

Afghanistan Young Leaders Initiative Position Paper on NATO Summit in Chicago

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Preamble

The 25th NATO Summit in Chicago this month is unusual compared to previous summits as it will not reaffirm the allocation of more resources to its mission in Afghanistan, but the alliance will seek how to withdraw from a leading combat role in an increasingly unpopular decade-long war. It is for the Afghans to take the necessary precautions and ownership to fill the void as NATO draws down from Afghanistan.

The Afghan Young Leaders Initiative understands that Chicago will introduce a different narrative as no world leader is expected to announce an increase in its military and economic footprint in Afghanistan.

Political and economic circumstances in the West, the US in particular, do not provide winning cards to NATO leaders to maintain the costly war for an unsustainable period. However, an accelerated drawdown will not only guarantee the failure of the mission for “winning hearts and minds”, but it could leave behind a country at risk of descending into another civil war as a possible post-2014 scenario. This, in turn, could translate into an increased regional rivalry for domination of Afghan politics by neighbours near and far.

Concerns and Recommendations

There is an increasing perception that the Chicago Summit will determine the endgame for Afghanistan, which paves the way for internal and external actors to chart their short to long-term strategic interests in this country. It is for the Afghan government and the international community to provide a clear vision for both the Afghan people and their domestic constituencies for the post-2014 period in Afghanistan.

The Afghan Young Leaders Initiative believes that success in Afghanistan could be ensured primarily through safeguarding our common achievements made in the past ten years, which has come through tremendous sacrifices of blood and treasure. In order to prevent Afghanistan from becoming once again a hub for international terrorism and regional rivalry, we recommend the Chicago Summit address the following:

- Sustainability of a properly equipped Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) is a crucial element for lasting security, which is also an essential precondition for economic development. Given that we live in unstable region, Afghanistan requires a military of an appropriate size, throughout the “transformation decade” (2015-2024). It should also be noted that a remarkable and sudden reduction in ANSF would leave a huge

number of trained soldiers unemployed, which adds to our vulnerability to further ethnic and political tensions.

- The growth of ANSF should be balanced between army and law enforcement agencies. Fighting an insurgency requires a stronger capability in the police and intelligence services; therefore, a greater emphasis is needed on police, as they would ultimately take on the role of ensuring the rule of law rather than fighting terrorists.
- The NATO forces should continue their counter-terrorism mission in parallel to counter-insurgency efforts throughout the transformation decade. The counter-terrorism operations should not be limited to Afghan boundaries alone. The mandate of post-ISAF engagement should state that its counter-terrorism aspect is not limited to the Afghan boundaries. However, the issue of sanctuaries has to be handled before the US combat role is ended in Afghanistan in 2014. Targeting the leadership of Al Qaeda and the Taliban in their safe havens regardless of its geographical location through intelligence-driven operations has to be maintained with high momentum.
- The upcoming 2014 Presidential election requires security arrangements, which in the immediate term seems beyond the capabilities of the ANSF unless the insurgency is quelled through a political settlement. Therefore, to ensure a free, fair and transparent election and also as a test case for the ANSF's capabilities, the presence of international forces is essential to safeguard the election process. The impartiality and professionalism of the Afghan security forces should be ensured to avoid politicisation in the ranks of ANSF for the upcoming Presidential and Parliamentary elections.
- The transition to a new Afghan administration after the 2014 Presidential elections should be considered as a key milestone to measure the success towards stability and political maturity beyond 2014.

Conclusion

The Afghan war is a war of perceptions for the most part. It is a multi-dimensional, complex, and regional conflict that requires a comprehensive, multi-pronged, and long-term commitment. It is of utmost urgency for both the Afghan government and the international community to ensure a successful outcome in Afghanistan, or we will continue to face the threat of terrorism and regional instability with grave consequences for world security and peace.

Afghanistan Young Leaders Initiative is a non-partisan and non-political group of young Afghans who share common values and beliefs to address the social, economic and political issues in Afghanistan. Our aim is to mobilize the youth for taking part in critical nation-building initiatives and advocate for positive changes in building a secure, safe and equitable Afghan society. Afghanistan Young Leaders Initiative established in 2011 in cooperation of Asia Society 21 Young Leaders program (www.asiasociety.org). For more information contact: a21yli@gmail.com