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POLICY

23 February 2010

Ambassador David M. Abshire  
President, Center for the Study  
of the Presidency and Congress  
1020 Nineteenth Street, NW, Suite 250  
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Ambassador Abshire,

Thank you for your letter in late January on the good work that your Center is doing on NATO in Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Secretary asked me to respond directly to your letter as he and I just returned from another NATO ministerial where we worked to address many of the challenges your excellent report highlights.

We have actually been quite pleased in recent months to find some NATO allies answering President Obama's call to do more in Afghanistan. To date, we have received roughly 9,000 additional troops. That said, serious shortfalls remain, particularly in regards to trainers. As you and your colleagues stress in the report, it's not that Allies lack the capabilities to do more. Instead, many simply lack the political will and sense of urgency. That lack of political commitment manifests itself in a number of ways that are detailed in the report: caveats, inadequate investment in training Afghan Security Forces, and inadequate investment in training and equipping NATO forces and civilian experts for deployment. The situation has been made worse by the European response to the global financial crisis and the fiscal crisis in NATO common funded budgets.

Personally, I found a number of the report's recommendations helpful and timely in addressing many of the challenges the Alliance faces today:

- Conduct a NATO threat assessment of the destabilizing effect extremists are having on the region and how that threatens European interests.
- Streamline decision processes for NATO.
- Conduct a wide-scale public information campaign regarding the importance of the war in Afghanistan.



To be sure, reinforcing public confidence in the Alliance's relevance and its important role in global security is a challenge on both sides of the Atlantic, but without public confidence in this Alliance we will not be able to create a shared sense of the importance and urgency of our mission in Afghanistan and Pakistan. I believe that the main ideas in your report are consistent with many of the ideas that Secretary Gates has been promoting with his NATO counterparts in recent meetings. In fact, at the recent meeting of NATO Defense Ministers in Istanbul, Secretary Gates described this as a defining year for the Alliance and for our partners and the people of Afghanistan as he urged Allies to provide more troops, trainers, and civilians in the weeks and months ahead. The Secretary has also been very outspoken on the need for NATO reform in order to ensure that Alliance procedures and processes are both effective and efficient.

My colleagues and I look forward to the next step in your project, which I presume will involve an important and timely Congressional element. As the Alliance prepares to draft and sell a new Strategic Concept to NATO parliaments and publics, we should aim to convene our two teams to compare notes on the way ahead. We would certainly welcome your ideas and suggestions.

I intend to provide copies of the "Country-by-Country Breakdown of Available Capacities" to my country desk officers and our ISAF team for reference. I look forward to opportunities to coordinate our efforts in the coming months.

Sincerely, -



James J. Townsend  
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense  
Europe and NATO