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A core OSCE tenet is that shared challenges require a collaborative, comprehensive response. Achieving a stable and prosperous future for Afghanistan is no exception to this principle. In Afghanistan, three defining transitions are currently underway: a political transition, including elections next April, a major security transition, and an economic transition.

Regarding the development of democratic institutions within Afghanistan, we hope that our Afghan partners will send a formal invitation to the OSCE requesting support for the 2014 election and that, as it has in the past, the OSCE will respond positively to any assistance requests. The OSCE has deployed Election Support Teams (EST) to Afghanistan since the 2004 presidential elections and has provided a number of recommendations on electoral reform. The United States welcomes the OSCE's commitment to supporting international efforts to promote free, fair, transparent and credible elections, particularly as Afghanistan prepares for 2014 presidential elections.

Since 2007, the OSCE has supported a number of initiatives focused on border security and transnational threats with Afghanistan and its neighbors. The United States has been a key supporter of the OSCE's work to share its expertise with Afghanistan and the region to build a more stable and democratic environment as we draw down the level of international forces in Afghanistan. As a platform for cooperation and facilitator of cross-border private sector collaboration and joint ventures, the OSCE is well-positioned to support and advance regional security and stability. The OSCE Border Management Staff College (BMSC) in Dushanbe already provides specialized training for border security agencies from across Central Asia, the wider OSCE region, and Afghanistan. Likewise, the OSCE Academy in Bishkek offers master's level training and engagement for the region's next generation of leaders in such areas as trade and customs facilitation and good governance. The OSCE's programs facilitate licit trade between Afghanistan and Tajikistan by building capacity and developing relationships between Tajik and Afghan businesses, notably by empowering and engaging women entrepreneurs. We applaud the OSCE's multi-faceted approach both to strengthen border security and to increase regional trade and linkages, including the promotion of integrated border management strategies.

We also fully support additional efforts within Central Asia for the benefit of Afghanistan and welcome Secretary General Zannier's vision in seeking out new, value-added region-wide endeavors. In this regard, we urge the speedy development and implementation of activities that meet the needs of our regional partners. Ideas such as establishing a state-of-art, regional center of excellence for senior-level law enforcement officials and an institute for strategic studies to assess opportunities and challenges facing the region deserve our close attention.

We encourage the OSCE to align its efforts on Afghanistan closely with the priorities identified by the region through the “Heart of Asia” process. And we seek a deeper and more integrated role for the OSCE as the Heart of Asia process develops and unfolds. The OSCE has unique experience and expertise to apply to the action plans of the six confidence building measure working groups and can serve as an important supporting partner organization for the Heart of Asia process as we generate closer ties and enhance our collaborative efforts.

Afghanistan’s neighbors in Central and South Asia have clearly demonstrated their leadership on a range of initiatives that advance both security and economic cooperation. We remain committed to the New Silk Road vision as a strategic framework for the United States’ ongoing engagement in the region, because we believe that the development of trade and transport corridors connecting Central and South Asia via Afghanistan have the greatest potential to transform regional relationships and promote regional stability. Regional governments have made notable progress toward establishing a more integrated market, and the U.S. will continue to support those countries that embrace connectivity and collaboration. We already have strong partners in this regard – from Moscow to New Delhi.

The OSCE’s comprehensive security concept, directly linking political-military security to economics, the environment, and human rights and fundamental freedoms, makes it a unique mechanism for the 57 participating States to advance their shared interests in Central Asia, Afghanistan, North America, and Europe. We note that the OSCE and its executive structures’ expertise in promoting the growth of civil society, transparency, and good governance and in strengthening respect for human rights, complement our efforts to counter transnational threats and bolster economic opportunities. The OSCE is very much an integral part of the “software” side of building the New Silk Road.

Conclusion

The OSCE has much to offer in assisting Afghanistan and the region, including improved border management and business practice, countering corruption, promoting democratic values, transparency, and human rights, and reducing illicit trafficking to promote legitimate trade and economic development. We call on all participating States and Partners for Cooperation to redouble their efforts to support the OSCE’s response to assistance requests from our Afghan partners and the region, and we welcome the opportunity to collaborate more closely with all our partners.

The United States is clear-eyed about the challenges that exist in Afghanistan and the wider region. But we also see clearly the progress made, as well as the virtually unlimited potential for advancement through greater regional connectivity. We remain committed to supporting stability in Afghanistan and to augmenting the regional relationships that will help make this possible.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.