



# Atlantic Council

## SOUTH ASIA CENTER

A transatlantic charter  
on Afghan sovereignty,  
security, and  
development

Atlantic Council trilateral  
dialogues on Afghanistan



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## Co-chairs' letter

Shaharzad Akbar  
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After nearly twenty years of a historic partnership between the United States, Europe, and the Afghan people, Afghanistan has reached a watershed moment. The United States and its NATO allies have announced the withdrawal of troops while pledging continued support for the Afghan government and its security forces. This decision fundamentally changes the dynamics of the search for a lasting peace in Afghanistan. Millions of Afghans fear what the days ahead could bring.

Following decades of violent conflict, intra-Afghan negotiations are underway, but the path forward is uncertain. Much is at stake:

- the hard-won progress in building a democratic, constitutional order;
- the rights of women to work, study, and participate in public life;
- the future of Afghanistan's youth, who are working to rebuild a devastated country against extraordinary odds;
- security in Afghanistan, the region, and beyond, which is threatened by the potential rise of new terrorist networks.

At this critical juncture, we believe that now is the time to express long-term solidarity and commitment to the people of Afghanistan.

Otherwise, there is considerable risk of a return to civil war, which would destroy the hard-won achievements that have been made, open the field for terrorist groups, and trigger a large-scale humanitarian and refugee crisis.

The participants of the Atlantic Council / Rockefeller Brothers Fund Strategic Dialogues have been working for the past eight months to develop a long-term strategic outlook to promote stability in Afghanistan consistent with Afghan, US, and European interests and values. This group of distinguished European, American, and Afghan diplomats, military officers, scholars, and analysts brought to our deliberations a deep understanding of the context both on the ground and among the allies. We explored a diplomatic-security framework based on the minimal conditions and variables necessary to realize a long-term vision of a sovereign, unified, democratic, peaceful, and prosperous Afghanistan and generated recommendations to support this vision.

While the participants in the Strategic Dialogues have differing views on the wisdom of the decisions made by the United States and NATO, they are in full agreement that the withdrawal of troops will not end the “forever war” for Afghans or the region. We therefore remain committed to putting forward a long-term vision for partnership between Afghanistan, the United States, and Europe. The United States and its European allies still have a range of levers—diplomatic, financial, political, and economic—at their disposal. What is urgently needed is a coordinated set of actions to mitigate the likely security and political consequences of the military withdrawal as part of a plan to advance stability and peace in Afghanistan.

First, support to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) is now more critical than ever. We must immediately begin planning with our Afghan partners to enable the ANDSF to secure the legal order, protect its citizens, defend the country's borders, and contain terrorism.



The ANDSF have been pressing the fight against multiple threats on multiple fronts, even as the Taliban and terrorist groups have increased attacks. Security and financial assistance will be critical to ensuring that an apolitical, professional ANDSF remains an instrument of national unity and is capable of maintaining security and defending the country in accordance with human-rights principles. The ANDSF are our partners in combating terrorism and must remain so if the threat is to be contained.

Second, a new long-term partnership approach with Afghanistan based on mutual respect and shared interests will remain critical for advancing security, justice, human rights, democratic governance, and stability. Near-term actions must support the Afghan state's ability to provide protection, governance, and basic services for citizens. Support for strengthening Afghanistan's key institutions is critical to containing violence, achieving stability, cultivating the rule of law, and sustaining development.

Third, as military forces are withdrawn from Afghanistan, the United States, the European Union (EU), and the broader international community must redouble their diplomatic efforts at the regional level. A high-level and sustained regional diplomatic process is urgently needed to bring pressure to bear on the Taliban to productively engage in negotiations. The United States, Europe, and other international partners must utilize all available levers to press regional countries and to support durable peace in Afghanistan. Regional countries, especially Pakistan, have the clout to assert themselves in light of Taliban recalcitrance. Other countries such as China and Russia can play an important role as evidenced by the recent Extended "Troika" on Peaceful Settlement in Afghanistan meeting in Moscow where participants expressed their opposition to the restoration of the Taliban's Islamic Emirate for Afghanistan.

Fourth, securing a comprehensive ceasefire must be a central priority. We have seen the unequivocal and widespread demand of the Afghan people and victims for a just and lasting peace. Afghans must drive their own peace process and use the leverage they have at the right stage of negotiations. To ensure its success, the peace process must be accompanied by early warning systems to prevent violence through international monitoring and oversight. Further, the United Nations (UN) should not delist the Taliban from UN sanctions lists until they commit to a verified ceasefire. If the Taliban is seeking international legitimacy, then it must demonstrate it can act in the interests of the Afghan people by ending violence against them.

What has too often been missing from policy discussions on Afghanistan is a clearly stated and shared aspirational vision for its future. To capture the core recommendations of the Strategic Dialogues, we have summarized them in a "Transatlantic charter on Afghan sovereignty, security, and development." The Charter is not intended to be a roadmap, but rather captures the spirit with which this group was brought together and the future vision we still hope will be achieved in Afghanistan.

We present this document with humility as we recognize that there are difficult choices ahead. An end to hardship and violence is not in sight. At the same time, we believe that state collapse and the loss of hard-won progress in so many areas of Afghan life are not inevitable. What happens in Afghanistan will have an impact on all of us. Our security and shared US, European, and Afghan interests and values are at stake. Now, more than ever, we must work together with all Afghans to avoid the worst and accomplish the best for Afghanistan—and for the world—and to honor the sacrifices so many have made.



# A transatlantic charter on Afghan sovereignty, security, and development

## Preamble

1. *Reaffirming* the importance of the relationship among Afghanistan, Europe, and the United States as friends, allies, and strategic partners and recognizing the benefits that close partnership and coordination bring to our shared interests and the values of our nations and peoples;
2. *Honoring* the sacrifices and important contributions made by Afghans, Americans, Europeans, and NATO allies and partners to advance peace, democracy, and stability in Afghanistan and the region, while acknowledging the vitally important contributions and sacrifices of other international partners and welcoming the ongoing engagement of Afghanistan's many donors and supporters who have pledged their commitment to the country's future;
3. *Building* on the hard-won social, political, and economic achievements by the Afghan people over the past twenty years;
4. *Recognizing* that, while women have suffered disproportionately in the war, they have also been at the forefront of achieving hard-won gains and are active in all sectors of society;
5. *Confirming* the importance of the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces (ANDSF) to advancing peace and security in Afghanistan and defending against the shared threat of terrorism and the continuing importance of international support for the ANDSF;
6. *Recognizing* that, as conditions require over time, adjustments might be made to the implementation of this charter, in particular in support of growing Afghan self-reliance.



## Section 1 | Goals

1. A broadly shared vision of an Islamic, sovereign, peaceful, unified, democratic, pluralistic, and prosperous Afghanistan.
2. A new, long-term transatlantic partnership with the people of Afghanistan, their institutions and elected leaders, and the country's civil society.
3. An urgent, high-level, and sustained diplomatic process, led by the United Nations (UN), to build and consolidate a regional consensus behind the envisioned end state and specific commitments to support realization of the vision of non-interference, sovereignty, and territorial integrity for Afghanistan.
4. A coordinated and sustained engagement by the transatlantic community in the near term, including a security presence, in support of the government of Afghanistan in the peace negotiations with the Taliban.

## Section 2 | Principles

1. The future of Afghanistan is for Afghans to decide based on the constitutional order and a culture of participation, pluralism, respect for diversity and equal rights, and the critical importance of the needs and voices of the Afghan people.
2. While a political process may require a transitional government, it is essential that the means of establishing such a government do not undermine the constitutional order, Afghanistan's key institutions, and the importance of credible and transparent elections. The sequencing of a transitional government, elections, and any revisions to the constitutional order should be determined by the intra-Afghan negotiating parties.
3. Respect for and protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the freedoms of religion, assembly, movement, and expression, and the principle of equality of citizens and protection for minorities, with an emphasis on the right of women to be full and equal members of society. Any new government, transitional or not, must respect its international obligations as a UN member and as a state signatory to treaties and covenants.
4. Commitment and support to the new generation of Afghans who are increasingly assuming positions of responsibility in government, civil society, and the private sector.
5. Continued support for rule of law, economic development, and private-sector growth so that the economy can provide livelihoods and opportunities for Afghan society,



especially the growing youth population, enabling Afghans to achieve self-sufficiency and restore a sense of national dignity.

6. Careful and responsible Afghan stewardship and ownership of resources, including Afghanistan's abundant natural resources, with the goal of supporting good governance, development, and stability.
7. Respect for and protection of Afghanistan's territorial integrity, political independence, stability, and sovereignty to enable its responsible self-defense and facilitate its ability to contribute to regional and global security.
8. Effective and continuous consultation, coordination, and consistent engagement of the transatlantic community with Afghan partners, including supporting the important role of the United Nations and other multilateral institutions, as well as transparent, coordinated, and consistent communications with US, European, Afghan, and regional publics.

### **Section 3 | Commitments of the transatlantic community in partnership with the Afghan people, their governance and security institutions, and Afghan civil society**

1. The drawdown of international forces from Afghanistan, as announced by the United States and NATO, is to be orderly, coordinated, and deliberate.
2. Long-term financial support by the United States, NATO, the European Union (EU), and other countries to the ANDSF (including the National Police), within the context of an Islamic, sovereign, unified, and democratic Afghanistan.
3. Intensified support for the Afghan peace negotiations to end the violence and achieve a political settlement and inclusive governance.
4. Appointment of an international mediator for the peace talks to assist the parties in reaching an implementable political settlement, if requested by the parties.
5. International monitors to preserve a negotiated ceasefire and report on compliance with other provisions of the political settlement agreed to by the parties, if requested.
6. International peacekeeping forces to assist in demilitarization and disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration, if requested.
7. Multi-year humanitarian and development assistance, to include incentives for private-sector trade and investment, with accountability provisions for state performance, especially in strengthening the rule of law and reducing corruption.
8. Long-term financial and technical support for the development of the Afghan state and economy, with a particular focus on preserving gains in education, health, and



security, including robust efforts to eradicate drug trafficking, develop critical infrastructure, and expand regional connectivity with Afghanistan's neighbors.

9. Sustained diplomatic engagement with Afghanistan's neighbors and other actors with interests and influence in the country to end support for non-state violent actors and to consolidate peace and economic gains in the region.

## **Section 4 | Modalities**

1. A transatlantic "Friends of Afghanistan" group made up of high-level representatives of the United States, the EU, NATO, and other important partners to enhance alignment and coordination on policy, diplomacy, and communications.
2. Continuous and sustained consultation between the "Friends" and the government and political leadership of Afghanistan.
3. Consistent and regular communications and engagement with the people of Afghanistan and Afghan civil society, especially women and youth.
4. Support for the role of the personal envoy of the UN secretary-general (PESG) as regional peace envoy to build regional consensus on the future of Afghanistan codified in specific multilateral and bilateral agreements on sovereignty, non-interference, economic cooperation, and dispute-resolution mechanisms. Regional diplomacy must include Russia, China, Pakistan, Iran, India, and the United States, plus important states such as the Central Asian and Gulf Cooperation Council countries, and others as determined by the PESG in consultation with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.
5. Support for the special representative of the secretary-general (SRSG) and head of the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan, with a mandate of strengthening the Afghan state, advancing the rule of law, and combating corruption; engaging with civil society, women, and youth; and supporting/delivering elections, as well as assisting any process for amending the constitution that may be determined in the intra-Afghan negotiations.

This charter seeks to build on the long-term multinational policies in support of the Afghan state and its people, including the NATO Chicago Summit declaration on Afghanistan (May 2012), the Tokyo Declaration (July 2012), the US-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership Agreement (July 2012), the US Bilateral Security Agreement (2014), and the Geneva Donor Conference (2020) attended by seventy countries and more than thirty international organizations.



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The signatories are signing in their personal capacity. Designations are only for identification purposes.



