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Secretary General, North Atlantic Treaty Organization

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Secretary General,

On the eve of the Warsaw Summit that will help set the security path for Afghanistan through the Transformation Decade, we are writing to respectfully call on NATO to make reforms to combat corruption in the defense and the security sector an urgent priority. Doing so will create a more resilient, capable and legitimate security force.

Corruption has been well acknowledged as an existential threat to the Afghan state. Without a greater focus on transparency, accountability, and counter-corruption—including the establishment of specific anti-corruption benchmarks for the defense and security sector—NATO campaign mission objectives cannot be achieved.

While the Afghan Government has made real progress in the fight against corruption, much remains to be achieved. As has been well documented, up to fifty percent of some units are reportedly composed of ‘ghost soldiers’. Promotions are often based on nepotism or bribes, and supplies often do not reach units in the field. Field procurement especially is subject to fraud and kickbacks. Some high-ranking security personnel are alleged to be involved in narcotics, illegal mining, and illegal checkpoints. All of this hamstrings the Afghan forces and prevents them from creating a viable defense against the Taliban, Islamic State, Al Qaeda, transnational criminal networks, and a host of other malign actors.

Corruption in the security forces drives the population into the arms of insurgents, warlords, and criminal groups, while incentivizing malign actors to maintain conflict. This weakens rule of law initiatives, and any chance of meaningful conflict resolution. Finally, these abuses deeply undermine the development of a sustainable economy that would eventually enable the Afghan government to fund its own security and development.

In light of this, we propose the following benchmarks for Afghanistan in the Warsaw Summit and beyond:

- Internal Accountability: The MOI and MOD should ensure that audit, oversight and anti-corruption units are staffed by people of proven integrity. The recently established MOD internal accountability mechanisms should be further strengthened, and similar mechanisms should be created in the MOI. The relation between internal accountability mechanisms and the role of the Inspector General should be clarified. Above all, the government must show accountability where abuses are uncovered.
- External Oversight and Transparency: The MOI and MOD should regularly and promptly publish relevant information and documents, including policies and strategies, audit results, and annual reports to enable civil society and the media to help uncover abuse as well as validate and give credit for reforms. As a short term benchmark, the anti-corruption plans for national defense and security strategies should be published prior to the Brussels Conference in October.
- Personnel Management: Afghan law should be amended to standardize promotion practices in the MOD and MOI. The MOI and MOD should put in place a rigorous and transparent mechanism for appointments and promotions. Proposed senior appointments and promotions within the MOD and MOI should be published to make it possible for the civil society and media to respond to and help verify appointments.
- Pay and Logistics: Transfer of salaries through bank accounts is only part of the solution to combatting so-called “ghost soldiers.” In addition to technological solutions such as mobile-banking and improved

logistical tracking processes, the MOI and MOD should strengthen their internal audit capacity and investigative powers, to allow them to monitor violations related to attendance, pay, and logistics – this requires specialized human resources and expertise, the ability to subpoena documents and testimony, the independence of these oversight bodies, and dedicated funding for these units.

- Anti-Corruption Justice Center & Prosecutions: Stronger and more transparent responses to corruption involving police and defense leadership are needed. Prosecution of senior defense and security officials will set the tone and build support for the government forces and start to show the government is committed in tackling pervasive impunity. The Anti-Corruption Justice Centre should prioritize major cases related to security and defense officials.
- Procurement: As part of larger procurement reforms, contracts should be publicly tendered, and the law should require that they are published as a condition of their coming into force. While there are some circumstances where at least some details could be withheld, such as where disclosure could cause grave danger to Afghan forces, their international partners, and overall strategy and missions, there should be a presumption towards disclosure, with narrowly defined exceptions and a requirement to publicly justify any decision to withhold publication.
- Training: Integrate corruption issues into the training curriculum of police and soldiers. The Afghan armed forces have seconded officers to Transparency International where they built a bespoke Building Integrity course. Build on and step up integrity trainings taking place at the National Defense University and National Police Academy, and ensure integrity building and human rights training are central to career progression of police and defense officials.
- Securing Afghanistan's Economic Assets: As part of a larger strategy to secure Afghanistan, the Afghan government and its international partners should create and implement detailed plans to secure the assets that are key to the licit Afghan economy, including major road networks, mining sites, oil facilities, pipelines, and electrical grids. As part of this strategy, the Afghan government should consider creating units of specially vetted and trained police forces, subject to exceptional accountability and oversight, to guard the most important sites and wrest them away from malign actors who use them for their own benefit. Sectors most prone to abuse, such as counter-narcotics and mining, should be a priority for transparency and reform.

The previous fifteen years of security assistance in Afghanistan and the international interventions in Iraq, Mali, Yemen, and the Democratic Republic of Congo have aptly demonstrated that an influx of money, equipment, and security assistance cannot lead to overall mission success without a parallel effort at improving transparency, accountability, and counter-corruption. For that reason, we warmly thank you for your consideration of these proposals, and stand ready to support your efforts and to contribute to the fight against corruption in the Afghan security and defense sector.

Sincerely yours,

