

CCAR Resolution on the War in Afghanistan

Adopted by the Board of Trustees – April 23, 2009

Background

The Central Conference of American Rabbis has, on previous occasions, expressed its refusal to accept “the inevitability of war.” Even in a time of war, we hold out as an ideal Isaiah’s vision of swords beaten to ploughshares. And yet, we have also learned from Ecclesiastes that there is a “time for war.” Some wars are both justifiable and justified. We believe that the United States’ war against the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan is such a war.

The Central Conference of American Rabbis last addressed the situation in Afghanistan directly in June, 2001. At that time, we decried the Taliban regime’s human rights abuses, addressing in particular their goal of eliminating women from public life, their persecution of the Shiite/Hazara minority, and the lack of religious freedom under the regime. We “[u]rge[d] the United States government to support international initiatives to end” these abuses, and urged our member rabbis “to educate their congregants and the public on the gravity of the situation in Afghanistan,” and “to voice their concern for the people of Afghanistan.”¹

Shortly after that resolution of the Conference, Al Qaeda attacked America, killing thousands. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 led the United States to fight the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan. Operation Enduring Freedom was undertaken with the overwhelming support of both houses of Congress, and with broad-based international support as well. By January 2002, the Taliban were militarily defeated in much of the country, and an international force under the auspices of the United Nations was working to provide security in and around Kabul. Today that force, now under NATO auspices, includes approximately 62,000 troops from 41 countries, among them 32,000 American military personnel. Additionally, extensive humanitarian efforts are underway throughout the country.

And yet, Afghanistan remains unstable and unsafe. The Taliban have worked ceaselessly to destabilize the country since they reconstituted in 2003. Wherever they take control, human rights abuses abound, including intentional massacres of civilians. While there is agreement that

¹ Resolution on Human Rights and Religious Freedom in Afghanistan, June 2001.

the NATO force of 62,000 is not sufficient to defeat the resurgent Taliban and Al Qaeda, increasing the size of that force has not been possible due to the war in Iraq, which has severely strained the capacity of the United States military.

Additionally, the situation is complicated by Pakistan for two reasons: along the border it shares with Afghanistan's Northwest Frontier Province, the forbidding geography and a sympathetic population have created a haven for Al Qaeda, and the government of Pakistan has not, until now, been unambiguously committed to the effort to defeat those Taliban and Al Qaeda fighters who have found a haven in Pakistan.

President Obama campaigned on a policy of redoubling America's efforts to decisively defeat the Taliban and Al Qaeda in the region, and has committed his administration to that goal.

Specifically, the Obama administration seeks:

1. to send the necessary combat and support units to Afghanistan to quell the resurgence of the Taliban so that Afghanistan does not become a haven for Al Qaeda;
2. to find, disrupt and destroy Al Qaeda wherever they may be found;
3. to create the infrastructure necessary for the deployment of American military personnel;
4. to work closely with and strengthen the government of Afghanistan;
5. to work closely with our NATO and other allies in the theater;
6. to expand and train the Afghan military so that it can play a greater role in creating security in the nation;
7. to foster and expand humanitarian aid and projects and work in close collaboration with development and aid agencies;
8. to work diligently for the protection of civil rights and liberties in Afghanistan; and
9. to encourage the government of Pakistan to work actively to not allow Al Qaeda and the Taliban to use Pakistan as a safe haven.

Therefore, be it resolved that the Central Conference of American Rabbis:

1. supports the goals of the Obama administration in Afghanistan;

2. reaffirms our November, 2001 statement that “military means alone will not defeat terrorism. A coordination of military, diplomatic, political, economic, religious and cultural means must also be utilized;”²
3. looks forward to the successful completion of the military objectives in Afghanistan, followed by the safe and swift homecoming of American military personnel;
4. reaffirms our June 2001 resolution on Afghanistan, calling for the return of women to public life, protection for ethnic minorities, and freedom of religious expression; and
5. calls upon our member rabbis to learn and teach about this issue.

² “In Response to Terrorism and the Attacks of September 11,” November 7, 2001.