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London Conference and the Future of Afghanistan

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On January 28, British Prime Minister Gordon Brown will host leaders and ministers from 68 nations and an alphabet soup of multilateral institutions to discuss the future of Afghanistan.¹ Announcing the conference in November 2009, Brown stated that Afghanistan's future security and political arrangements would be discussed at the conference, including a timetable for handing over control of Afghanistan's districts and provinces to the Afghan government.² France and Germany further stated that they would consider strengthening their countries' commitments to Afghanistan at this time.

This conference must focus on delivering results rather than adding to the proliferation of bland and meaningless statements produced by the ever-increasing number of international meetings on Afghanistan. In addition to the NATO summit in Strasbourg and the October 2009 defense ministerial summit in Slovakia, there have been at least three regional or international conferences dedicated to Afghanistan in the past year alone. Therefore, the London Conference on Afghanistan must be more than an expensive photo opportunity and instead deliver hard-and-fast commitments from NATO, the international community, and Afghanistan's leaders.

NATO's Strategy Is Already Set but Needs Resources. In presenting recommendations for a new counterinsurgency strategy in Afghanistan, NATO commander U.S. General Stanley McChrystal requested a surge of *up to* 80,000 additional troops. He estimated that 40,000 extra soldiers would give his strategy a fair chance of succeeding.³

On December 1, 2009, President Obama announced that he would deploy an additional 30,000 U.S. troops in support of General McChrystal's strategy, therefore requiring the other members of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to commit 10,000 additional troops.⁴

Since President Obama's election a year ago, Afghanistan has suffered less from a lack of clear strategy and more from a lack of adequate resourcing, particularly from several European members of NATO including France, Germany, Greece, Spain, and Turkey. These nations have persistently shortchanged the NATO mission in Afghanistan, and the United States and the United Kingdom have been forced to shoulder an unfair share of the burden, sacrificing disproportionate amounts of blood and treasure.⁵

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen announced that the NATO alliance would send just 7,000 additional troops to Afghanistan in 2010. France and Germany specifically refused to commit additional resources to Afghanistan, stating that they would make a decision at the London Conference.⁶

However, neither country looks set to significantly increase troop or equipment levels or to reduce the number of self-imposed operational

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caveats on existing and future deployments. German officials are reportedly at odds over the question of increasing the Bundeswehr's deployment to Afghanistan,⁷ with Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle threatening to boycott the conference if it focuses heavily on increasing troop numbers rather than on reconstruction and development.⁸

The London Conference. Franco-German reluctance to fairly share the burden in Afghanistan has forced British Foreign Secretary David Miliband to stipulate that this would not be a pledging conference, echoing President Obama's post-summit announcement at the Strasbourg-Kehl Summit.⁹

Brown has also taken the extraordinary step of extending an invitation to Tehran, specifically Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki, who has threatened a "slap in the mouth" to Britain.¹⁰ Iran's defiance of the international community in pursuing an illicit nuclear weapons program should pre-

clude it from attending the London Conference, and the invitation should be immediately rescinded.

More Than a Photo-Op. The London Conference must present clear opportunities to advance the future of Afghanistan and rally diplomatic support for McChrystal's counterinsurgency strategy. European allies must finally address the chronic under-resourcing of the mission and, above all, demonstrate the strength, resolve, and staying power of the 43-nation ISAF mission if it is to reach its goals of handing over security, judicial, and economic responsibilities to the central and local government of Afghanistan.

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