



Alliance in Support of the Afghan People Outlines Core Principles for U.S. Engagement with Afghanistan in 2021

Washington, D.C. (January 22, 2021) – In recognition, nearly 20 years since the post-9/11 intervention in Afghanistan, of the current dynamics there and in the region, the Alliance in Support of the Afghan People urges the United States government to consider:

Reassessing the U.S.-Taliban Doha agreement. The Taliban and other groups (such as al Qaeda) have continued to carry out politically motivated violence against civilians. This violates an essential aspect of the agreement, corrodes prospects for negotiations, and demonstrates a lack of will to keep the peace over the long term. The continued presence of Al Qaeda within Afghanistan is a further violation of the agreement. Additionally, while the Taliban have entered into intra-Afghan talks, as the agreement requires, they have thrown up numerous roadblocks to stymie the progress of those talks. Finally, the framework of the agreement does nothing to prevent the Taliban from reverting to its previous posture once the international forces leave Afghanistan, jeopardizing essential civil rights of women and minority communities and counter-terrorism goals.

Stressing force capabilities over the size of the U.S. military presence in Afghanistan. Troop numbers need to be based on capabilities to achieve security goals and be tied to actual Taliban cooperation in reducing violence in Afghanistan, rather than being part of a politicized numbers game. Focusing on our mission goals is essential to our interests and will help assure the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) that we remain a reliable partner.

Rethinking U.S. representation to the Afghanistan peace process. The U.S. would do well to augment the Special Representative's role with the appointment of a third-party facilitator to the current Afghan peace process. The U.S. role is indispensable, given our importance and leverage and our obligation to protect our national interests. But the U.S. should not serve as the only facilitator, as it does now. A neutral facilitator can help the parties reach compromise and corral the support of international and regional actors not only by using U.S. carrots and sticks but also by rallying allies and conflict patrons to get to an agreement.

Rebuilding a deteriorated U.S. relationship with our allies. The U.S. must replace a mercurial policy-making style that too often surprised and undermined our partners with one that is clear, sustainable, and deeply considered. That will allow our partners to better plan and build their own strategies. We must also live up to our long-standing agreements with the Afghan government and with other partner nations still engaged in Afghanistan. Further, the U.S. should do more to listen to and take into account the concerns and ambitions of our Afghan government counterparts, of the Afghan people they serve, and of our valued alliance partners.

Reasserting that the Afghan constitutional republic and government institutions are our core partner. U.S. remains committed to the agreements and obligations it has with the government of Afghanistan, such as the Kabul Declaration, the Strategic Partnership Agreement, and the Bilateral Security Agreement. For legal, moral, and diplomatic reasons, these commitments must take precedence over the U.S.-Taliban agreement. The Afghan government is recognized across the world, and by the U.S., as the legal sovereign authority. We should not sacrifice a relationship with our core partner in exchange for a partial agreement with the Taliban that will not end the war or secure our interests there.

For more information, go to: www.allianceforafghans.org

Publicly demonstrating appropriate strategic patience. Waging war can take time, establishing peace can often take longer. As with any overseas engagements driven by our interests and values, the U.S. should allow the circumstances, not the calendar, to determine when and how it is best to reduce our commitments. This requires patience and consideration of the many longer-term gains that can come from continued engagement with the Afghanistan's government, security forces, people, and economy.

The Alliance in Support of the Afghan People (or ASAP) represents a cross section of American national security, military, civilian and human rights leaders who advocate for continued U.S. engagement that protects, sustains, and advances the progress the Afghan and American people have made in Afghanistan since 2001. For more information: <https://www.allianceforafghans.org/>