide necessary services. This increased capacity coupled with the increased infrastructure has in essence given Afghanistan the tools it needs to become an increasingly independent and integrated into the region as an equal partner.

- **Security Transition**

- ANSF is in the Lead

- This past summer the Afghan Government and Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) assumed the lead for security throughout the country. Though challenges

remain, the ANSF has made tangible progress in the face of determined opposition. It continues to develop its capability, confidence, and capacity.

- Since this summer's Milestone, the ANSF has been responsible for day to day execution of the military campaign across all of Afghanistan. Afghan soldiers and police have been planning and conducting the vast majority of combat operations. U.S., NATO, and ISAF partner forces are now in a supporting role. And the ANSF has been successful at holding ground and taking on the insurgency in many parts of the country, including the Kabul, where there are frequent attacks on government and international facilities.
 - The Afghan people justifiably take immense pride in their ANSF – which is becoming a truly national force – and in the real progress they have made in restoring and maintaining security.
- One Example: Logar Province
 - One example our military uses to demonstrate how far the ANSF have come was an operation in Loghar province this summer that involved all elements of the ANSF working in concert. The large-scale, three-week effort in the Azrah Valley was planned, resourced, and executed solely by Afghan forces – something that would never have occurred even just a year ago. A combined force of Army, Air Force, local police, and commando units were able to get Afghan troops where they needed to be, outmaneuver an insurgent force, and clear the valley. After the fighting was over, the ANSF shipped in humanitarian supplies and voter registration materials.
 - BSA

- In order to continue to train and equip Afghan security forces, and to bring needed clarity to our future security relationship with Afghanistan, we have been negotiating a Bilateral Security Agreement. This agreement is in no way a threat to Afghanistan's neighbors.
- During Secretary Kerry's recent trip to Afghanistan, we resolved the major issues in the Bilateral Security Agreement negotiations and got general agreement on the text.
- As a next step, President Karzai will submit the text of the BSA to the Afghan Loya Jirga for approval.
- We will undertake an internal technical review process to prepare the text for signature, as will the Afghans.
- We are optimistic about concluding the BSA in a timely manner as we believe the BSA is in both countries interests.

Conclusion

- In closing I would like to reiterate that the U.S. is optimistic about the long term future of Afghanistan, as Afghans take increasing ownership of their political system, their economic, and their security.
- The U.S. will continue to work closely with Afghanistan to strengthen its institutions, to help Afghans consolidate the dramatic gains they have made over the last decade, and to help the country become better integrated into the wider South and Central Asian region. These efforts, along with the contributions of others in the international community, and the many brave and resilient Afghans who have worked so hard over the last decade, will help ensure Afghanistan

becomes a more mature and stable democracy, with the opportunities that all its citizens richly deserve for generations to come.