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E.O. 12958: DECL: 08/26/2016
TAGS: PREL, MOPS, AF
SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: WHERE WE STAND AND WHAT WE NEED.

REF: A. KABUL 3719
B. KABUL 3749

Classified By: Ambassador Ronald E. Neumann for
reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

SUMMARY

1. (S) We are not winning in Afghanistan; although we are far from losing. We still can win. We are pursuing the right general policies on governance, security and development. But because we have not adjusted resources to the pace of the increased Taliban offensive and loss of internal Afghan support we face escalating risks today. NATO ISAF is fighting well but whether it can sustain the political will to fight at current casualty levels for several years is unknown. And NATO too is not winning. The Taliban are showing renewed confidence. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] At the present level of resources we can make incremental progress in some parts of the country, cannot be certain of victory, and could face serious slippage if the desperate popular quest for security continues to generate Afghan support for the Taliban. Nor can we rule out another surprise next year as the enemy surprised us this year with the numbers of insurgents. In short, our margin for victory in a complex environment is shrinking, and we need to act now. The stakes in Afghanistan deserve a better margin for

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victory.

2. (S) There are important big things we need to do now:

- Accelerate and expand the equipping of the Afghan security forces.
- Fund a major road building program in the southern and eastern provinces (\$600 million) to connect all district and provincial capitals with gravel roads.
- Make sure we see real progress in Pakistan to stop the Taliban and take out Taliban leadership.

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These efforts must be sustained over time if we are to win. There are not enough Afghan forces in the war and creating properly trained forces will take time. We are working with the Afghan government to increase Afghan provincial defense (so called "auxiliary police") under clear GOA control. We are still studying options with ISAF and the GOA and are not proposing separate funding at this time. We need to use President Karzai's September 26 visit to Washington as an important milestone in this process to announce major new programs of equipping the Afghan security forces and road building. END SUMMARY.

MILITARY SITUATION

3. (S) A year after I arrived the overall military situation has worsened in the south. We have scored real successes in Eastern Afghanistan because of military action combined with road building, economic development and better governors. But we must reinforce success with more development and governance or we could go backwards. And the numbers of Security Forces provided by the Afghan government, particularly police, remain wholly inadequate to the current need.

4. (S) Ghazni Province (East/Center) is much worse than a year ago. New coalition military operations will buy time. President Karzai has promised me a change from the current corrupt and ineffective governor. But additional Afghan manpower and resources to solidify gains will be needed here as

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well.

5. (S) The South is far worse than it was a year ago. We predicted an offensive but not its size and scope. The Mountain Thrust operation bought time, particularly in Oruzgan [redacted]

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Zabul continues to improve but the shift to ISAF and smaller Romanioan forces will be an attractive Taliban target so we should expect challenges. [redacted]

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[redacted] in Kandahar, security is not good. People in the city are afraid. ISAF may need two to three months of stiff fighting to stabilize the situation. In Helmand, large portions of the province are out of government or ISAF control, small Afghan and ISAF garrisons in several district centers are isolated and unable to maneuver or protect the population (REF A includes a combined ISAF/Coalition GOA security assessment - it is not pretty).

6. (S) Yet all is not grim. ISAF is finding its feet and should make some progress in restoring the balance particularly if NATO meets the troop requirements. New coordination measures in Kabul may slowly improve the synergy of development and military action (REF B). There is some reduction in the tempo of Taliban operations, although this appears to be mainly for regrouping and resupply. The Taliban lost all major fights; but their casualties were mostly in replaceable fighters and intelligence shows that Taliban leadership still perceives victory. That perception, that the Taliban is winning, scares the hell out of Afghans. It is effectively exploited in excellent Taliban media work. Until we are able to secure more places and people and spread economic progress, our IO campaign will have little credibility.

POLITICAL IMPACT

[redacted]

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[redacted] The politics of ethnic balance have repeatedly failed in Afghanistan but [redacted]

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[redacted] ethnic balance is the only safeguard Afghan politicians, tribal leaders, and warlords know. Establishing a competent, merit-based government has made some progress. We will shove it hard. But it will be a task for years to come. Fortunately, the Parliament has been reasonably responsible and to date effective.

ECONOMICS

8. (S) Progress is evident at the macro-economic level; continued growth, low inflation, currency stability, debt rescheduling, slowly increasing revenue collection and even some investment are all moving forward. We are working on each of these fronts. But none of this meets the excessive expectations of Afghans, who widely perceive the pace of reconstruction as being too slow and as leaving them out. There is a sour mood of economic frustration and far too many unemployed. A drought will lower growth next year. The feeling of economic neglect in the North and West is growing and slowly adding new risks.

WHAT HAPPENED?

9. (S) [redacted] We braced for a Taliban offensive that we predicted in February, but were surprised by the size of the forces employed. We can always defeat them in battle but the numbers have given them an expanded ability to control the rural population in too much of the South.

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[redacted] the craving for security at any price is leading at least some tribal elements to join the enemy. Eradication of poppy in Helmand may well have stimulated drug lords, if not farmers, to provide more active support for the Taliban. In short, a revitalized enemy with its leadership secure in Pakistan mounted a major counter-attack before our work in governance, building the ANA, standing-up a real police force, and economic development had

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adequately taken hold. Each of our pieces is working but education takes time and social change for responsible government and efficient management takes longer. We face a gap between the time we need and the pressure of the enemy. We are potentially in trouble, but not if we and our allies commit

additional resources. Intelligence suggests that the Taliban's Pakistan-based leadership continues to believe it can prevail. Our vital national security interests dictate that we prove them wrong.

WHAT IS NEEDED

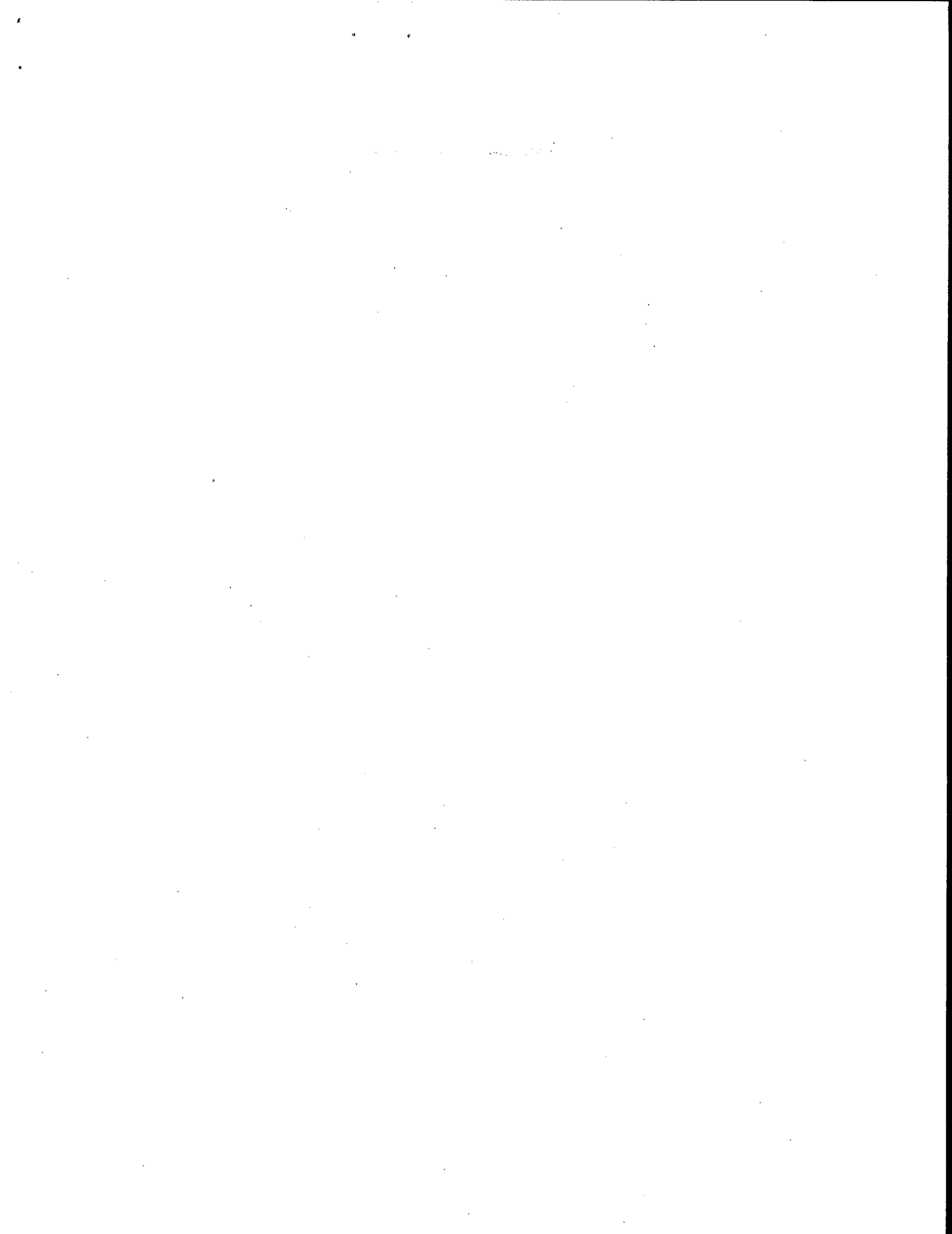
10. (S) ANSF Modernization: The assumptions underlying the current program to build the ANA and reform and build the ANP have changed significantly. Moreover, the ANA is demonstrating improved fighting ability every day. We now have the opportunity to invest in faster modernization of the Security Forces as a path to attacking the insurgency, decreasing our presence, and demonstrating real success in the war on terror. Such an investment now can provide the ANA the force protection equipment, supporting fires, and mobility it needs to defeat this enemy, and give the ANP the equipment it needs to add a constabulary capability. And, starting in FY08, it can start diminishing the annual billions spent to maintain our current forces in Afghanistan. If we fail to take this opportunity, we will be here, paying that bill, for a long period.

11. (S) Reconstruction: The delta is growing between programmed funding levels and what is needed for major infrastructure in power, roads and rural development. It is clear we cannot meet the need in the time by marginal priority shifts within existing budgets. We need to move on multiple priorities at once. At a minimum, we should seek a supplemental for \$600 million to connect every district capital in the South to its provincial capital and every provincial capital to the main (Ring) road. In this fight, roads are life. This should be treated as part of a security response to the insurgency and not a developmental issue. In the short term, we must also recognize that the "get it from other donors" approach has not worked. Not a single one of the major priorities we identified for funding in the recommended '06

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supplemental has yet been covered by another donor. And the new need, to go much faster for security reasons than previously foreseen on developmental grounds alone, to build secondary roads has doubled the funding requirement. To be clear: the recommended \$600 million would do the increased requirement but cover little of the unfunded regular budget for roads, electricity and agriculture. While we meet the short term crisis we should push our allies on longer term funding and sustain our own funding normal levels.

12. (S) Pakistan: Afghans want to build on the success of the military Tripartite Commission by expanding dialogue and confidence-building into the political sphere. NSA Rassoul recently visited his Pakistani counterpart (Aziz), and both sides seem ready for Presidents Karzai and Musharraf to meet. We should support this nascent initiative.

[Redacted]

[Redacted] The Embassy will provide additional thoughts on shaping President Karzai's visit to the U.S. following consultations with Embassy Islamabad.

[Redacted]

14. (S) A final consideration that is not a recommendation: There are not enough Afghan forces to secure the population at the village and district level. Too much of ISAF is immobilized protecting small areas and populations too politically vital to give up. Using more ISAF, coalition forces or the limited ANA would deprive us of essential mobility and striking power but the ANP is several years away from being able to provide the required level of security. With our support the GOA and ISAF are examining ways to put more local auxiliary police out at various

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provincial levels to defend the population. Karzai

argues that they need to come from the population to be accepted. They do not need much equipment - Afghanistan is running over with light arms - but they need some pay, ammunition and communications. Numerous such forces are already in the field without our consent. We are making solid progress in insisting that they must be brought within the MOI change of command. We are now examining how we, ISAF and other donors could contribute to such an effort and enlarge the forces to fill the gap until a fully fielded ANP can take its rightful role. We are not/not making any recommendations now.

BOTTOM LINE

15. (S) We are not losing. We are pursuing the right policies on building governance, security forces and development. But we are too slow. To build is always slower than to destroy but the enemy has increased the tempo faster than we have responded. The result is a broad Afghan perception that victory is slipping away, a reduced margin for victory and no margin for surprise. And surprise could take many forms; [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] The stakes in Afghanistan deserve a bigger margin for victory. President Karzai's visit to Washington is the time to announce new funds and new visions for stronger Afghan forces.

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