



September 7, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama  
President of the United States  
The White House  
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

The situation in Afghanistan is grave and deteriorating. This is in part the legacy of an under resourced war effort that has cost us and the Afghans dearly. The Taliban has retaken important parts of the country, while a flawed U.S. strategy has led American forces into secondary efforts far away from critical areas. However, we remain convinced that the fight against the Taliban is winnable, and it is in the vital national security interest of the United States to win it.

You've called Afghanistan an "international security challenge of the highest order," and stated that "the safety of people around the world is at stake." Last month you told a convention of veterans, "Those who attacked America on 9/11 are plotting to do so again. If left unchecked, the Taliban insurgency will mean an even larger safe haven from which al Qaeda would plot to kill more Americans. So this is not only a war worth fighting. This is fundamental to the defense of our people."

We fully agree with those sentiments. We congratulate you on the leadership you demonstrated earlier this year when you decided to deploy approximately 21,000 additional troops and several thousand civilian experts as a part of a serious counterinsurgency campaign. Your appointments of General Stanley McChrystal as top commander and David Rodriguez as second in command in Afghanistan exemplified the seriousness of purpose you spoke about during the campaign. We are heartened to see that the much needed overhaul of our military operations has begun.

Since the announcement of your administration's new strategy, we have been troubled by calls for a drawdown of American forces in Afghanistan and a growing sense of defeatism about the war. With General McChrystal expected to request additional troops later this month, we urge you to continue on the path you have taken thus far and give our commanders on the ground the forces they need to implement a successful counterinsurgency strategy. There is no middle course. Incrementally committing fewer troops than required would be a grave mistake and may well lead to American defeat. We will not support half-measures that repeat the errors of the past.

This is, as you have said, a war that we cannot afford to lose. Failure to defeat the Taliban would likely lead to a return of al Qaeda to Afghanistan and could result in terrorist attacks on the United States or our allies. An abandonment of Afghanistan would further destabilize the region,

and put neighboring Pakistan and its nuclear arsenal at risk. All our efforts to support Islamabad's fight against the Taliban in Pakistan's tribal regions will founder if we do not match those achievements on the other side of that country's porous northwestern border.

As you observed during the 2008 U.S. presidential campaign, "You don't muddle through the central front on terror and you don't muddle through going after bin Laden. You don't muddle through stamping out the Taliban." We completely agree. Having "muddled through" in Afghanistan for years, this is no longer a politically, strategically, or morally sustainable approach.

Mr. President, you have put in place the military leadership and sent the initial resources required to begin bringing this war to a successful conclusion. The military leadership has devised a strategy that will reverse the errors of previous years, free Afghans from the chains of tyranny, and keep America safe. We call on you to fully resource this effort, do everything possible to minimize the risk of failure, and to devote the necessary time to explain, soberly and comprehensively, to the American people the stakes in Afghanistan, the route to success, and the cost of defeat.

With the continued bravery of our troops, and your continued full support for them and their command team, America and our allies can and will prevail in Afghanistan.

Sincerely,

Steve Biegun  
Max Boot  
Ellen Bork  
Paul Bremer  
Christian Brose  
Debra Burlingame  
Eliot A. Cohen  
Ryan C. Crocker  
Thomas Donnelly  
Eric Edelman  
William S. Edgerly  
Jamie M. Fly  
David Frum  
Abe Greenwald  
John Hannah

Pete Hegseth  
Margaret Hoover  
Thomas Joscelyn  
Frederick W. Kagan  
Robert Kagan  
William Kristol  
Tod Lindberg  
Herbert London  
Clifford May  
Robert C. McFarlane  
Joshua Muravchik  
Andrew Natsios  
Sarah Palin  
Keith Pavlischek  
Beverly Perlson

Danielle Pletka  
John Podhoretz  
Stephen Rademaker  
Mitchell B. Reiss  
Karl Rove  
Jennifer Rubin  
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Peter Wehner  
Kenneth Weinstein  
Christian Whiton