

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON AFGHANISTAN

WEDNESDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2009

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ARMED SERVICES,
Washington, DC.

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:02 a.m. in room SD-106, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator Carl Levin (chairman) presiding.

Committee members present: Senators Levin, Lieberman, Reed, Akaka, Bill Nelson, Ben Nelson, Bayh, Webb, McCaskill, Udall, Hagan, Begich, Burr, Kirk, McCain, Inhofe, Sessions, Chambliss, Graham, Thune, Wicker, LeMieux, Burr, Vitter, and Collins.

Committee staff members present: Richard D. DeBobes, staff director; Christine E. Cowart, chief clerk; and Leah C. Brewer, nominations and hearings clerk.

Majority staff members present: Jessica L. Kingston, research assistant; Gerald J. Leeling, counsel; William G.P. Monahan, counsel; Michael J. Noblet, professional staff member; Roy F. Phillips professional staff member; William K. Sutey, professional staff member.

Minority Staff Members Present: Joseph W. Bowab, Republican staff director, Adam J. Barker, research assistant, Christian D. Brose, professional staff member; Michael V. Kostiw, professional staff member; Lucian L. Niemeyer, professional staff member; Richard F. Walsh, minority counsel; and Dana W. White, professional staff member.

Staff assistants present: Kevin A. Cronin, Paul J. Hubbard, Jennifer R. Knowles, Hannah I. Lloyd, and Brian F. Sebold.

Committee members' assistants present: James Tuite, assistant to Senator Byrd; Vance Serchuk, assistant to Senator Lieberman; Carolyn A. Chuhta, assistant to Senator Reed; Nick Ikeda, assistant to Senator Akaka; Christopher Caple and Ann Premor, assistants to Senator Bill Nelson; Patrick Hayes, assistant to Senator Bayh; Gordon I. Peterson, assistant to Senator Webb; Stephen C. Hedger, assistant to Senator McCaskill; Jennifer Barrett, assistant to Senator Udall; Roger Pena, assistant to Senator Hagan; Lindsay Kavanaugh, assistant to Senator Begich; Roosevelt Barfield, assistant to Senator Burr; Bethany Bassett, assistant to Senator Kirk; Brandon Andrews, Anthony J. Lazarski, and Rob Soofer, assistants to Senator Inhofe; Robert La Branche and Sandra Luff, assistants to Senator Sessions; Clyde A. Taylor IV, assistant to Senator Chambliss; Adam Brake, assistant to Senator Graham; Jason Van Beek, assistant to Senator Thune; Erskine W. Wells III, assistant

to Senator Wicker; Brian Walsh, assistant to Senator LeMieux; Charles Brittingham, assistant to Senator Vitter; Rob Epplin and Chip Kennett, assistants to Senator Collins.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CARL LEVIN, CHAIRMAN

Chairman LEVIN. Good morning, everybody. Secretary Clinton, Secretary Gates, Admiral Mullen, welcome. Thank you all for your many contributions to our Nation.

Today, the committee receives testimony from the President's senior advisors on his strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan which the President set out last evening. The United States has important security interests in the Afghan-Pakistan region. Instability in Afghanistan or the return of the Taliban to power would not only provide fertile ground for al Qaeda and other extremists to regroup and renew plots against the United States and its allies, but it would also threaten the stability of neighboring Pakistan, a nuclear-armed country.

For the sake of our military men and women who are, or will be, deployed in harm's way, as well as the well-being of our Nation, we have to get the strategy right. Our purpose and our mission, what we are trying to accomplish, must be clear.

I agree with the President's emphasis on the training and rapid growth of the Afghanistan National Security Forces and transitioning responsibility to the Afghan government for Afghanistan's security. Indeed, I have long believed that the most urgent need in Afghanistan is to provide the training, from basic training to mentoring to side-by-side partnering on the battlefield, along with the equipment and the other support elements to rapidly build the capabilities of the Afghan army and police. An Afghan surge should be our goal, and any U.S. surge should be related to that goal.

The President has also called for increased contributions from our NATO allies. We need not only to Afghanize, but to NATOize the Afghanistan mission.

I also agree with the President's emphasis on the importance of efforts to reintegrate local Taliban fighters into Afghan society. An adequately funded plan for reintegration is long overdue.

The President's strategy also makes clear that our commitment to the future of Afghanistan requires action from the Government of Afghanistan. That means recruiting of soldiers and police needed to quickly expand Afghan forces; it means serious anticorruption efforts; it means national reintegration and reconciliation policies, and retention and support for honest, competent ministry officials.

President Karzai has pledged to do these things, and President Obama rightly insists on holding him to that pledge. Setting the July 2011 date to begin the reduction of our forces is a reasonable way, under the circumstances, to produce the sense of urgency in the Afghan government that has been lacking up to now and that is essential to success.

I believe the principal mission of U.S. troop increases in Afghanistan should be to accelerate the transition to Afghan forces taking the lead for providing Afghan security. This is an important part of the approach outlined by the President. Where I have questions is whether the rapid deployment of a large number of U.S. combat

forces, without an adequate number of Afghan security forces for our troops to partner with, serves that mission.

A critical component of transitioning to Afghan responsibility will be the on-the-job partnering of Afghan forces with U.S. and coalition forces. That partnering is vital to success in Afghanistan, for the Afghans and for us. But, the current shortfall, in terms of partnering, is not a shortage of American combat troops, it's a shortage of Afghan troops.

In the key province of Helmand, the ratio of U.S. troops to Afghan troops is about five U.S. troops to one Afghan soldier. We are now partnered with about 2,000 Afghans in Helmand. The desired ratio, according to Pentagon doctrine, is close to the opposite—three Afghans for one U.S. soldier or marine. So, we have enough troops in Helmand right now—about 10,000—to partner with more than 20,000 additional Afghan troops, more than are expected to be available to partner with us there next year, according to Prime Minister Gordon Brown of Great Britain. If so, doubling the number of U.S. troops in the south will only worsen a ratio under which our forces are already matched up with fewer Afghan troops than they can and should partner with.

General James Conway, the Commandant of the Marine Corps, said in September, “If I could change only one thing in the south of Afghanistan, it would be to have more Afghan troops.” A few days ago, General Conway reiterated the point this way, quote, “To have American marines standing on a corner in a key village isn't nearly as effective as having an Afghan policeman or an Afghan soldier.”

Well, it seems to me that the large influx of U.S. combat troops will put more U.S. marines on street corners in Afghan villages, with too few Afghan partners alongside them. Partnering with, equipping, and in other ways empowering Afghan forces to provide security for their country will demonstrate our resolve and commitment to a stable future for Afghanistan and the region. That should be the stated mission, and troop increases should be judged by whether they advance that mission.

Senator McCain.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN McCAIN

Senator McCAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And let me thank Secretary Clinton, Secretary Gates, and Admiral Mullen for joining us today to discuss the vital issue of Afghanistan.

Let me first reiterate, as I said yesterday, that I think President Obama has made the right decision to embrace a counterinsurgency strategy for Afghanistan and to resource it properly. I would have much preferred that General McChrystal receive the entire force he had requested, but I've spoken with our military and civilian leaders, and I think the 30,000 additional U.S. troops that the President has called for, plus greater force commitments from our allies, will enable us to reverse the momentum of the insurgency and create the conditions for success in Afghanistan.

I support the President's decision, and I think it deserves the support of all Americans, both Republicans and Democrats.

While I do not support—what I don't support and what concerns me greatly is the President's decision to set an arbitrary date to begin withdrawing U.S. forces from Afghanistan. A date for withdrawal sends exactly the wrong message to both our friends and our enemies in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the entire region, all of whom currently doubt whether America is committed to winning this war. A withdrawal date only emboldens al Qaeda and the Taliban, while dispiriting our Afghan partners and making it less likely that they will risk their lives to take our side in this fight.

Yes, our commitment to Afghanistan is not open-ended. Yes, large numbers of U.S. combat troops will not remain there indefinitely. And yes, this war will one day end. But, it should end when we have achieved our goals. Success is the real exit strategy. And when conditions on the ground have decisively begun to change for the better, that is when our troops should start to return home with honor. Not one minute longer, not one minute sooner, and certainly not on some arbitrary date in July 2011 which our enemies can exploit to weaken and intimidate our friends.

I am eager to hear, from our distinguished witnesses, how we can say, as the President did last night, that our withdrawal will begin in July 2011, no matter what, but that this arbitrary date will also take into account of conditions on the ground. That seems logically incoherent to me, and I welcome some clarity on this matter.

Another concern that I have to do—that I have is to do with the civilian side of our counterinsurgency strategy. Greater military force is necessary to succeed in Afghanistan, but it's not sufficient. I am confident in our military strategy and leadership, and I believe our troops can do everything that General McChrystal laid out in his assessment of this summer. I believe we can "clear and hold," but I am concerned that we and our allies do not have a unified plan to "build," to work with and support our Afghan partners in Kabul and beyond as they build their own nation, their own economy, and their own free institutions.

I'm also concerned by reports of divisions in our embassy and by major differences between our commander and our ambassador. We can only succeed in Afghanistan if we have a joint civil-military campaign plan unified at every level from top to bottom, much as Ambassador Crocker and General Petraeus established in Iraq during the surge. I look forward to hearing what progress we're making on creating such a joint civil-military effort.

I've been critical of the President during the past several months, but that is now behind us. Our focus, going forward, must be on winning the war in Afghanistan. I emphasize "winning." And this depends as much on the substance of our policy as the signals we send to actors in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and the region.

The President was wrong to signal our intention to begin leaving Afghanistan on an arbitrary date, but the fact is, we now have the right mission, we now have the right leadership, and we now have a request for sufficient resources to succeed, so our friends can know that we will support them, our enemies can know that we will defeat them, and all can know that we are committed to the long-term success of Afghanistan and Pakistan as stable states that can govern themselves, secure themselves, and sustain their

own development. Though the nature of our commitment to Afghanistan, Pakistan, and their region will change over time, our commitment to their success will endure.

We now have an opportunity to build a bipartisan consensus in support of a vital national security priority, defeating al Qaeda and its violent extremist allies in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and ensuring that these countries never again serve as bases for attacks against America and our allies.

Americans need to know why winning this war is essential to our country's security. They need to know that things in Afghanistan will get worse before they get better, that, unfortunately, casualties will likely rise in the year to come, but that, ultimately, we will succeed.

I look to the President and to our witnesses here today to lead an unflinching effort to build bipartisan support for the war in Afghanistan, both among the public and here in Congress. I will be an ally in this effort, and I pledge to do everything in my power to ensure that we win this war—not just end it, but win it.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The prepared statement of Senator McCain follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator McCain.

I understand that the order that our witnesses desire to be recognized is Secretary Gates first, then Secretary Clinton, then Admiral Mullen.

Secretary Gates, welcome.

**STATEMENT OF HON. ROBERT M. GATES, SECRETARY OF
DEFENSE**

Secretary GATES. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Actually, I think the Secretary of State's microphone is the only one working, so perhaps we should allow her to be the only witness today. [Laughter.]

Mr. Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for inviting us to testify today.

Last night, President Obama announced a renewed commitment and more focused strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. I would like to provide an overview of the strategic thinking and context behind his decisions—in particular, the nexus among al Qaeda, the Taliban, Pakistan, and Afghanistan—our objectives and how the President's strategy aims to accomplish them, and the military forces required.

As the President first stated in March and reemphasized last night, the goal of the United States in Afghanistan and Pakistan is to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and to prevent its return to both countries. The international military effort to stabilize Afghanistan is necessary to achieve this overarching goal. Defeating al Qaeda and enhancing Afghan security are mutually reinforcing missions. They cannot be untethered from one another, as much as we might wish that to be the case.

While al Qaeda is under great pressure now, and dependent on the Taliban and other extremist groups for sustenance, the success of the Taliban would vastly strengthen al Qaeda's message to the Muslim world that violent extremists are on the winning side of history. Put simply, the Taliban and al Qaeda have become sym-

biotic, each benefiting from the success and mythology of the other. Al Qaeda leaders have stated this explicitly and repeatedly. Taliban success and retaking and holding parts of Afghanistan against the combined forces of multiple modern armies, the current direction of events, has dramatically strengthened the extremist mythology and popular perceptions of who is winning and who is losing.

The lesson of the Taliban's revival for al Qaeda is that time and will are on their side, that, with a Western defeat, they could regain their strength and achieve a major strategic victory as long as their senior leadership lives and can continue to inspire and attract followers and funding. Rolling back the Taliban is now necessary, even if not sufficient, to the ultimate defeat of al Qaeda.

At the same time, one cannot separate the security situation in Afghanistan from the stability of Pakistan, a nuclear-armed nation of 175 million people now also explicitly targeted by Islamic extremists. The two countries, bound by ties of tribe and faith, share a porous border of more than 1500 miles. Giving extremists breathing room in Pakistan led to the resurgence of the Taliban and more coordinated, sophisticated attacks in Afghanistan. Providing a sanctuary for extremists in southern and eastern Afghanistan would put yet more pressure on a Pakistani government already under attack from groups operating in the border region.

Indeed, the Pakistan Taliban, in just the last year or so, has become a real threat to Pakistan's own domestic peace and stability, carrying out, with al Qaeda's help, escalating bombing attacks throughout the country. It is these attacks and the Taliban's movement toward Islamabad, 7 months ago, that largely motivated the current operations by the Pakistani army. And we know the Pakistan Taliban operate in collusion with both the Taliban in Afghanistan and al Qaeda.

A related point with respect to Pakistan: Because of American withdrawal from the region in the early 1990s, followed by a severing of military-to-military relations, many Pakistanis are skeptical that the United States is a reliable, long-term strategic partner. We must change that perception.

Failure in Afghanistan would mean a Taliban takeover of much, if not most, of the country, and likely a renewed civil war. Taliban-ruled areas could, in short order, become, once again, sanctuary for al Qaeda, as well as a staging area for resurgent military—militant groups on the offensive in Pakistan. Success in south and central Asia by Islamic extremists, as was the case 20 years ago, would beget success on other fronts. It would strengthen the al Qaeda narrative, providing renewed opportunities for recruitment, fundraising, and more sophisticated operations. Aided by the Internet, many more followers could join their ranks, both in the region and in susceptible populations across the globe.

It is true that al Qaeda and its followers can plot and execute attacks from a variety of locations, from Munich to London to Denver. But, what makes the border area between Afghanistan and Pakistan uniquely different from any other location, including Somalia, Yemen, and other possible redoubts, is that this part of the world represents the epicenter of extremist jihadism, the historic place where native and foreign Muslims defeated one superpower

and, in their view, caused its collapse at home. For them to be seen to defeat the sole remaining superpower in the same place would have severe consequences for the United States and the world.

Some say this is similar to the domino theory that underpinned and, ultimately, muddled the thinking behind the U.S. military escalation in Vietnam. The difference, however, is that we have very real and very recent history that shows just what can happen in this part of the world when extremists have breathing space, safe havens, and governments complicit with, and support of, their mission. Less than 5 years after the last Soviet tank crossed the Termez Bridge out of Afghanistan, in 1993 Islamic militants launched their first attack on the World Trade Center in New York. We cannot afford to make a similar mistake again.

A stable security situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, one that is sustainable over the long term by their governments, is vital to our national security. By the same token, the current status quo in Afghanistan, the slow but steady deterioration of the security situation and growing influence of the Taliban, is unacceptable. So, too, is the status quo ante, a largely ungoverned region, controlled by extremists, in which the United States had little influence or ability to gain actionable intelligence on the ground.

The President's new strategic concept aims to reverse the Taliban's momentum and reduce its strength while providing the time and space necessary for the Afghans to develop enough security and governance capacity to stabilize their own country. We will focus our resources where the population is most threatened, and align military and civilian efforts accordingly, with six primary objectives: reversing Taliban momentum through sustained military action by the U.S., our allies, and the Afghans; denying the Taliban access to, and control of, key population and production centers and lines of communication; disrupting the Taliban outside secured areas and preventing al Qaeda from regaining sanctuary in Afghanistan; degrading the Taliban to levels manageable by Afghan National Security Forces; increasing the size and capability of the Afghan National Security Forces, and employing other local forces selectively, to begin transitioning security responsibility to the Afghan government within 18 months; and finally, selectively building the capacity of Afghan government, particularly in key ministries.

This approach is not open-ended nation-building; it is neither necessary nor feasible to create a modern, centralized, Western-style Afghan nation-state, the likes of which has never been seen in that country; nor does it entail pacifying every village and conducting textbook counterinsurgency from one end of Afghanistan to the other. It is, instead, a narrower focus tied more tightly to our core goal of disrupting, dismantling, and eventually defeating al Qaeda by building the capacity of the Afghans, capacity that will be measured by observable progress on clear objectives, and not simply by the passage of time.

The essence of our civil-military plan is to "clear, hold, build, and transfer." Beginning to transfer security responsibility to the Afghans in summer 2011 is critical, and, in my view, achievable. This transfer will occur, district by district, province by province, depending on conditions on the ground. The process will be similar

to what we did in Iraq, where international security forces provided overwatch, first at the tactical level and then at the strategic level.

Even after we transfer security responsibility to the Afghans and draw down our combat forces, the United States will continue to support their development as an important partner for the long haul. We will not repeat the mistakes of 1989, when we abandoned the country only to see it descend into chaos and into Taliban hands.

Making this transition possible requires accelerating the development of a significantly larger and more capable Afghan army and police through intensive partnering with ISAF forces, especially in combat. It also means achieving a better balance between national and local forces, increasing Afghan unconventional warfare capabilities, engaging communities to enlist more local security forces to protect their own territory, and bolstering Afghan-led reintegration and reconciliation efforts.

At the strategic level, the President's plan will achieve a better balance between investments in the central government and sub-national entities. At the national level, the focus will be primarily on reforming essential ministries and pressing for the appointment of competent and honest ministers and governors. At the local and regional level, there will be a shift to work through existing traditional structures rather than building new ones.

In all of these efforts, we must have a committed partner in the Afghan people and government. That is one reason why there will be very clear and definitive timeframes for reviewing our, and their, progress.

As the President announced, the United States will commit an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan for an extended surge of 18 to 24 months. These forces, the U.S. contribution to the fight, will be deployed and concentrated in the southern and eastern parts of the country. The first of these forces will begin to arrive in Afghanistan within 2 to 3 weeks.

In all, since taking office, President Obama has committed nearly 52,000 additional troops to Afghanistan, for a total U.S. force of approximately 100,000. We are looking to NATO and to our other partners to send a parallel international message of strong resolve. Our allies must take the lead and focus their resources in the north and west to prevent the insurgency from establishing new footholds. We will seek some 5- to 7,000 troops from NATO, and expect the allies to share more of the burden in training, equipping, and funding the Afghan national army and police.

Let me offer a few closing thoughts. It is worth remembering that the security situation in Afghanistan, though serious, does not begin to approach the scale of violence that consumed Iraq and confronted our forces there when I was confirmed as Secretary of Defense, 3 years ago this week. With all the resources already committed to this campaign, plus those the President has just announced, I believe the pieces are being put in place to make real and measurable progress in Afghanistan over the next 18 to 24 months.

The President believes, as do I, that, in the end, we cannot defeat al Qaeda and its toxic ideology without improving and stabilizing the security situation in Afghanistan. The President's decision of-

fers the best possibility to decisively change the momentum in Afghanistan and fundamentally alter the strategic equation in Pakistan and central Asia, all necessary to protect the United States, our allies, and our vital interests.

So, I ask for your full support of this decision to provide both Ambassador Eikenberry and General McChrystal the resources they need to be successful. This will take more patience, perseverance, and sacrifice by the United States and by our allies. And, as always, the heaviest burden will fall on the men and women who have volunteered and, in many cases, revolunteered, to serve their country in uniform. I know they will be uppermost in our minds and prayers as we take on this arduous but vitally necessary mission.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Gates follows:]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Secretary Gates.
Secretary Clinton.

**STATEMENT OF HON. HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON,
SECRETARY OF STATE**

Secretary CLINTON. Okay. Thank you. Chairman Levin, Senator McCain, members of the committee, I am grateful for this opportunity to testify before so many former colleagues and friends. My experience on this committee helped form my views on many of the issues facing our Nation, and it's a privilege to be here before you now in this different role.

Yesterday, President Obama presented the administration's strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan. Today, Secretary Gates, Admiral Mullen, and I will all be providing you with additional details. But, let me speak briefly at a more personal level about why we are making this commitment.

Simply put, among a range of difficult choices, this is the best way to protect our Nation now and in the future. The extremists we are fighting in Afghanistan and Pakistan have attacked us and our allies before. If we allow them access to the very same safe havens they used before 2001, they will have a greater capacity to regroup and attack again. They could drag an entire region into chaos.

Our civilian and military leaders in Afghanistan have reported that the situation is serious and worsening, and we agree. In the aftermath of September 11th, I grieved with sons, daughters, husbands, wives whose loved ones were murdered. It was an attack on our country, and an attack on the constituents I then represented. I witnessed the tragic consequences in the lives of thousands of innocent families and the damage done to our economy and our sense of security. So, I feel a personal responsibility to help protect our Nation from such violence.

The case for action against al Qaeda and its allies has always been clear, but the United States course of action over the last 8 years has not. The fog of another war obscured our focus. And while our attention was focused elsewhere, the Taliban gained momentum in Afghanistan and the extremist threat grew in Pakistan, a country with 175 million people, a nuclear arsenal, and more than its share of challenges.

It was against this backdrop that President Obama called for a careful, thorough review of the strategy. I was proud to be part of that process, which questioned every assumption and took nothing for granted. And our objectives are clear: We will work with the Afghan and Pakistani governments to eliminate safe havens for those plotting to attack against us, our allies, and our interests. We will help to stabilize a region that we believe is fundamental to our national security, and we will develop a long-term, sustainable relationship with both Afghanistan and Pakistan so that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past.

The duration of our military presence is not open-ended, but our civilian commitment must continue, even as our troops begin, eventually, to come home. Accomplishing this mission and ensuring the safety of the American people will not be easy. It will mean sending, not only more troops, but more civilians and more assistance to Afghanistan, and significantly expanding our civilian efforts in Pakistan.

The men and women carrying out this military-civilian mission are not members of a list or items on a PowerPoint slide; they are our friends and neighbors, our sons and daughters, our brothers and sisters. And we will be asking them and the American people to make extraordinary sacrifices on behalf of our security.

I want to assure this committee, that I know takes its oversight responsibility so seriously, that we will do everything we can to make sure their sacrifices are honored and make our Nation safer.

The situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan is serious, but it is not, in my view, as negative as frequently portrayed in public, and the beginning of President Karzai's second term has opened a new window of opportunity. We have real concerns about the influence of corrupt officials in the Afghan government, and we will continue to pursue them. But, in his inauguration speech last week that I was privileged to attend, I witnessed President Karzai's call for a new compact with his country. He pledged to combat corruption, improve governance, and deliver for the people of his country. His words were long in coming, but they were welcome. They must now be matched with action.

The Afghan people, the United States, and the international community must hold the Afghan government accountable for making good on these commitments. We will help by working to strengthen institutions at every level of Afghan society so we don't leave chaos behind when our combat troops begin to depart.

The President has outlined a timeframe for transition to Afghan responsibility, something that President Karzai assumed would happen, and which we took as a very good sign of a renewed understanding of the necessity of Afghanization.

That transition will begin in the summer of 2011, when we expect Afghan security forces and the Afghan government will have the capacity to start assuming ownership for defending their own country. As the President has said, we will execute the transition responsibly, taking into account conditions on the ground.

But, we think a timeframe for such a transition will provide a sense of urgency in working with the Afghan government. It should be clear to everyone that, unlike the past, the United States, our allies, and partners have an enduring commitment to Afghanistan,

Pakistan, and the region, so our resolve in this fight is reflected in the substantial commitment of troops and in the significant civilian commitment that will continue long after combat forces leave.

That civilian effort is already bearing fruit. Civilian experts and advisors are helping to craft policy inside government ministries, providing development assistance in the field, and working in scores of other roles. When our marines went into Nawa this July, we had civilians on the ground with them to coordinate assistance the next day. And as operations progress, our civ-mil coordination is growing even stronger.

We are on track to triple the number of civilian positions in Afghanistan, to 974, by early next year. On average, each of these civilians leverages ten partners, ranging from locally employed staff to experts with U.S.-funded NGOs. It's a cliché to say we have our best people in this job—in these jobs, but it happens to be true.

When I was in Kabul a few weeks ago, I met with an American colonel, who told me that, while he had thousands of outstanding soldiers under his command, none of them had the 40 years of agricultural experience of the USDA civilian serving alongside his battalion or the rule-of-law and governance expertise of their civilian experts from the State Department. He told me, "I'm happy to supply whatever support these valuable civilians need, and we need more of them." The President's strategy will make that possible.

Not only do we have the right people to achieve our objectives, we also have a sound strategy. We will be delivering high-impact assistance and bolstering Afghanistan's agricultural sector, the traditional core of the Afghan economy. This will create jobs, reduce the funding that the Taliban receives from poppy cultivation, and draw insurgents off of the battlefield.

We will also support an Afghan-led effort to open the door to those Taliban who renounce al Qaeda, abandon violence, and want to reintegrate into Afghan society. We understand some of those who fight with the insurgency do not do so out of conviction, but due to coercion or money. So, all Afghans should have the choice to pursue a better future if they do so peacefully, respect the basic human rights of their fellow citizens, and reintegrate into their society.

Our regional diplomacy complements this approach by seeking to mitigate external interference in Afghanistan and working to shift the calculus of neighboring countries from competition for influence to cooperation and economic integration.

We also believe a strong, stable, democratic Pakistan must be a key partner in the fight against violent extremism, and people in Pakistan are increasingly coming to view that we do share a common enemy. I heard this repeatedly during my recent visit. So, our relationship needs to be anchored in common goals of civilian rule, robust economic development, and the defeat of those who threaten Pakistan, Afghanistan, the United States, and the rest of the world.

We'll significantly expand support intended for Pakistan to develop the potential of their people. We will do so by demonstrating a commitment to Pakistan that has been questioned by the Pakistanis in the past. And we will make sure that the people of Paki-

stan know that we wish to be their partner for the long term and that we intend to do all that we can to bolster their futures.

Now, we're not going to be facing these challenges alone. We share this responsibility with governments around the world. I will go to Brussels tomorrow to begin the process of securing additional alliance commitments of troops, trainers, and resources. We expect Secretary General Rasmussen to have an announcement today about the progress we're making in that effort. Ambassador Holbrooke, our Special Representative, is already there, consulting with our allies.

And we're also asking the international community to expand its support to Pakistan. Our objectives are shared by people and governments across the world, and we are particularly reaching out to Muslims everywhere.

Let me conclude where I began. We face a range of difficult choices in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but the President's plan represents the best way we know to protect our Nation today and in the future. The task we face is as complex as any national security challenge in our lifetimes. We will not succeed if people view this effort as a responsibility of a single party, a single agency within our government, or a single country.

We owe it to the troops and civilians, who will face these dangers, to come together as Americans, and come together with allies and international partners who are ready to step up and do more.

We have to accomplish this mission. And I look forward to working with you to help meet this challenge.

Thank you all very much.

[The prepared statement of Secretary Clinton follows:]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Madam Secretary.
Admiral Mullen.

**STATEMENT OF ADMIRAL MICHAEL G. MULLEN, USN,
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF**

Admiral MULLEN. Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain, distinguished members of this committee, thank you for your time today.

Let me state, right up front, that I support fully and without hesitation the President's decision, and I appreciate the opportunity to contribute to what I believe was a healthy and productive discussion. I've seen my share of internal debates about various national security issues, especially over the course of these last two years, and I can honestly say that I do not recall an issue so thoroughly or so thoughtfully considered as this one.

Every military leader in the chain of command, as well as those of the Joint Chiefs, was given voice throughout this process, and every one of us used it. We now have before us a strategy more appropriately matched to the situation on the ground in Afghanistan, and resources matched more appropriately to that strategy, particularly with regard to reversing the insurgency's momentum in 2010. And given the stakes in Afghanistan for our own national security, as well as that of our partners around the world, I believe the time we took was well worth it.

Secretary Clinton and Gates—Secretaries Clinton and Gates have already walked you through the large policy issues in question. I will not repeat them.

From a purely military perspective, I believe our new approach does three critical things:

First, by providing more discrete objectives, it offers better guidance to commanders on the ground about how to employ their forces. They will still work to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven. They will still strive to protect the Afghan people, who remain the center of gravity. They will still pursue major elements of the counter-insurgency campaign desired and designed by General McChrystal, which, as we all know, involves at least some measure of active counterterrorism operations. But, now they will tailor this campaign and those operations by focusing on key population areas, by increasing pressure on al Qaeda's leadership, by more effectively working to degrade the Taliban's influence, and by streamlining and accelerating the growth of competent Afghan National Security Forces.

At its core, our strategy is about providing breathing space for the Afghans to secure their own people and to stabilize their own country. It's about partnering and mentoring just as much, if not more, than it is about fighting. Where once we believed that finishing the job meant, to a large degree, doing it ourselves, we now know that it cannot truly, or permanently, be done by anyone other than the Afghans themselves. Fully a third of the U.S. troops in theater are partnered with Afghan forces, and I expect that number to rise significantly throughout 2010.

Secondly, but not insignificantly, this new strategy gives commanders on the ground the resources and the support they need to reverse the momentum of the Taliban insurgency and to accomplish these more limited objectives. I've said it before, and I believe it still today, this region is the epicenter of global Islamic extremism. It is the place from which we were attacked on September 11. Should we be hit again, it's the place from which I am convinced the planning, training, and funding will emanate. Al Qaeda may, in fact, be the architect of such an attack, but the Taliban will be the bricklayers.

Though hardly a uniform body, Taliban groups have grown bolder and more sophisticated. We saw that just a few months ago in the Korangai Valley, where Taliban forces attacked coalition outposts using what I would call "almost conventional small-unit tactics." Their fighters are better organized and better equipped than they were just 1 year ago. In fact, coalition forces experienced record-high violence this past summer, with insurgent attacks more than 60 percent above 2008 levels. Through brutal intimidation, the Taliban has established shadow governments across the country, coercing the reluctant support of many locals, and challenging the authority of elected leaders and state institutions. Indeed, we believe the insurgency has achieved a dominant influence in 11 of Afghanistan's 34 provinces. To say that there is no serious threat of Afghanistan falling once again into Taliban hands ignores the audacity of even the insurgency's most public statements. And to argue that, should they have that power, the Taliban would not at least tolerate the presence of al Qaeda on Afghan soil, is to ignore both the recent past and the evidence we see every day of col-

lusion between these factions on both sides of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border.

The cost of failure is, then, grave. That is why the President's decision for an extended surge to Afghanistan of 30,000 additional forces is so important. It gets the most U.S. force into the fight as quickly as possible, giving General McChrystal everything he needs in 2010 to gain the initiative.

It validates our adherence to a counterinsurgency approach, and it offers our troops in Afghanistan the best possible chance to set the security conditions; for the Afghan people to see our commitment to their future; for the Karzai government to know our strong desire to see his promised reforms; for the Afghan Taliban to understand they will not, they cannot, take back Afghanistan; and for those beyond Afghanistan who support the Taliban, or would see the return of al Qaeda, to realize the futility of their pursuit.

I should add that this—these reinforcements come on top of the 21,000 troops the President ordered shortly after taking office, troops which have already made a huge difference in the southern Helmand Valley. But, as I have testified before, Mr. Chairman, no amount of troops in no amount of time will ever be enough to completely achieve success in such a fight. They simply must be accompanied by good governance and healthy public administration. This, not troop numbers, is the area of my greatest concern.

Like everyone else, I look forward to working with the Karzai government, but we must have the support of the interagency and international communities, as well.

And that brings me to my final point. The President's new strategy still recognizes the criticality of a broadbased approach to regional problems. He does not view Afghanistan in isolation any more than he views the ties between al Qaeda and the Taliban as superficial. He has called for stronger and more productive cooperation with neighboring Pakistan, which is, likewise, under the threat from radical elements, and whose support remains vital to our ability to eliminate safe havens. He has pledged, and we in the military welcome, renewed emphasis on securing more civilian expertise to the effort—and that is happening—more contributions by other NATO nations, and a realistic plan to transition responsibilities to the Afghans. His is a more balanced, more flexible, and more achievable strategy than we've had in the past, one based on pragmatism and real possibilities. And speaking for the 2.2 million men and women who must execute it and who, with their families, have borne the brunt of the stress and the strain of 8 years of constant combat, I support his decision and appreciate his leadership.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Admiral Mullen follows:]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you so much, Admiral Mullen.

We're going to have a 6-minute round, and I will ask members to strictly adhere to that 6 minutes so we will all have an opportunity to ask questions.

There's been some confusion about whether the beginning date for U.S. troop reductions is set for July 2011, with the pace of those reductions being condition-based, or whether the 2011 July starting date itself is dependent on conditions on the ground. And, Secretary Gates, which is it?

Secretary GATES. Mr. Chairman, it is—July 2011 is when we expect the transition process to begin. Our view is that—

Chairman LEVIN. But, is that date conditions-based, or not?

Secretary GATES. No, sir.

Chairman LEVIN. Okay. Next question. The—and this has to do with the partnering ratio. There are currently just over 10,000 U.S. troops in Helmand Province in southern Afghanistan, and they are partnered with only 1,500 or so Afghan soldiers. The partnering goal for the United States is almost the reverse; as measured in units, three Afghan companies to one U.S. company. Now, paraphrasing the National Security Council's director for Afghanistan, the three-Afghan-to-one-U.S. ratio helps prevent Afghan units from relying too much on the U.S. unit, to the detriment of the Afghan unit's development. So, the current number of troops could and should, under our own doctrine, be partnering with 20,000 or so Afghan troops in Helmand. We don't need more troops to partner more Afghans; we have more than enough for that purpose. Nor do we expect 20,000 or more Afghan troops to be assigned to partner with us in Helmand next year. According to Prime Minister Brown of Great Britain, there will be 10,000 more Afghan troops deployed to Helmand in the coming year, to be divided approximately equally between U.S. and British forces for partnering.

So, first, Secretary Gates, are my numbers correct?

Secretary GATES. Let me defer to Admiral Mullen.

Admiral MULLEN. Chairman, I think your numbers, as far as those that are currently partnered, are correct, the availability of Afghan forces in the south, in Helmand—

Chairman LEVIN. In terms of—

Admiral MULLEN.—yes, sir.

Chairman Levin:—what we expect to be deployed by Afghanistan for their troops in—

Admiral MULLEN. It—yes, sir, it sounds about right.

Chairman LEVIN. Okay.

Now, I thought I heard the President, at the meeting yesterday in the Old Executive Office Building, say that we would not have our troops clear an area unless they could turn the cleared area over to Afghans. Now, Secretary Gates, did I hear him correctly? And if so, how is that possible, given the paucity of available Afghan forces?

Secretary GATES. Well, let me start and then invite Admiral Mullen to chime in.

First of all, clearly, as I've indicated, accelerating the growth of the Afghan national army and police is vitally important, but we are also looking, as I suggested in my remarks, at local forces, as well, partnering with local security forces so there are—there is more than just the Afghan national police and the Afghan national army in this mix. And the plan clearly is that we will not transition security responsibility to the Afghans until the Afghans have the capacity in that district or that province to be able to manage the security situation on their own, with us and our allies initially in a tactical overwatch and then a strategic overwatch situation.

The reality is that the circumstances, very much as in Iraq, differ from district to district and province to province, so the ability of the Afghans to take this on will depend on the circumstances in

each of these areas. And in some, it will take fewer Afghans. But, clearly a big part of this is additional training, both basic training, but then partnering in combat as training, to put more and more Afghans into the fight and into a position where they can take responsibility for security, and particularly in the context of degraded Taliban capabilities. I mean, one of the purposes of the U.S. going on with additional forces is, not just to partner with the Afghans, and not just to train the Afghans, but to degrade the capabilities of the Taliban. And so, you have the situation in which the capabilities of the ANSF are rising at a time when our combat forces are degrading the capabilities of the Taliban, and it's the point at which the Afghans are able to handle that degraded threat that we would make the transition.

Chairman LEVIN. So, do I understand from your answer, then, that we—there will be situations where our troops will be clearing an area and not have Afghans available yet, at that point, to turn that cleared area over to? Is that fair?

Admiral MULLEN. Mr. Chairman, I think it is. But—

Chairman LEVIN. All right.

Admiral MULLEN.—if I can, just briefly. When General McChrystal showed up, in June, there were virtually no units partnered. There are some 280 units out of 351 right now who are partnered. This is—

Chairman LEVIN. With some—

Admiral MULLEN. This is—

Chairman LEVIN.—partners, not the three-to-one ratio.

Admiral MULLEN. No, sir, we're not there yet.

Chairman LEVIN. Okay.

Admiral MULLEN. But, this is companies by companies. This is in training and in fighting.

Chairman LEVIN. My final question, because I'm out of time. What will be the Afghan army's projected size by July 2011?

Secretary GATES. The goal, by December 2010, is 134,000.

Chairman LEVIN. No, my question is July 2011.

Admiral MULLEN. It'll be about 170,000.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

Senator McCain.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Admiral Mullen, do you think it's important to tell the American people it's very likely that casualties will go up during the course of this troop increase that's envisioned?

Admiral MULLEN. I—Senator McCain, I—when we added the Marines, when the 21,000 went in, I was very clear about the potential there, that casualties would go up, and I don't think there's any question that that is part of the risk associated with these additional troops, and that they will go up.

Senator MCCAIN. I think the American people need to understand that.

Admiral MULLEN. Yes, sir, I agree with you.

Senator MCCAIN. Secretary Gates, in answer to Chairman Levin's question, if I understand your answer—Chairman Levin said you—was it condition-based, the withdrawal plan for July 2011, and you said, "No." Will we withdraw our forces based on condi-

tions on the ground or based on an arbitrary date, regardless of conditions on the ground?

Secretary GATES. What we're talking about, Senator McCain, is the beginning of a process, not the end of that process. Approximately 60 percent of Afghanistan today is not controlled by the Taliban or have significant Taliban influence.

Senator MCCAIN. I'd say, with respect, Secretary Gates, my question is, Will the date of withdrawal, of 2011, which the President said—will be based on an arbitrary date of July 2011, regardless of conditions on the ground?

Secretary GATES. I think it's the judgment of all of us in the Department of Defense involved in this process that we will be in a position, in particularly uncontested areas, where we will be able to begin that transition in July—

Senator MCCAIN. Well, let's suppose you're not.

Secretary GATES.—of 2011.

Senator MCCAIN. Let's suppose you're not. Let's suppose that conditions on the ground so that our commanders believe that it would jeopardize the success of the mission if we start a withdrawal in July 2011. Will we do it anyway?

Secretary GATES. Well, I think that we will be in a position—the President has indicated that we will have a thorough review of how we're doing in December of 2010, and I think we will be in a position then to evaluate whether or not we can begin that transition—

Senator MCCAIN. President—

Secretary GATES.—in July.

Senator MCCAIN. I say with great respect, Secretary Gates, the President announced that we would begin withdrawing a hard date, of July 2011, which is—I don't know why that date was particularly picked—which may be time in another session—but—so, he's announced that. But, at the same time, you said conditions on the ground would. Now, those are two incompatible statements. You either have a winning strategy and do as we did in Iraq, and then, once it succeeded, then we withdraw, or we—as the President said, we will have a date, beginning withdrawal, of July 2011. Which is it? It's got to be one or the other. It's got to be the appropriate conditions or it's got to be an arbitrary date. I'd—you can't have both.

Secretary GATES. Where we begin the transition is, I think, what is the—is the key factor here, Senator. As I suggested, we're—we will have a thorough review in December 2010. If it appears that the strategy's not working and that we are not going to be able to transition in 2011, then we will take a hard look at the strategy itself.

Senator MCCAIN. Well, I say, with respect, I think the American people need to know whether we will begin withdrawing in 2011 or—and conditions are ripe for that—or whether we will just be withdrawing, no matter what. And I think—

Secretary GATES. Our current plan is that we will begin the transition, in local areas, in July 2011. We will evaluate, in December 2010, whether we believe we will be able to meet that objective.

Senator MCCAIN. I think that's got to be made very clear, because right now the expectation level of the American people, be-

cause of the President's speech, is that we will be withdrawing, as of July 2011, regardless of conditions on the ground. I think that's the wrong impression to give our friends, it's the wrong impression to give our enemies, it's the wrong impression to give the men and women who want to go over there and win, not start withdrawing on an arbitrary date. And that's—unfortunately, that has not been made clear at all.

And by the way, Admiral Mullen, the Army Counterinsurgency Field Manual says, "counterinsurgents should prepare for a long-term commitment. The populace must have confidence in the staying power of both the counterinsurgents and the host-nation government." By announcing a date for withdrawal, don't you think that that kind of contradicts the counterinsurgency manual?

Admiral MULLEN. Sir, I believe, and the military leadership believes, by mid-2011 we'll know how this is going. And the Secretary talked to the assessment. And, in fact, it's General McChrystal's view that this—these additional forces will allow him to reverse the momentum and head us in the right direction. And we'll have very solid indicators at that point, and then, in—obviously, the July 2011 date is a day we start transitioning—transferring responsibility and transitioning; it's not a date that we're leaving. And the President also said that is—will be based on conditions on the ground. So—

Senator MCCAIN. Which—then it makes no sense for him to have announced the date. But, we'll—I'm sure we'll continue this discussion.

Secretary Clinton, I appreciate your statement, but I would like a lot more specifics. We know that there are divisions within the Embassy in Kabul. We know that cables were leaked, that the ambassador there was against any increases in troops there. We know that relations within the embassy—at least three factions. And we also know that the ability of State Department personnel has been significantly limited, as it was prior to the surge in Iraq, because the environment is not safe for them to go out and operate.

I'm—I have great confidence in the military operational planning, and I'm confident it can succeed. But, as I said earlier, I don't see the "build" component yet, and I would like for you to submit to this committee a very specific plan, just as we are receiving a very specific military plan, on exactly how we're going to achieve the "build" part of it, which I think there is an adequate model for it, in the case of Iraq.

So, I appreciate your statements, and I agree with you about the quality of personnel. I have yet to see a comprehensive, cohesive, convincing plan to implement the essential civil side of any successful surge.

Secretary CLINTON. Well, Senator McCain, first let me say, we are more than happy to submit a plan. We have obviously been working with our committee of jurisdiction and authorization on a very close ongoing basis, and we'll be happy to share a lot of the information with you, and we would welcome your response and your advice.

I have to say, however, that, you know, the process that we engaged in solicited opinions, and I thought it was a great tribute to the President and to General Jones that the White House ran a

process that actually sought out and made it clear that diversity of opinion was welcome. And I thought it was useful to hear from a variety of sources. It wouldn't surprise you, as it didn't surprise me, that people had different opinions based on their perspective. But, as Admiral Mullen just eloquently said, the President's made a decision. There is no division. There is absolute unity and a commitment to carrying out the mission. And we'll be happy to share the specifics of that with you.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you very much.

And thank all the witnesses. We appreciate, enormously, their contributions to our country.

Chairman LEVIN. We're going to take advantage—thank you, Senator McCain—we're going to take advantage of the presence of a quorum here now.

[Brief recess for business meeting.]

Chairman LEVIN. Senator Lieberman.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Senator MCCAIN. By the way, thank you, Mr. Chairman. [Laughter.]

Chairman LEVIN. I knew you would appreciate that intervention.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thank—oh, one more item of business.

Chairman LEVIN. I included the 1900.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Thanks, Mr. Chairman.

Thanks, to Secretary Gates, Secretary Clinton, and Admiral Mullen, for your excellent opening statements and for all the hard and effective work that you did in support of the policy that the President announced last night.

I agree with what Senator McCain said, that the President has made the right decision in embracing a counterinsurgency strategy for Afghanistan and resourcing it properly. In making this decision, President Obama has respectfully disagreed with the majority of members of his own political party, according to every public opinion poll I've seen, and therefore, I think it's fair to say that the President has quite literally put our national security interests ahead of partisan political interests. I hope that fact will inspire and encourage a majority of members of both political parties to do the same and to, thereby, show that America's political leadership is still capable of suspending partisanship at the water's edge when our security and our troops are on the line.

As chairman of the Homeland Security Committee, I'm very grateful that President Obama argued so effectively last night that the war in Afghanistan is a war of necessity because its outcome is inseparable from our security here at home. That is why I believe there is no substitute for victory over the Islamist extremists and terrorists in Afghanistan. A war of necessity must not just be fought, it must, of necessity, be won. Last night, in the most controversial paragraph of his speech, President Obama said that we will, quote, "begin the transfer of our forces out of Afghanistan in July of 2011," end quote. That troubled me when I heard it. But, then the President added words that reassured me, which were that, quote, "We will execute this transition responsibly, taking into account conditions on the ground," end quote.

This morning, Secretary Gates, in your opening statement, you added more detail, I think, to the—and, Admiral Mullen, you did,

too—to the mode by which we will begin this transition in July 2011. And I'm particularly struck that you refer to it as a "transfer of security responsibility," and you also say that it will be very much like what we did in Iraq, that—where international security forces provided overwatch, first at the tactical level, then at the strategic level.

So, Secretary Gates, I want to ask you, if I—as I read your words today, if I'm correct in concluding that what will definitely begin in July 2011 is a transfer of security responsibility to the Afghans, but may not include, immediately, a withdrawal of our forces from Afghanistan?

Secretary GATES. No, and that is correct. I think as we turn over more districts and more provinces to Afghan security control, much as we did with the provincial Iraqi control, that there will be a thinning of our forces and a gradual drawdown. I would remind folks, here, since this is the second surge I've been up here defending, that the surge in Iraq lasted 14 months.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Right.

Secretary GATES. January '07 to March '08. And frankly, it was pretty apparent to the Taliban—or to our adversaries in Iraq, rather—all along that that was a very tentative situation, because we were up here defending it practically every day.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Right.

Secretary GATES. So, the notion that our adversaries in Afghanistan are not aware of the debates in this country, and the debates in Europe and elsewhere, is, I think, unrealistic. So—

Senator LIEBERMAN. I agree.

Secretary GATES.—they know these things. But, the reality is, this is going to be a process. And I think it has much in common with the way that we began to draw down in Iraq.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Is it—so, that—to me, that says that we may transfer—we're likely to transfer—am I right?—security responsibilities to the Afghans in the areas that are most stable, that are most uncontested at the beginning.

Secretary GATES. It's going to be—

Senator LIEBERMAN. At the beginning, we probably will put our troops back a ways, just to see how that works, rather than taking them out of the country.

Secretary GATES. Yes, we're not just going to throw these guys into the swimming pool—

Senator LIEBERMAN. Got it.

Secretary GATES.—and walk away. I mean, the reality is, first of all, those transfers are going to take place in the most uncontested places in Iraq, so—

Senator LIEBERMAN. Right.

Secretary GATES.—in Afghanistan. So, just as in Iraq, you may have some districts and provinces being transferred to Afghan security responsibility, and, at the very same time, have extraordinarily heavy combat going on in other provinces around the country, which is exactly what we saw in Iraq.

Senator LIEBERMAN. And am I right that, in the policy that the President announced last night, which does begin a transfer of security responsibility of July 2011 to the Afghans, there is no dead-

line for the end of that transfer; it will be based on conditions on the ground?

Secretary GATES. It will be based on conditions on the ground. But, by the same token, we want to communicate to the Afghans—

Senator LIEBERMAN. Right.

Secretary GATES.—this is not an open-ended commitment—

Senator LIEBERMAN. I agree.

Secretary GATES.—on the part of the American people and our allies around the world.

Senator LIEBERMAN. And I agree with that.

Secretary GATES. Because we have—

Senator LIEBERMAN. Admiral Mullen—

Secretary GATES.—to build a fire under them, frankly, to get them to do the kind of recruitment, retention, training, and so on, for their forces that allow us to make this transition.

Let me just draw one other analogy to Iraq. In Iraq, once it was clear the surge was working, it was pretty plain that the Iraqis wanted us out—

Senator LIEBERMAN. Right.

Secretary GATES.—about as fast as possible. The security agreement and everything flowed from that. That's not entirely clear in Afghanistan. They live in a very rough neighborhood. And so, we have the balancing act here—and frankly, the centerpiece of our debates for the last several months—of, How do you get the Afghans to begin to step up to responsibility for their own future, their own security in a way that allows us to have confidence that they will not once again become the safe haven for al Qaeda? That's—figuring out that balance, in terms of how you incentivize and give a sense of urgency to the Afghans, and at the same time signal resolve to our adversaries, was the tough part of this for us.

Senator LIEBERMAN. Well, I appreciate that answer. I think you strike exactly the right balance, and I appreciate what you said. We're not just going to throw the Afghans into the pool and run away, until we're sure that they can swim on their own. And to me, that's the essence of moving down the road to victory in Afghanistan.

Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Lieberman.

Senator Inhofe?

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I was going to head up with the—start up with the end status and state, but it's been pretty well covered right now. I would only say this, though. I would—probably speaking on behalf of all of the members up here, because all of us have been both to Afghanistan and Iraq. And the troops themselves, they want to win, and they don't really—they don't like to even talk about a withdrawal date and that type of thing.

Let me just mention a—ask you a quick question, Admiral Mullen. Most of the time, when commanders talk about different options and courses of action, they talk about the risk involved. The risk is usually from low, medium, or high. What was the risk—or, was there a risk level associated with General McChrystal's 40,000 increase?

Admiral MULLEN. Notionally and broadly moderate, but the real critical path here is the development of the ANSF, the Afghan Security Forces, which we all think is high risk, particularly on the police side. That's one of the reasons he's shifted to partnering. And one of the reasons that we are devoting our best people, best leaders, resources, to accelerating that, so that we can do what Secretary of Defense—

Senator INHOFE. Okay. I'll pursue that in just a minute, here. And so, I would assume that the number 30,000 would be a little higher risk than the moderate risk that—

Admiral MULLEN. Sir, I—what I said in—

Senator INHOFE. Oh, oh—

Admiral MULLEN.—what I said in my statement is, General McChrystal is going to get these forces this year in as fast as we can get them there.

Senator INHOFE. Okay.

Admiral MULLEN. His biggest concern is to reverse the momentum. He thinks he can do that with these forces.

Senator INHOFE. Yes.

Admiral MULLEN. He's going to get 'em on the same timeline he asked for—

Senator INHOFE. Yes, I understand.

Admiral MULLEN.—and at about the same level.

Senator INHOFE. Now, I was privileged to be with General Jones the last week that he was on the job over there, and I know some of the differences between Afghanistan and Iraq, but I'd been asked, a lot of the times—and I think we should get it on the record—if we're looking at—during the peak of the surge in Iraq, of about 165,000 Americans, and this, when you start with 68,000, add 30- to it, you're talking about 100,000 in a country that's about twice the size of Iraq—why does it take fewer—what's the major reason it takes fewer of our troops, our participation, in Afghanistan, relative to the size, as it did in Iraq?

Admiral MULLEN. One of the, I think, great strengths of the review was to focus the objectives specifically, and, in particular, focus the objectives on key population centers. And so, the troops that General McChrystal has asked for, and that will add up to about 100,000, do that in key areas that—in, particularly, the Pashtun Belt, where he fundamentally believes, with these troops, he can turn this around. So, it—while those—while the ratio is a guide, it is not sacrosanct, and he's able to focus where we need to focus to get at this insurgency. And in that—and actually, it was the—the same was true in Iraq; it's just that this need, with respect to these ratios and these numbers, is about right for Afghanistan.

Secretary GATES. Let me just add one sentence. And that is one of the reasons why the contribution—the added contributions from our allies and partners are so important, because, basically, we want them to take responsibility for the northern and western parts of Afghanistan so that we can concentrate and focus our efforts in the southern and eastern parts of the country.

Senator INHOFE. Secretary Gates, the—I think one thing that all of you have said in your opening statements is, we need greater participation by the Iraqis, the ANA, and we also need greater par-

ticipation by the non-American coalition. We all agree with that. On the—I happened to be over there in '03, when we were taking—turning over the training of the ANA to the Afghans, and it happened to be Oklahoma's 45th Guard Unit that was in charge of that. They contend that they're great warriors; and yet, you looked around—and I have ever since then—you see so many of these young, healthy Afghans, that are walking the streets, who ought to be in the military. What can we do differently than what we've done in the past to encourage a greater participation with the ANA?

Secretary GATES. Well, let me start and then ask Admiral Mullen to contribute.

One of the things that they are doing that actually, I think, makes a real difference is significantly increasing the pay, both for the police and the army. The reality is that, based on the information available to us, in many instances the Taliban actually pay more than the Afghan government. And so, one of the things that—particularly in terms of retention, is to increase their pay. And I think most people believe that that will have a real impact.

Senator INHOFE. Okay, I—okay.

Admiral MULLEN. The Secretary talked earlier about retention, recruiting; and clearly incentivizing that, from a pay standpoint, is critical.

The other fundamental difference from a—from several years ago, or really since General McChrystal got there, is this partnership piece. What I think you saw, Senator, was mentoring and training teams, that kind of thing.

Senator INHOFE. That's correct.

Admiral MULLEN. This is partnering, and it's getting everybody off their bases and out with the community. So, that—those two differences are significant.

Senator INHOFE. Well, okay, I appreciate it. I was going to ask the same question about—What can we do differently, in terms of encouraging more of the non-American coalition forces? I was pleased with the one statement that the President made when he talked about—when—the fact that he had actually talked to some of the NATO allies before coming out with this. I wish he had done the same thing on the third site in Poland. But, by doing that, do you think that's going to encourage them, make them feel they're more a part of this? Was that a good move?

Secretary GATES. Absolutely. And I—

Senator INHOFE. And what else can we do to encourage more of the non-American—

Secretary GATES. Well, we—

Senator INHOFE.—coalition?

Secretary GATES. Secretary Clinton has been talking to her counterparts, I've been talking to my counterparts, and we are hearing: 1,000 here, 800 there, and so on. I think that we will make the 5- to 7,000 goal, and I think, you know, as somebody who has been critical of the allies and was once derided by my British colleague for megaphone diplomacy because I was giving 'em such a hard time on this, it's—we have to realize that the non-U.S. forces have increased in the last 2 years, from about 17- to 18,000 troops, to almost 44,000. So, with this add, we will be at nearly 50,000 non-

U.S. troops in Afghanistan, and I think that's a pretty significant commitment.

Senator INHOFE. Yes.

My time has expired, but, for the record, Madam Secretary, you made the statement about Karzai and the speech that he made and all this. I hope it's not just empty words. But, if you would, for the record, give us your indication—your feelings about what he can do now to accomplish what you had suggested.

Secretary CLINTON. I—

Senator INHOFE. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman

Secretary CLINTON. I certainly will, Senator.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Secretary CLINTON. But, if I could just quickly add, one of the most important parts of his speech was his assertion that Afghan forces would be taking responsibility for many important parts of the country within 3 years, and that they would be responsible for the entire country within 5 years. That is very much along the lines of the kind of partnering and transition that we think is realistic; we just have to keep the feet to the fire and keep pushing it forward.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Inhofe.

Senator REED.

Senator REED. Well, thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, Madam Secretary, Mr. Secretary, Chairman.

There's been much made about this withdrawal goal as arbitrary, but—let me ask you, Admiral Mullen and this was based on the advice of General McChrystal, and your advice, about your expectation of the—what the situation on the ground would be in 2011 Given these additional resources and additional change of policy

Admiral MULLEN. I have a very clear view—and, I think, so does General Petraeus and McChrystal—that by mid-2011 we will know whether we are going to succeed here or not. That has been something that we've discussed and we agreed on. That's why getting these forces in so quickly is so important to try, to reverse this thing. And it's—and some of it is based on the fact, the Marines have been in Helmand this year, so, in fact, the Marines will be in one of the toughest places for three fighting seasons, if you will—2009, 2010, and 2011—and we think, with the additional forces, we will have very strong indicators about how this is going and our ability to transfer and transition at that point.

Senator REED. So you wouldn't describe the date as arbitrary.

Admiral MULLEN. No, sir. It wasn't arbitrary.

That said, what the President also said is, it would be responsible and it would be based on conditions. And it's—you know, all of us can look out and think—you know, speculate what those conditions will be, but—I think we have to be careful about that, but that is the goal right now.

Secretary GATES. I would just clarify, if I could, Senator—

Senator REED. Mr. Secretary?

Secretary GATES.—that the July 2011 date was chosen because it will be 2 years after the Marines arrived in Helmand.

Senator REED. And giving them the fighting opportunities, for want of a better term, that—fighting obligations or fighting challenges that—

The issue of—the deadline also raises the issue of our posture in Iraq. There is a deadline there, Mr. Secretary, and that is a legal deadline, which I understand couldn't be changed without the permission of the Iraqis, even if conditions deteriorated. Is that correct?

Secretary GATES. That's correct. The—all of our combat forces are to be out by the end of August 2010, and all forces out by the end of 2011. We do have some flexibility, in terms of the pacing of the withdrawals between now and the end of August, but even with the hiccups over the elections, the problems with respect to the election law, at this point General Odierno does not see any need to alter the pacing of the draw-downs in Iraq.

Senator REED. But, as that is—that was agreed to by the Bush administration as a hard deadline without conditions, is that correct?

Secretary GATES. That is correct.

Senator REED. One of the other aspects of this was the process of deliberation that went into it. It took time. But, from your comments this morning, that time, I sense, was well spent. And one aspect of this I think, Admiral Mullen, was—the original plan by General McChrystal would not have had the flow of forces as quickly as the final plan adopted by the President. Is that correct?

Admiral MULLEN. And, in particular, with respect to the NATO forces, that, again, they're not committed yet, that we would hope to, certainly making it—we're hopeful that they will be available more quickly and that we will do everything that we can to get as much capability and as quickly as possible.

Senator REED. But, that is—

Admiral MULLEN. I don't want to overstate that.

Senator REED. Right.

Admiral MULLEN. It is accelerated, to some degree, but I don't want to overstate that, but it really gets him the forces he needs this year to turn this thing around.

Secretary GATES. And I would add that the final component of his original request, the final brigade combat team, would not have arrived in Afghanistan until the summer of 2011. My own personal recommendation was, there's no need to commit to that since it's so far in the future, and so, to Admiral Mullen's point earlier, fundamentally General McChrystal is getting more troops faster than under the original plan.

Senator REED. And under the—all right, let me just rephrase that.

This process, as you've suggested, has produced, in your minds, a better proposal across the board than originally was submitted by the individual components: the Ambassador, General McChrystal, CENTCOM, et cetera. Is that your—

Secretary GATES. I'm convinced everybody in the process feels that way. Because one of the things that was clearly—one of the concerns that I had, coming out of the March decisions, was that they were interpreted very broadly as—and in the press and elsewhere—as a commitment to full-scale nation-building, and creating

a strong central government in Kabul. And broad—understandable skepticism over such broad objectives, and it sounded very open-ended. So, one of the principal components of the dialogue over the last 3 months is, How do we refine and narrow the mission to make it achievable, and achieve the objectives, in terms of our own security?

Senator REED. Mr. Secretary, some of the criticism of even talking about a date—regardless of whether it's a hard unconditional withdrawal as in Iraq, or the proposal of the President—is that it would embolden the enemy, on one hand, or, on the other hand, they would lie low and wait us out. It strikes me as that the Taliban has been emboldened quite aggressively over the last several years without any type of deadline, and if they sit it out, what will you do if they simply gave up the operational space to us for 18 months or 2 years?

Secretary GATES. Well, we certainly would welcome them not being active for the next 18 months, because it would give us open-field running, with our allies and the Afghans, to build capacity. I think, as you make the point, we are already in a situation in which they are emboldened and in which they are being aggressive and where they have the momentum right now. And so, it's not clear to me what more they could do than they're doing right now. The forces that we're sending in are intended, in the first instance, as the Admiral has said, is to reverse that momentum and deny them the ability to control territory.

Senator REED. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Reed.

Senator Sessions.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank all of you for all your presentations this morning, and for your service to the country.

We only have one Commander in Chief, and I want to be supportive. I think this plan is within the framework of something I think can be effective. I intend to support you and examine it as we go forward to make sure that we're fulfilling our role here in Congress as oversight and responsibility to our constituents. So, I want to thank you for your presentations.

Secretary Gates, we talked earlier this year about too-grandiose expectations about a country that has as many difficulties, and is as poor, as Iraq—or, Afghanistan—and you recognized that in your answer to our questions, and I'd like to pursue that a little bit. That is, what can we realistically expect? And how can we create stability and order in Afghanistan as soon as possible so that we can reduce our troops as soon as possible from that country?

Most of the talk I've been hearing, and in your statements, indicate a commitment to an Afghan National Army, which I assume is commanded and directed from central government in Kabul. But, you did indicate in your statement that you would want to engage communities to enlist more local security forces to protect their own territory. I heard former Secretary Brzezinski this morning on television talk about the need for local militias. I see in—Mr.—former President Musharraf from Pakistan, his Op-Ed in the Washington—in the Wall Street Journal, saying that Afghans, for centuries, have been governed loosely, through a social compact be-

tween all the ethnic groups under a sovereign king, and that—so, again, how do you envision making progress to transitioning to local security forces? And to what extent must those forces be directly accountable to Kabul, and to what extent can they be local?

Secretary GATES. The balance that we have to strike, and we do—I have believed, ever since I got this job, that we have been too focused on the central government in Kabul, and not enough on the provinces and the districts and the tribes. The key here is community security organizations that are willing to work with the government in Kabul and that do not become the militias for warlords.

What—the balance we're trying to strike, and what General McChrystal cares about a lot, as does everybody else, is, How do we encourage these local policing functions? Some of the efforts that I've seen in Wardak Province, where they recruit locals—and the tribal elders are telling me that the roads that have been closed by the Taliban for years have been reopened by these local groups—but, they are within the framework of the provincial governor and the district leadership, so that they're not operating independently, working for warlords. So, figuring out how to encourage that kind of activity and build on it, but keep it within the framework of people who are in governing positions, and not just independent warlords, is the key to that effort.

But, that kind of sub-national sub-provincial effort, I think, ultimately will play an important role in all of this.

Senator SESSIONS. Of course, the National Guards—and every State had a National Guard, the Governors still appoint the commanders of those National Guards in America, and they have—I think there is a sense of loyalty and fierce commitment to local areas, in nations like Afghanistan, that we may not be fully respecting. I think you're on the right track with that thought.

One of the generals who I met in the Pentagon recently had a picture of one of the local officials on his wall, and he was very impressed with him. A very strong leader and was doing good work. I'm not sure that—how well he would perform if he thought that everything had to be run through the national government.

Secretary GATES. I would just add, Senator, I think that one of the keys here is—you know, in a country that is as rural and as tribal as Afghanistan, I think one of the challenges in recruiting people for the army and the police is getting them to leave their local area. And that's why I think these local security activities, if we can work with the Afghans to keep them within a governance model, have such promise, because these guys are basically protecting their own turf.

Senator SESSIONS. I couldn't agree more, and they can be paid what for them would be a good wage, but far less than it would cost to have an American soldier there.

Mr. Secretary, I regret to have to raise the problem with the tanker competition. I notice the Northrop Grumman team has announced a concern so great that they are announcing they may pull out from the competition.

A number of serious changes were made in the RFP, each one of those tilted against a transformational aircraft, tilted against a larger aircraft, a aircraft that could provide more cargo capacity

and more other capabilities. And the initial RFP was received very—with great concern by the Northrop team, and well they could, because it's quite different from the original RFP. There's no doubt about that. And all the change is tilted in the way I've mentioned.

So, I guess my question, briefly, to you is, Do you believe that competition is important in this aircraft for the Defense Department and the warfighter? And number two, will you consider discussing some of these matters and be open to changing an RFP if it's not fair and does not do the job that you need for the Defense Department? Or has a final decision been made to make absolutely no changes in—this entire process of discussion has produced no alteration in the—what the tentative RFP that's out there?

Secretary GATES. We promised a fair and highly transparent process. We believe that the RFP is evenhanded. We are in a comment period, and we have received a lot of comments, both from the competitors and from the Congress and others. The comment period is coming to a close. If we were totally locked into not changing anything, we wouldn't have gone through the comment period. So, we will look at the comments that have been made, and make a judgment at that point. We believe that both of the principal competitors are highly qualified, and we would like to see competition continue in this process.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Sessions.

Senator SESSIONS. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Senator Bill Nelson.

Senator BILL NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Madam Secretary, Mr. Secretary, Admiral, thank you for your public service, for your continued public service.

During the 1970s and the 1980s, I had the privilege of serving with Congressman Charlie Wilson in the House of Representatives. Mr. Secretary, I am so happy to see in your statement, and I quote you, "We will not repeat the mistakes of 1989, when we abandoned the country only to see it descend into civil war and then into Taliban hands."

And it was Charlie Wilson at that time who singularly had been, in large part, responsible for us getting in, in the first place, that fought us getting out. So, thank you for stating the United States policy as strongly as you have.

Now, I'm going to ask you and Secretary Clinton a couple of questions that I think, for the long term—other than the policy that was announced last night by the President with regard to the military activities—for the long term, we have to integrate the military with the other agencies of government to help stabilize the country. For example, the Congress has provided our commanders in the field with the Commanders Emergency Response funds, or CERP funds, to quickly initiate reconstruction projects and provide immediate assistance to the Afghan communities, after they've actually finished their combat. But, we don't seem to have done a great job in, How do you move from the post-conflict reconstruction projects, often overseen by the military, to the long-term development projects overseen by civilians? And so, I wish you all would address, How are Defense and State working together to make that transition for the long term in Afghanistan more seamless?

And then, Secretary Clinton, the State Department has undertaken a major review of U.S. assistance programs, including the agricultural assistance. Particularly with regard to malnutrition as well as alternate livelihoods to growing the poppies. The U.S. has tended to favor large development contracts using third-country nationals instead of investing in the Afghans themselves, the grass-roots efforts that employ Afghans, and therefore providing them with the skills and assist in getting their crops to markets. So, if you would share with the committee about your review of the agricultural assistance, and how we're going to work to make it more effective as you and Defense work together.

Please.

Secretary GATES. Well, first I would say that it is—this situation in Afghanistan has been, shall we say, personally of interest to me, having worked with Charlie Wilson back in the 1980s, and—which was always an interesting experience.

I think one of the—first of all, the specific answer to your question is, Ambassador Eikenberry and General McChrystal are, as we speak, working on their joint civil-military campaign plan, which I think will establish the basis for the kind of transition that you're talking about. But, I would tell you, one of the obstacles, at least in my opinion from observing, is that the Department of State does not have the kind of flexibility in the way that it spends money, and the ability to do so quickly and make commitments quickly and have agility, because of the number of restrictions and processes that they have to go through with respect to their funds. And frankly, I think one of the things that the CERP funds we've learned, both in Iraq and Afghanistan, is that that kind of flexibility and agility has been a huge asset for the United States in both places.

Secretary CLINTON. Well, Senator Nelson, let me start by saying that it's been a real privilege working with Secretary Gates and the Defense Department in trying to figure out how to have a more integrated civilian-military strategy. Secretary Gates has been one of the best advocates that the State Department and USAID have for increasing our funding, our personnel, our flexibility and agility, so that we do have the resources and capacity to be quickly responsive.

What we have done in the last 10 months is, number one, to investigate very thoroughly what was on the ground in Afghanistan, and we didn't particularly come away impressed. As I said in my testimony, there were a little over 300 civilians. Many of them were on 6-month rotations. If you looked at their in-country time, a lot of them spent time out of the country. They did not have well-defined missions. Most of our civilian aid going into Afghanistan had been contracted out without adequate oversight or accountability.

We stopped all contracts going into Afghanistan. We began doing a complete scrub of them. I'm not saying that we have yet perfected our oversight, but we have been working very hard to improve it dramatically.

We are strongly supporting the special inspector general. We would like to actually learn from the mistakes that are being made—in a timely way, rather than waiting, as we did in Iraq, and

being told that we've wasted tens of billions of dollars, which is just, you know, unacceptable.

We also began to recruit civilians who were well suited for the jobs we needed. There was a tendency, in the past, for both Iraq and Afghanistan to basically tell Foreign Service officers, Civil Service officers, in both State and USAID, that if they went, spent their 6 months in one of those two places, they would have an advantage in getting the next best assignment. So, if you wanted to end up in Paris you'd go to Baghdad for 6 months, whether your particular expertise and experience was needed or not.

So, we have painstakingly, under the leadership of Deputy Secretary Jack Lew, actually matched each individual to the job that was required. And we will triple the numbers that we have on the ground, by early January. We've also required all of our civilians to train at Camp Atterbury in Indiana, where our military PRT members train, so that we can, from the very beginning, start integrating our civilian-military forces.

I think that we're learning a lot of lessons as we go, but you put your finger on one of our biggest problems. The CERF funds that are accessible to our military forces, both in and immediately after combat operations, are an—a tremendous tool for doing projects, for winning allegiance. It's even being, you know, used, as it was in Iraq, for enticing people off the battlefield, as you know. There's nothing comparable on the civilian side. I mean, we have to requisition money, we have to wait. I mean, it—you know, the—a young captain can access CERF funds in a matter of hours; an experienced agricultural specialist, a rule-of-law specialist, has to wait weeks, if not months, to get a project approved.

So, if we're going to be successful, and if we're going to, frankly, be the kind of partners that our military needs, we have to have more tools. We're getting more resources, but the budget situation is going to be very tight, as everybody knows, and whether our civilian personnel will have the resources they need to be the partners they are required is going to be challenging.

So, we will come with a very specific set of asks, but your question really goes to the heart of what we are trying to achieve.

The final point I would make is that, you know, we have civilians in the State Department and from USAID serving all over the world in very dangerous settings. You know, they are in war—conflict areas, like Eastern Congo, without any security support. But, when we have our troops on the ground, as we do in Iraq or in Afghanistan, we try to take even additional measures to make sure that our people can get around. But, as Senator McCain said, it's very difficult, because of the security situation.

So, what we are doing is partnering more by embedding our civilians with our troops. That carries a mixed message, as you might guess, because we're trying to have a civilian face on it, but we have to have enough security to function.

So, this is a highly complex assessment. We send individuals on the civilian side; the Defense Department sends units, battalions, brigades; and so, we are trying to do something that's never been done before, and we need the advice, the help, the resources, that are required.

Senator BILL NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Since we have to be successful at the end of this trial time, we'll look forward to that appropriation request, Madam Secretary, and see if we can act expeditiously on it.

Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Nelson.

Senator Chambliss.

Senator CHAMBLISS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thanks, to all three of you, for your leadership at this very critical time in the history of the world, not just our country.

Secretary Gates, I thought the President did a good job last night of laying out the scenario as well as the way forward. However, having just heard your opening statement, I thought you were much stronger, even much more powerful, and I hope that you will carry the message you brought to this committee to our friends in Afghanistan as well as Pakistan, because, as you said, the perception among the Paks has got to be that we're going to be there. The perception among the Afghans has got to be that we're going to stay there for the long term. Otherwise, as one of the Taliban commented in the Afghan press when I was over there last week over Thanksgiving, that, "If the President comes out and says that, 'In 2013 the United States is out of here,' then we're going to sit back and just wait til 2013." We all know that's the case. So, you're exactly right, and I do truly hope that you will take that message to our folks in both Afghanistan and in Pakistan at the leadership level.

Admiral Mullen, you made a comment that I want to drill down on for just a second. You said we will know by mid-'11 if we're going to be successful. Now, let's assume that we are being successful, that General Clark is doing well down in RC South, that General Scaparotti is doing well in RC East, moving against Haqqani, that the Paks are stepping up in a greater fashion and helping us out.

What does this mean, with the President having said that we're going to start bringing our troops home, in 18 months, but if we are successful, what does that mean with respect to the bringing home of troops?

Admiral MULLEN. Senator Chambliss, you—actually you, I think, very accurately captured the overall situation. The Paks have started to move; we've got a new government, new—a newly elected president in Afghanistan; we've got great commanders on the ground in our leadership; we've got an increased level of support, not just in terms of numbers, but, really, support from our NATO allies; and we have a very unpopular insurgency with respect to the Afghan people. So, I think there are great opportunities here over the next 18 to 24 months and that one of the reasons it's so important to turn this—to get these troops there, is—as I've said before—turn this insurgency around. And General McChrystal believes, General Petraeus believes, I believe, we can do that over the course of the next 18 to 24 months. That will then provide an opportunity to get at the kind of transition, as far as security responsibility and thinning of our forces, if you will, to start that. It's very difficult to know exactly what the conditions are—will be—but they will be—if we get this right, they'll be a lot better in the east and a lot better in the south, and provide us an opportunity to do that,

which is why—and to the—on the other side, if we are unable to do that by then, I think we have to reassess our strategy.

Senator CHAMBLISS. So, what I'm hearing is that there is flexibility in that timeline, based upon success or lack thereof.

Admiral MULLEN. I think the timeline is clear. I think the flexibility is in where we transition, where we turn over responsibility. And this is something we all understand, and that—we think we'll be able to do that. It's a little difficult to predict exactly where that's going to occur, right now.

Senator CHAMBLISS. Right.

Secretary GATES. Senator, if I might just add—

Senator CHAMBLISS. Sure.

Secretary GATES.—because I appreciated your comments about the longer term. Now, what I'm about to state is just my opinion, because, frankly, this wasn't a part of our dialogue over the past 2 or 3 months, or not a significant part of it. But, in my mind I think that—particularly if the Afghans want us to—we need to think in terms of a very long-term willingness to work with the Afghans, in terms of military training, in terms of equipping, the kind of long-term partnership we have with many countries around the world, where we have a certain military presence in that country, but—it's not a combat presence, it's a training-and-equipping and that kind of a role, but one where we are clearly seen as their continuing partner. That would be my personal opinion of how I would see this unfolding long-term, after our combat forces are principally gone from Afghanistan.

Senator CHAMBLISS. I appreciate that, and—my worry is, though, that—the headline in the Islamabad press today is that, "President Sending 30,000 Troops; They're Coming Out in 18 Months." So, that's why I think it's important. You carry your message—and all of you—the message of exactly what we mean by that 18 months.

Secretary Clinton, I have not always been a fan of the work that USAID has done, but I've been in Afghanistan—not just last Thursday, but about 6 months ago also—and had the opportunity to visit with your folks. I will have to say that they're doing an amazing job over there, with respect to educating children—we've gone from 900,000 to 6 million—we've still got another 6 million to go. But, it's because, in my opinion, of what AID has done, and with the security that's been given by the military, that we are seeing those children educated, which, for the long term, I think is the biggest issue that we've got.

Now, you are—I told your folks that, while we're surging troops—and we assumed, the other day, that we knew what the President might say, and he did—but that there also needed to be a surge on the civilian side. And you have indicated that you're plussing-up those folks. Same thing thy told us the other day.

But, I worry about what's going to happen in 18 months. Because security in Afghanistan has got to be the way forward, not just for—from the military standpoint; but, your folks on the ground, the State Department civilians, have got to have security on order to be able to improve the lives of the Afghans.

So, I'd just like your comment on whether or not you think the levels you're talking about are enough. Are you going to ask for

more resources, for more people? Where do you see the way forward?

Secretary CLINTON. Well, Senator, thank you for those very kind words, which are so well deserved by our people on the ground in Afghanistan and elsewhere. They are really responding to the mission, and working extremely hard; but, of course, they have to do so within a secure environment.

You know, our civilians are out around the country. They are also, of course, in Kabul, working with government ministries. USAID is certifying ministries so we can determine which ones are accountable and transparent enough to receive additional funds from us. So, they are truly working, at all levels of the Afghan government and in many sectors of society. But, security is a key element as to whether they can be effective. Now, a lot of our civilian workers are—you know, they're veterans of other very difficult security environments, they are willing to go places that a lot of folks are not, and I give them great credit for that. And I think we just have to come to you with our best estimate as to what it will be—what will be required to have the kind of civilian surge you just referred to, because, as we put additional troops in, we want to have more civilians embedded with them, we want to have them right there, on the ground when combat is over, to begin the building process and partnering with their civilian counterparts. So, we are tripling the number that we found when we got there, and we're changing their mission and requiring much more of them. But, the numbers are going to have to grow if we expect to deliver on what is required.

Senator CHAMBLISS. You've got an amazing PR team down in Lashkirga; they're doing great work.

Secretary CLINTON. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Chambliss.

Senator Ben Nelson.

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And let me add my appreciation to the three of you for your continuing service, as well.

I've been a long-time advocate for benchmarks or measurements to develop in the conduct of our missions so we can measure progress and continue to be objective, engaging the efforts in Afghanistan-Pakistan. I know this administration is committed—our allies—are committed to proffering these objective benchmarks.

Are we in the process of developing new benchmarks in connection with the new mission so that we can determine whether we're 25 percent towards successful, towards achieving certain goals, 50 percent, or a lot more needs to be done? And then, if we are in the process of doing that, will we be in a position to change the benchmarks as things develop on the ground?

I guess I'd start with you, Secretary Gates.

Secretary GATES. The answer is yes. And I mentioned earlier that we—the President has made it clear that there will be another thoroughgoing review in a year, in December of 2010, but we have developed some clear benchmarks, in terms of not only the security arena, but in terms of Afghan forces recruitment, retention, fielding, partnering, and so on. And the President's made it pretty clear and, I think mentioned to the congressional leadership yesterday,

that he's expecting to get monthly reports on how we're doing against these. But, we also have some—have benchmarks on the civilian side, as well.

Secretary CLINTON. Well, Senator Nelson, our civilian, military, and intelligence agencies have all developed a range of benchmarks and they're in a constant process of being refined. And, as Secretary Gates said, we're going to be looking to report on those, going forward.

The military has their own benchmarks, but, as Admiral Mullen referenced, we have taken a much closer look at districts, who controls what, what the capacity of governance is, whether there's a shadow government, how much of national sovereignty can be asserted. So, we're looking at those kinds of yardsticks of measurement on the military side.

On the civilian side, a lot of it depends upon our assessment of where we're starting. As Senator Chambliss said, when President Karzai took office, there were a little less than a million students in school, and they were virtually all boys; now there are 7 million, and about 40 percent are girls. But, there are 5 to 6 million yet to go. So, that's a very clear benchmark.

In the agricultural area, we've already rehabilitated irrigation canals, we've worked closely with the agricultural ministry. We helped them, as did other international donors with whom we coordinate to provide heartier seeds so that they had a bumper wheat crop. They just had their first big shipment of apples and pomegranates to India. We are supporting their acquisition of better fertilizer and farm equipment. So, again, there are measurable benchmarks. How much is the agricultural economy improving? How many people are employed? What is the relationship between a lower poppy crop and a higher licit kind of list of crops?

And we are working with the governance and rule-of-law challenges, as well.

So, in each of these areas, we have realistic expectations, we are trying to have good measurements, and we will be carefully following that to see what kind of progress we're making.

Senator BEN NELSON. Well, I appreciate that. I think that is critically important to, not only determining how we're doing, but also, I think, in keeping the support of the American people, in seeing that progress is, in fact, being made, and where it isn't, that a plan is now in place to try to change the direction.

And in that connection, do we have any specific ideas about how to assist President Karzai in rooting out—if we can be of assistance in that—rooting out the corruption within the government—it's one thing to tell them that that's what needs to be done; it's another thing to expect it to be done. And can we be of assistance?—which I think probably would assure us of some success?

Secretary CLINTON. Well, Senator Nelson, we have made a number of requests of the Karzai government. Obviously, who is put into the cabinet, who are named as governors, who hold other responsible positions, is key to everything that happens, going forward.

We have focused our efforts in four areas. First, to enhance law enforcement cooperation. When I talk about the civilian work that is being done, I don't want just to talk about the State Department

and USAID. We have a lot of very experienced officials from DEA, from FBI, from the Department of Justice, as well as places like the Agriculture Department, et cetera. And we are enhancing intelligence-sharing and cooperation on corruption and major crime.

We are certifying Afghan ministries, and there are some that we believe are functioning well enough now that we can, with confidence, provide funding, holding their leadership accountable; and others that we're not going to touch, we're not—you know, until they're cleaned out, they're not getting any United States civilian assistance.

Third, we do want to strengthen the special inspector general for Afghan reconstruction. We are asking for additional resources on the ground with auditors, because we want realtime reports.

And fourth, we are supporting the Major Crimes Task Force and other Afghan anticorruption efforts. The Major Crimes Task Force is a vetted Afghan unit supported by U.S. and British law enforcement officials. It's focusing on corruption as part of its mandate. It's recently charged several Afghan officials, and others are under investigation.

So, ultimately, it's up to the Afghans to end corruption, and we have an expectation of that, but we have no illusions that this is going to happen easily or quickly, but we know how important it is to be working to try to root it out.

Secretary GATES. I would just add, Senator, that—I mean, I think we have to be honest with ourselves that the massive influx of money into Afghanistan that is being—that comes from ourselves and our international partners, is a huge factor in this—or a significant factor. And, as Secretary Clinton has suggested, I think we need to go back and look at how we are disbursing—dispensing money and how we are doing contracting and so on. I—the subject, I know, is near and dear to Senator McCaskill's heart. But, how can we leverage the areas where we're writing the checks into minimizing the opportunities for that money being siphoned off on its way to the purpose we intend?

Secretary CLINTON. Senator Nelson, if I could just add, because Secretary Gates raised an issue that is connected with this, and that is our contracting processes, something that Senator McCaskill is focused on. If you think about the long supply-chain lines that we have, getting into Afghanistan, when our equipment, our food, everything that our troops use, our civilians depend on, largely comes from the outside, when a ship docks at Karachi, and the goods get loaded onto trucks, and then the trucks start that long trip through Pakistan, up into Afghanistan—I mean, it's a very difficult environment to operate in. And there's a lot of evidence that, in addition to funding from the Gulf and the illegal narcotics trade, that siphoning off contractual money from the international community and the—in terms of just outright fraud and corruption, but also intimidation and extortion, is a major source of funding for the Taliban. So, you know, we just have to be honest, here, about how complex and difficult this problem is, and how, frankly, it is not all an Afghan problem. So.

Senator BEN NELSON. Well—

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

Senator BEN NELSON.—thank you. Thank you very much.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator—

Senator BEN NELSON. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN.—Nelson.

Senator Graham.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you all for coming. I know it's been a difficult process you've been involved in.

As you were debating what to do, did all of you realize this is the last best chance America has to get it right in Afghanistan?

Secretary CLINTON. Yes, sir.

Secretary GATES. Yes, sir.

Admiral MULLEN. Yes, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. Politically, militarily, otherwise. Now—

Secretary CLINTON. And we also realized how sad it was that we were trying to make that decision 8 years later.

Senator GRAHAM. Yes, ma'am. And—it is sad.

Voice: It is.

Senator GRAHAM. It would have been sad to have lost in Iraq. It would have been devastating.

Secretary CLINTON. Well, we'll talk about that offline sometime.

Senator GRAHAM. There you go. [Laughter.]

But, we're talking about the future now. We're talking about winning, I hope.

Rank the consequences of a failed state in Afghanistan to our national security interest, one being inconsequential, ten being grave. Where would you put a failed state in Afghanistan, in terms of our national security interest?

Secretary Clinton?

Secretary CLINTON. Well, Secretary Graham, I would put it at a ten. I think a failed state that is totally lawless, that is a—

Senator GRAHAM. Yes, ma'am.

Secretary CLINTON.—safe haven for terrorists—particularly, the syndicate of terrorism headed by al Qaeda poses a direct threat to the security of the United States of America.

Senator GRAHAM. I think that's a very—does it—do both of you agree with that? Okay. I think that is an—a good evaluation. As to those who criticized the President, I think all three of them are right; he did this because he realized it was a ten, too, I hope. And I'm sure he did.

The July 2011 withdrawal statement—Mr. Secretary Gates, who is the audience for that statement?

Secretary GATES. I think that there are at least two principal audiences. One audience—and a very important one—is the Afghan government, that they must accept responsibility, in terms of their own governance, in terms of their own security forces, in terms of accepting their responsibility and understanding that—and taking ownership of this conflict on their own soil, that it's not just going to be fought by—

Senator GRAHAM. Okay.

Secretary GATES.—foreigners on their behalf.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay.

Secretary GATES. I think the other audience, frankly, is the American people, who are weary of 8 years—after 8 years of war, and to let them know this isn't going to go on for another 10 years.

Senator GRAHAM. But, there are other people listening, and I guess that's my problem, because—I can understand the frustration of the American people. We've been here 8 years, and it seems to be that it's not working out the way we would all hope. And I can understand that. But, I can't understand letting Afghanistan go back into the abyss again. That's my dilemma.

On December the 10th—on December 2010, you will begin to evaluate Afghanistan anew, is that correct? Our progress?

Secretary GATES. Well, we're going to have a continuing process, but there will be a full-scale reevaluation of where we stand in December, yes.

Senator GRAHAM. My question is, Will the decision—will the evaluation decision be how fast we withdraw or whether or not we should withdraw?

Secretary GATES. I think it'll be principally about whether the strategy that we've put in place is working.

Senator GRAHAM. Is it possible, in December 2010, to reach the conclusion, "It is not wise to withdraw anyone in July of 2011?" Is that possible?

Secretary GATES. I think the President, as Commander in Chief, always has the option to adjust his decision.

Senator GRAHAM. So, it is not locked in that we're going to be withdrawing troops in July 2011; we're going to look, throughout the process, particularly in December of 2010, and make a decision then as to whether we should withdraw at a certain pace or not withdraw at all. Is that correct?

Secretary GATES. I guess the way I would phrase it is that it is our plan to begin this transition process in July of 2011. If circumstances dictate in December, I think, as I say, the President always has the freedom to adjust his decisions.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay.

Admiral Mullen, is it your understanding that it's possible, in December 2010, not to begin to withdraw in 2011?

Admiral MULLEN. Yeah, well, I'd reiterate the President has choices, as the—

Senator GRAHAM. Okay.

Admiral MULLEN.—President.

Senator GRAHAM. So, his statement last night did not bind him to start withdrawing in 2011. That's the understanding of this panel?

Secretary GATES. I would say—I'd defer to Secretary Clinton, but I think it was a clear statement of his strong intent.

Senator GRAHAM. Right. And I understand why he'd want to let the American people know that we're not going to be there forever, but this is a critically important event. I think that the success of this operation depends on will and resolve, and I just don't want the July 2011 statement to be seen by our enemy, which is not one of the audiences you mentioned, which I think are listening, that we have somehow locked ourselves into leaving.

The question is, Have we locked ourselves into leaving, Secretary Clinton, in July 2011?

Secretary CLINTON. Well, Senator Graham, I do not believe we have locked ourselves into leaving, but what we have done—and I think it was an appropriate position for the President to take—is to signal very clearly, to all audiences, that the United States is not interested in occupying Afghanistan—

Senator GRAHAM. Right.

Secretary CLINTON.—we are not interested in running their country, building their nation. We are trying to give them the space and time to be able to build up sufficient forces to defend themselves. It is the best assessment of our military experts, as evidenced by Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen, General Petraeus, General McChrystal, and others, that by 20—by July 2011, there can be the beginning of a responsible transition that will, of course, be based on conditions.

Here's what the President said, that, "Allow us to begin the transfer of our forces out of Afghanistan in July 2011. We will execute this transition responsibly, taking into account conditions on the ground." And to me, that is exactly the appropriate approach for the President to take. And as Secretary Gates has said, his authority and his responsibility as Commander in Chief require him to be constantly assessing, which he will do.

Senator GRAHAM. Well, thank you. My time is up, but I would just like to remind everyone there is another audience that wasn't mentioned by Secretary Gates. It's the enemy. They have a vote in this war. They are a participant in it.

And finally, the last question, if you could, Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen, would you grade NATO in terms of their effectiveness as a fighting force over the last several years?

Secretary GATES. I think that it varies from country to country, Senator.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank—

Admiral MULLEN. They're not—

Chairman LEVIN. Oh, I'm sorry.

Admiral MULLEN. Senator, I mean, they have bled and died—

Senator GRAHAM. I know they have, but—you give them an A to an F? NATO as an effective fighting force, an A to an F? Not just part of it, all of it.

Secretary GATES. Senator, in all honesty, I don't think any good purpose is served by doing that. I would say that those of us—those who have been fighting with us in the south—the Australians, the British, the Dutch, the Danes—

Secretary CLINTON. The Canadians.

Secretary GATES.—the Canadians, the Poles—

Secretary CLINTON. The Brits.

Secretary GATES.—I'd give 'em all an A.

Senator GRAHAM. Great.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Graham.

Senator Webb.

Senator WEBB. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And let me begin by again communicating my respect for all three of you for the service that you have given our country, and for the good of our country, in a lot of different ways, and for the process that this administration has gone through, with you and others, such as General Jones, in terms of trying to work out—you

may call it the “best possible formula”; perhaps it’s the most realistic, in your view. There’s not a lot of good in the options that are available in this part of the world.

There’s been a lot of time spent on the notion of the dates that were mentioned in the President’s speech. I would prefer to focus, as I have in the past, on the conditions that might bring about an endpoint to our involvement. I would like to see an endpoint, and this is something that you can expect to hear more from our perspective on over the coming months. What exactly is going to bring about the conditions under which we can end our involvement?

There’s also been a good bit of discussion about the nature of the Karzai government, and issues such as corruption. I would like to defer a dialogue on that until tomorrow; I’m on the Foreign Relations Committee. But, I would like to address this tomorrow. I think perhaps we may reach a point where we might encourage the Afghans to examine their constitution that was arrived at, at the Bonn Conference in ’01, to try to enable a greater devolution of this government so you can get into issues such as local authority and corruption at a local level.

Where I really would like to spend my time today is how we are separating out who actually should be confronted as an enemy on the battlefield. As all of you know, a defining characteristic throughout the history of Afghanistan has been its resistance to foreign influence and, particularly, foreign occupation; and, I would say, very successful resistance. And when we talk about the Taliban, we’re talking about terms that we use interchangeably, but which aren’t particularly interchangeable. We have a pretty vicious government, which we assisted in getting rid of. We have an ideologically charged group right now that operates principally in Pakistan, which is associated with the forces of international terrorism. And then we have a third group, which many believe is the—a group that is growing with the greatest speed, who, from the perspective of many Afghans, is ideological, only in the sense that it resents our presence, and is not viewed as a terrorist organization, specifically, or even aligned with terrorist organizations. It’s viewed by many in Afghanistan as a popular movement, who doesn’t like a central government and whose size can actually be elevated, its recruitment process can be increased, by the wrong application of American force.

In that respect, rather than being an element that is aligned with international terrorism, it is viewed by many Afghans as a—something of a regional militia that doesn’t particularly want to threaten the United States interests outside of Afghanistan. And I would like to hear from you—and I’ll start—Admiral Mullen, perhaps you can start this, but anyone who wants to contribute—How were these distinctions, in terms of history and in terms of participation, made as you developed the policy that was now announced?

Admiral MULLEN. A very tired people—of war—the citizens of Afghanistan, and very much waiting on the fence to see which way this is going to go. All the information I’ve gotten, both personally when I’ve been there as well as from the commanders on the ground, indicate not only are they tired, but they’re not very supportive—not supportive at all of the Taliban, very small percentage. And I’m talking about the last group, more specifically.

We believe there's an—there's a large percentage of that group which can be reconciled and reintegrated, with the right approach.

The other thing, in a larger sense, that I've watched over the last couple of years, which is of growing concern, is the collaboration of these—of the Taliban. And I got that they have—they can have somewhat ideologically different perspectives, but they have come together in ways that actually are hugely concerning to me, on both sides—

Senator WEBB. Well, let me—

Admiral MULLEN.—of that—

Senator WEBB.—since my time is running out, I want to seize on something you just said, because I think it's a very important clarification that you can make here. If those are people who can be brought over—

Admiral MULLEN. Right.

Senator WEBB.—to our view, and if we're having trouble recruiting on the national army, which we seem to be, while this—the size of this element seems to be growing, how are you making the distinction, in terms of operational policy that would give them reason to change their affiliation?

Admiral MULLEN. I—actually, I think it's—if I understand your question correctly, it's really done through direct engagement at the local level. And we've seen, very recently, numbers of them say, "No, I don't want to do this anymore." But, we've got to—as I think you understand, as well or better than anybody, we've got to have a secure environment in which they can do this. And we don't have that, in many places.

So, General McChrystal is actually very optimistic with—and others—very optimistic with respect to doing this, but we can't do it without a level of security we just don't have, in many of these places.

Senator WEBB. So, you do have an optimism that, over time, these are people who—

Admiral MULLEN. Yeah. I—

Senator WEBB.—despite—

Admiral MULLEN.—I do.

Senator WEBB.—the characterization that we presently use can be convinced to affiliate with—

Admiral MULLEN. I think they can.

Senator WEBB.—national government.

Admiral MULLEN. I mean, in the end, I think the only way that we're not going to occupy 'em is to not occupy 'em. I mean, that's—that is a challenge that we are going to—you know, over time—I mean, we're committed to not doing that. The President spoke to that last night. But, that's a message, obviously, we have to deliver in fact, not just speaking to it, and to give them responsibility for their own security. And there's a big part of the strategy that focuses locally—the Secretary talked about it earlier—to not turn it back into warlordism. And that's a very delicate balance. But, the commanders on the ground that I've engaged with are comfortable that this is very possible.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

Senator WEBB. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Webb.

Senator Thune.

Senator THUNE.— Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Clinton, welcome back to the committee. Secretary Gates and Admiral, thank you very much for your service.

I think there's been, already, some discussion about the Afghan police, Afghan security forces, at least in terms of the numbers. I'm interested in knowing how analogous the situation there is with the training and equipping of the Afghan security and police forces to Iraq, and just in terms of their capacity to take over battlespace, and how that fits in with the timeline that you have laid out; that what made the Iraq surge, I think, so effective, the counterinsurgency strategy there, was that the Iraqi security forces eventually were able to step up and provide security for the population. And do you see parallels there? And how quickly might we expect that capacity and capability to grow?

Admiral MULLEN. I think, Senator, it's very much tied to the momentum piece, which is going against us right now. And that—turning this momentum around in a positive way makes a lot of things possible, including improved retention, improved recruiting, and reduced attrition, and a much better ANSF. That's why the security piece and the momentum piece is so critical.

There are many analogies, I think, that are comparable between both Iraq and Afghanistan. We're very concerned about creating midgrade leaders on—you know, junior leaders, as well as officer leaders, on both the ANA and ANP. That was a significant challenge in Iraq—more so on the police side than on the army side. Again, the same was true in Iraq. In fact, it was really late '07 before the police in Iraq really started to step out and the leadership was there.

The—and I think we have to be—we have to be careful with comparisons. This is a force that's a—certainly on the army side, you know, they've been in the fight, they've been in the fight a long time, they're good warriors. They have taken to this partnership approach that General McChrystal has put in place. So, I think there's a lot of potential there. There are similarities and there are differences, and we're trying to take advantage of those lessons to integrate those into an accelerated training and equipping plan right now for them.

Senator THUNE.— Let me ask—the President, last night, said that we will support efforts by the Afghan government to open the door to those Taliban who abandon violence. General Petraeus has previously indicated that we lacked the nuanced and sophisticated understanding of the Taliban to identify and distinguish between reconcilable and irreconcilable elements of the Taliban. And I guess my question is, How do we go about reliably identifying the reconcilable elements of the Taliban?

Secretary CLINTON. Well, Senator, there are several efforts already underway to answer the questions that General Petraeus and others have posed. As you might know, General McChrystal has asked General Lamb, a retired British general who was instrumental in the work that was done in Iraq, to come to Afghanistan to advise him. The Afghans themselves, led by President Karzai, have a pretty good idea of who they think can, if persuaded, be re-integrated.

But, this is very much a case-by-case effort. And there are certain aspects of it that we are very insistent on. One, that they have to renounce any ties to al Qaeda, and they have to renounce violence, and they have to be willing to reintegrate into Afghan society in a peaceful way.

We know that some of the Taliban will not renounce al Qaeda; they are too closely interconnected. We know that others, who call themselves “Taliban” want to have a continuing means of, you know, acting in a military capacity, and we want them, you know, to have to give up their commitment to violence and, maybe, join the army, if that’s appropriate, join one of the community defense initiatives. But, this is very painstaking work. And we have very high expectations for who we would support reintegrating.

Secretary GATES. Let me just add to that. I think that, here again, there may be some parallels with Iraq.

First of all, I think that reintegration, particularly at the front end, is going to be retail, not wholesale. And it is going to—we will end up, as we did in Iraq, turning to local leaders that we have confidence in who will, in turn, then vouch for these people and who will essentially pledge their community to the reliability of these people that are willing to come away from the Taliban.

A second point, we think that there’s a fair percentage of the foot soldiers in the Taliban that basically do this for pay. And so, creating economic opportunities as an alternative in order to support their families is another vehicle for this.

And finally, to the Admiral’s point, security is essential. Somebody who—I mean, they—there are too many examples of people who have tried to leave the Taliban and themselves and all of their family have been killed. And so, until—in retaliation—and so, until we can provide a secure environment, at the local level, that gives them some confidence they can—they will not be retaliated against, it will be a problem.

Senator THUNE.— Go ahead.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much—

Senator THUNE.— My time has expired.

Chairman LEVIN.—Senator Thune.

Senator THUNE.— Thank you, Mr.—

Chairman LEVIN. Senator McCaskill.

Senator MCCASKILL.— Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to echo the comments of some of my colleagues, that I think the President is very fortunate to have the three of you, and our country is even more fortunate. I appreciate your service, and I appreciate how hard you have worked at coming up with the best answer among a list of very bad choices.

It won’t surprise you that I want to talk a little bit about contracting. I will tell you that we’ve made progress. When I joined this committee, in 2007, no one could tell us how many contractors were in Iraq. There wasn’t even a number available. We have made progress.

Now I want to talk a little bit today, if I have time, about SPOT, the database that we put in place to try to track contractors, and the problems that are arising about a lack of consistency between State, USAID, and DOD on how they’re utilizing this database, and how much we can rely on the numbers. But, to the extent that we

can rely on the numbers, we know we have around—as of June, we have approximately 75,000 contractors in Afghanistan and 5200 private security contractors in Afghanistan. And the interesting thing—one of the stark differences between the contracting force in Afghanistan and that in Iraq is the predominance of Afghans in our contracting force; 50,000-plus of the contractors are Afghans and 5,000 of the 5200 private security contractors are Afghans. It's not clear to me whether this has been purposeful or situational. And I would—if, briefly, you—any of you could address whether or not this is purposeful or situational.

Secretary CLINTON. Well, Senator, I share the experience you just described, because, in February, when I asked to see a list of all the contracts in Afghanistan, at that time we couldn't produce such a list. And so, we have been trying to not only get a handle on the contracts, but try to persuade contractors to employ more Afghans. So, I think it's probably both. I think it is, to some extent, a message, but it's also just the reality of who is there and what the mission requires.

Clearly, what we're trying to do is review every single contract. We stopped everyone until we had a better idea of what they were for, who they went to. We're trying to assert more State Department and USAID oversight, and that's why we asked Ambassador Tony Wayne to go to Afghanistan to run the civilian side. And we have to do a better job coordinating with, not just our friends at DOD, but all the other government agencies. So, we really welcome your efforts, and we want to be as cooperative as we can.

Senator MCCASKILL.— Let's talk a little bit about LOGCAP IV. Good news: We competed it. Good news: We ended up with three different companies that are eligible for contracts under LOGCAP IV. Not as good a news, I think—I understand the reality of why this probably occurred—we have, now, instead of one monopoly on logistical support for our troops, we now have two monopolies, in that we have given the contracts on a regional basis as opposed to a task basis. Fluor has gotten the north, DynCorp has gotten the south; and they are not task-competing, they have, in fact, been selected, it's my understanding, from the research we've done, to, in fact, to everything in those regions.

I understand the efficiencies you get by doing that, but what it really brings up again is the incredible importance of monitoring and oversight, because when you have one company doing all the work, even though it's not the whole contingency operation, it is certainly—it is, within the north and the south. And what I was worried about is, there was testimony this summer that we had 600 oversight positions vacant in Iraq and Afghanistan. I—it wasn't clear, from the testimony that was given at the time, how many of those positions were in Afghanistan. But, are we plussed-up to where we need to be with oversight and monitoring of these logistical contracts that cost us way more than they ever should have cost us in Iraq?

Secretary GATES. As is often the case with these things, you're probably better informed than we are. But, what I will tell you is, I can almost certainly tell you we do not have as many contract monitors in Afghanistan as we want. And one of the things that I have mentioned, both at the White House and within the Depart-

ment of Defense as we talk about 30,000 troops and so on, is, let's not forget about contract monitors, logistical experts, and so on, to make sure that we're doing this right. And so, what I would like to do, Senator, is take your question for the record, and we'll get back to you on the vacancy—the number of vacancies we have for contract monitors in Afghanistan.

Senator MCCASKILL.— That would be great.

Admiral MULLEN. Senator, if I could—if I can only add one thing. And this goes back to your first question. When I've, in particular, asked this question in RC East, of General Scaparotti and his people a few months ago, with respect to the—who gets the contracts. There's a very specific effort there to hire Afghans first. And that, I think, is represented in the numbers that you're talking about, which, to me, makes all the sense in the world. You've got to, obviously, have somebody qualified. But, to be able to put that kind of income into that country is really critical.

Secretary CLINTON. Senator, could I just add one other consideration that I wish we could take into account?

There is an inherent tension between more monitoring, more auditing, more contract oversight, and the kind of flexibility and agility that we were talking about with Senator Bill Nelson's question. We have to figure out how to manage risk without being adverse to risk. We have to give our people in the field—and I'm talking just on the civilian side right now—enough discretion to be able to make smart decisions, and yes, maybe even make some mistakes, because they might have made an investment where it didn't pay off, but it, you know, was worth trying.

So, it's complicated, and we want to account for every single penny, but we also want to be sure we have enough flexibility to be smart as we try to do the job we've been given.

So, I don't know what the answer to that is, but I'd ask for your consideration as we move forward so we strike the right balance.

Senator MCCASKILL.— I think—I understand that tension, and it is a real tension. I think, unfortunately, the lesson learned in Iraq was that there wasn't enough of that tension. It was all about, "We need it today. We need it tomorrow. We don't care what it costs. Get it here." And so, finding that balance is what we're talking about here. That's why the data being input correctly and why the oversight personnel is so important, because if we don't have those, we never create that tension. And that's my concern. And particularly—my time's up, and I don't have time to go into CERP. But, I do think we need to take a hard look at CERP and whether it has morphed into something other than what it was intended to be, whether we're doing too many big projects—are we monitoring or are we just obligating? And I know we've done about 1.6 billion in CERP in Afghanistan since 2004. I think we need to continue to look at that CERP.

And I will—I'll do some questions for the record on the CERP funds since I don't have time in my questioning today, and will look forward to continuing to work on these issues with you and your great folks that are trying hard.

And thank you again.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator McCaskill.

Senator LeMieux.

Senator LEMIEUX.— Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, Secretary Clinton, Secretary Gates, Admiral Mullen. I've not had the opportunity to talk to you about these issues, because I'm a new Senator, but I appreciate that opportunity today.

Let me say, first, that I want to join my colleagues in commending the President for his recommendation for adding the additional troops. I think it's the right thing to do. I had the opportunity to go to Afghanistan in late October and meet with General McChrystal and Admiral—or, Ambassador, rather, Eikenberry, and talk about these issues. And I believe that the counterinsurgency strategy is the right tactic that we need for success.

There's been a lot of discussion this morning about the 18 months and what that really means. I appreciate the elaboration that was given.

Let me ask you this question. In every plan, you hope for a successful ending, and you must have in your minds what that successful ending looks like. If we are able to meet the President's commitment to remove troops in July of 2011—and I guess this question would first go to Secretary Gates—how do you envision success looking like at that time?

Secretary GATES. Sure. I—first of all, let me just, again, underscore that what we were talking about in July 2011 is the beginning of what we expect will be a gradual process of thinning and reducing U.S. forces.

I think the end state in Afghanistan looks a lot like what we see in Iraq, and that is the gradual transfer of responsibility for security to the indigenous forces in government and having a security situation that allows us to draw down our forces. We have gone from 20 brigades to soon to be 10 brigades in Iraq. We have the agreements, that we talked about earlier, in terms of combat forces being out at the end of the August 2010.

And so, what you will see, in my view, is a map, if you will, that changes colors in different places at different times, but increasingly in terms of the Afghan government's control or the control of—by local governments, district governments, provincial governments that are associated with the national government and hostile to the Taliban and to al Qaeda. And so, I think this gradual transfer of security responsibility, with a continuing role, on our part, as a partner for that country in the long term, is what I would call success in Afghanistan.

Senator LEMIEUX.— And to follow up on the questions of Senator Ben Nelson, in terms of benchmarking, do you have specific benchmarks that you have put in place for this next period, this 18-month period, when the withdrawal of American troops would begin, that would say there would be only this many American casualties or this many of other, you know, Afghan troops trained—we talked about that before—are those benchmarks in place now as you work forward in the next 18 months?

Secretary GATES. Well, we would not have U.S. casualties as a benchmark, but we have some very specific benchmarks, both for

us and for the Afghans and for our international partners, as well, in terms of whether they are fulfilling the commitments that have been made.

Senator LEMIEUX.— Just to touch quickly on the international partner issue, you mentioned bringing 5- to 7,000 more troops from international partners. In the past, you have been, as you stated, somewhat critical of those troops, and you wanted to make sure that those troops were caveat-free. Do you believe that these troops that are coming, hopefully the 5- to 7,000 troops will be, as you said before, caveat-free and be able to fully engage?

Secretary GATES. One of the positive developments, I would say, of the last year, but especially since the NATO summit last spring, has been a fairly steady reduction in the number of caveats that are being imposed by governments. I think they are realizing—you heard the German Defense Minister, a couple of weeks ago, for the first time in Germany, refer to what is going on in Afghanistan as a “war,” or “warlike.” So, they are, I think, domestically, beginning to deal with the realities of Afghanistan, and I think that has contributed to a reduction in the caveats.

Senator LEMIEUX.—Secretary Clinton, we haven’t talked a lot today about Pakistan. And certainly Pakistan is a huge—of huge importance in the success in this region. What commitments do you think we will get from Pakistan to continue in their efforts—I know they launched this offensive in Waziristan that’s been somewhat successful and continues on—where do you see their participation, in the next 18 months, to make sure that we’re succeeding?

Secretary CLINTON. Well, Senator, they have certainly demonstrated, over the last year, their commitment and willingness to take on the Pakistan Taliban, who directly threaten them. I spent 3 days in Pakistan recently, and spoke at length with both the civilian and the military intelligence leadership, as well as many citizens, press, and others, and I think the unity of support that the people of Pakistan are showing for this effort is profoundly significant. But, as we have said, it is not enough. It is difficult to parse out the different groups that are operating within Pakistan, all of whom we think are connected in one way or another with al Qaeda, and partition some off and go after the others.

So, it will be our continuing effort—and Admiral Mullen has been instrumental in working on this with his counterparts—to make the case that the Pakistanis have to do more against all of the insurgent terrorist groups that are threatening them, that are threatening us in Afghanistan, and the Afghan people, are threatening other neighbors in the region. And we hope that we’ll be able to make that case successfully.

Senator LEMIEUX.— Does Pakistan understand now that having a stable and secure Afghanistan is in their national interests?

Secretary CLINTON. Well, I think that they certainly understand that having an unstable, destabilizing Afghanistan that offers launching grounds and training for those who threaten them is not in their interests.

Senator LEMIEUX.— Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. Thank you—

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator LeMieux.

Senator Mieux and others have talked about the benchmarks, and you've indicated that they exist in the current—whatever the current form is. Would you submit those to us for the record? We saw an earlier version, but we'd like to see the current version of the benchmarks, for the record. If there's any classified benchmarks, just—we will, of course, honor that.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Chairman LEVIN. Senator Udall.

Senator UDALL.—Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, to the three of you. The unanimity that you represent by being here together is powerful and inspirational, and I want to thank you, along with the members of the committee, for your leadership and your service. I, too, hope that—and will do my part to assure that the politics in this important policy debate we're having end at the water's edge. And again, your presence here today makes that statement, loud and clear.

Secretary Clinton, if I could just follow on Pakistan, do you have any concerns that the July 2011 transition date sends a message to the Pakistanis that we're going to leave the region, that we're not committed in a long-term way?

Secretary CLINTON. Well, again, I think that the messages that are being heard by different audiences are consistent with their perspectives. And, as Senator LeMieux seemed to imply in his question, there is a lot of concern in Pakistan about what our commitment means, both in terms of whether we put more troops in, or not, whether we leave them in, or not. The Pakistanis, understandably, worry that our actions in Afghanistan increase cross-border efforts that threaten them, which they are not, obviously, in favor of seeing increase.

So, we have worked very hard with our Pakistani counterparts to explain that we have a long-term commitment to Pakistan; we are not going to be in and out, the way we have in the past; we want to be partnering with the Pakistanis; we want to be supporting their democracy and their development—and that is independent from Afghanistan; but that we have unfinished business in Afghanistan, and that requires us to take the steps, which the President outlined, but that we also are asking for more help from the Pakistanis to go after al Qaeda and the leadership of the Afghan Taliban inside their own territory.

Senator UDALL.— So, in an ideal world, we would get the job done militarily in the short term; in the medium and long term, we would have a presence in the region, economically, diplomacy, and politically.

Secretary CLINTON. Well, as we have with so many other countries—obviously, we have troops in a limited number of countries around the world; some have been there for 50, 60 years, but we have long-term economic assistance and development programs in many others. And we think that's a likely outcome in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, that we would be there with a long-term commitment.

Senator UDALL.—Let me turn, if I would and could, to the civilian surge. I had a close friend who follows what's happening very closely, and he said, "Who's going to be in charge of the civilian

surge?" And I've heard some discussion of an ISAF commander, civilian counterpart for the civilian efforts that we're going to put forth.

Secretary Clinton, could you speak to whether there would be an official who's in charge of the surge, and what sort of authority that person might have?

Secretary CLINTON. Well, we are actually discussing that with our allies. It's one of the issues I will be talking to them about in Brussels. You know there's a United Nations presence in Afghanistan. There is also the NATO ISAF presence. Not everyone who contributes civilian aid is a member of NATO or ISAF, but they all are members of the United Nations. So, how we coordinate and better hold accountable our civilian aid is a matter of great concern to all of the contributing nations, both the troop-contributing, nontroop civilian, non-NATO, et cetera.

For example, Japan has just announced a significant civilian commitment of \$5 billion. They're not a member of NATO. They don't have troops in NATO ISAF. So, we're looking at the United Nations, we're looking at NATO ISAF, but we're going to come up with a coordinating mechanism that can meet the needs of all the various parties who want to contribute to Afghanistan's future.

Senator UDALL.—Secretary Gates, Admiral Mullen, I assume that General McChrystal understands the importance of that hand-off and that coordination.

Secretary GATES. Nobody wants it more than he does. [Laughter.]

Senator UDALL.—Let me turn to the Secretary and Admiral Mullen. Given that this increase in the troops in Afghanistan will occur prior to the official drawdown in Iraq, what effect do you see this additional deployment having on dwell time and the length of deployment cycles and reset and then the services required to take care of our troops at—both here at home and in theater?

Admiral MULLEN. Senator, not just tied to this decision, it's something I think that we watch carefully, and have for the last several years. And what is happening in the Marine Corps—and the ground forces, obviously, absorb the brunt of these deployments—the—what we've seen happen in the Marine Corps is actually moving out to almost two to one. They're, like, at 1.5 to one right now. We want to get to a point where they're home twice as long, the two, as they are deployed, and that, in this deployment cycle, General Conway thinks he'll be able to continue to progress out in that direction, with the exception of some of the smaller, more critical enabling kind of capabilities, over the next year or so.

The—on the Army side, they're—we're actually making progress, as well, moving away from one-to-one—not as rapidly; and with this deployment decision, we expect it to probably take a couple more years to get to a point where he's out to two-to-one.

The Iraq drawdown is taken into consideration in all this, and that—we're still being able to gradually improve, although extremely concerned about the continued pressure, stress, and strain that our ground forces—our military, and our ground forces in particular, and their families, have gone through. So, we're paying a lot of attention to that.

General Casey sent a note to the Section I yesterday, saying—and reemphasizing what he'd had said before, that this can be managed; certainly there are challenges associated with that, but he's comfortable that he can lead his Army through this at this enormously important time.

Senator UDALL. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Udall.

Senator COLLINS.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Secretary Gates, I'm going to explore with you an issue that Senator Graham raised, and it's an issue that you touched on in your testimony. I think it is a fundamental question, and that is, Why Afghanistan?

In your statement, you list six primary objectives of the strategy, one of which is preventing al Qaeda from regaining sanctuary in Afghanistan; yet, we know that al Qaeda has the presence in as many as 20 countries. And in Yemen, for example, al Qaeda's strong enough that a cell there was able to launch a successful attack on our embassy just a year ago.

So, the fundamental question, to me, is, How will it make us safer to invest more troops and more treasure in Afghanistan as long as al Qaeda still has the ability to establish safe havens in other countries? What is it about Afghanistan that makes it critical that we invest more troops, more civilian personnel, put more people at risk in that country?

Secretary GATES. Well, first of all, as the President indicated last night, this is the country where, when the Taliban governed it, the attack against us was launched in 2001. It is the only country from which we have been attacked successfully.

Al Qaeda is still—the al Qaeda presence and its leadership in the border area of Afghanistan and Pakistan—is still the wellspring of inspiration for extremist jihadism everywhere. Afghanistan is where these extremists, in many respects, consider that they defeated the Soviet Union and contributed enormously—in fact, give themselves credit for its ultimate collapse. Whether it's in the United States and the plots that we continue to see, or in Somalia or Yemen, the fact is that the inspiration, and oftentimes the guidance and strategic leadership, comes from the al Qaeda leadership that is there in that border area.

What we have seen, in the last year, develop is a—an unholy alliance, if you will, of al Qaeda, the Taliban in Pakistan, and the Taliban in Afghanistan. And these people work off of each other's mythology, off of each other's narrative. And success of one is—contributes to the success of the other.

If anything, the situation, I think, is more serious today than it was a year ago, because of the attacks of the Taliban in Pakistan, on Pakistan, and the effort of al Qaeda in collusion with the Taliban in Pakistan to try and destabilize Pakistan itself. More safe havens on the Pakistani side create opportunities for success in Afghanistan. But, we know, from historical experience, that safe havens and Taliban control of space in Afghanistan not only gives them the opportunity to organize better attacks against the West and our allies and friends, but now creates an opportunity for them to further destabilize Pakistan.

This area—as the President said last night and as I said in my opening remarks, this area that we’re talking about—Afghanistan, in particular—is the epicenter of global extremist jihad. And if we don’t—if that center were to take—were to disappear—if that leadership were to disappear, and al Qaeda were defeated in Afghanistan and Pakistan, I think you would face a very different and very significantly less important threat from these various regional movements that put enormous emphasis on their alliance with al Qaeda in Pakistan-Afghanistan. Whether it’s al Qaeda in the Maghreb, whether it’s al Qaeda in the Horn of Africa, they put enormous value on this connection back into the al Qaeda that have fled Afghanistan.

So, I think that Afghanistan has a unique place in the historical narrative of these extremists that makes it especially important to us and, as the President said last night, preventing the Taliban from returning and defeating al Qaeda in our vital national interest.

Senator COLLINS. Thank you.

Secretary Clinton, Secretary Gates has given an excellent answer to the question of, “Why Afghanistan?” My question for you is, Can we succeed, despite the brilliance of our leaders, the courage of our troops, the efforts of the civilian component? Is this an impossible task? We have a corrupt and ineffective government as a partner. We’ve seen, in the last 2 years, even with the presence of NATO troops, the government lose control of much of the country. Can this work, despite everybody’s best efforts?

Secretary CLINTON. Well, Senator, we believe it can. And I think it is important to underscore your question, because, along with the question about, “Who is the enemy?” this is the critical question as to the commitment that the President has made.

The reasons why we do believe success is possible is, number one, we think that the Afghan leadership and the people of Afghanistan are ready for a—an approach that makes them more accountable, responsible, and a true partner. I’ve been to Afghanistan, as you know, in the past. In those last trip, I was struck by what Defense Minister Wardak told me. He said it was the first time, with General McChrystal now in charge of NATO ISAF, that they really—that the Afghans felt like they were full partners. They’d been invited into NATO ISAF headquarters, they were getting access to intelligence that they’d never been given before. I mean, his enthusiasm for the new leadership that we have on the military side was striking to me, because I’ve known him for all these years, and he has been truly a good soldier, just trying the best he could under very difficult circumstances, but he didn’t feel like he was fully supported or partnered until relatively recently.

Second, I think that the wake-up call about the deteriorating situation has not only been heard by the United States, but by our friends and allies. I think that there was an attitude, perhaps, that, “Okay, the Americans want us there. We’ll show up. We’ll do the best we can.” And, as Secretary Gates said, some of our NATO ISAF troops were extraordinarily brave and courageous and successful; you know, others were kind of just, you know, there to fulfill a commitment. But, there seems to be a new awareness that this is not just America’s fight, and I’m very encouraged by that.

Third, look, I've spent a lot of time with and around Karzai, and I really believe that, if we work with him in a more effective manner, we will get a better outcome from him and from the team around him. He has some very good cabinet ministers who are doing really excellent work. There need to be more of them. They need to be supported more. They need to be held accountable. But, my sense from the very long and candid conversations I had with him is that there's a window of opportunity here that we have to seize.

And finally, I think that the impetus that the President's decision is giving us will change the reality on the ground. The President's announcement last night, the resolve that he's showing, the fact that very obviously this is not an easy political call for him to make, it has significant budget implications for our country, I think will help to summon the very best of everybody and will give us the chance of success that I believe we can achieve.

So, I'm not naive about how hard this will be, but I think it's the right decision, and I think it can lead to success if we implement the way we should.

Senator COLLINS.—Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Collins.

Senator Hagan.

Senator HAGAN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

And I, too, wanted to echo my sentiment about having you here and the service that you are providing, not only to our President, to our country, but I want to thank each and every one of you, and the fact that you spent 3 hours already, asking questions.

I'm going to—some of these questions, you've already talked about a little bit, but let me just ask another specific concerning NATO. Obviously, the President talked about the fact that we're going to look to NATO to help send more—additional troops. And I think that we—we do know that some of them are constrained by some of the mandates that their countries have put on them. And I think, Secretary Gates, you mentioned a little bit about that. But, I do know that some of the countries have mentioned, in the past, about starting their own withdrawals. In particular, I believe Germany has suggested a transition by 2013, and they have 4,000 troops; Canada suggesting some pullout in 2011 in Kandahar—they have 2500 troops; the Italian leaders, 2800 troops, leaving Herat by December 2011; Dutch leaders suggesting they might want to pull out by 2010. And I was just wondering if that is still a concern.

I'll—Secretary Gates, if you have some information on that.

Secretary GATES. Well, it is a concern. The only two firm decisions that have been made that I'm aware of are that the Dutch will leave, next year, with their forces, and the Canadians, by the end of 2011. These are parliamentary decisions that have been made.

Frankly, our hope, just going back to Secretary Clinton's final remarks in the response to the previous—Senator Collins—I think our hope is that—and I think our hope is that the President's speech last night, and his decisions, will help change the political dynamic among some of our allies. And I must just say, just the first—sort of, the first reactions that I saw on the news this morning from the Europeans, I think, were very encouraging—President

Sarkozy's comments, the comments of the NATO Secretary General, and so on.

And so, I think that—I'm not aware of a German commitment or any kind of firm decision to leave at a particular time, but our hope is that what the President has decided will change the political dynamic.

The truth of the matter is, the governments—and Admiral Mullen and I run into this all the time—the governments of our allies are really very strongly supportive of what—of the mission in Afghanistan. And the military and defense leaders in these countries—and, I think probably also the foreign ministers—very supportive. The problem is, some of these governments are in very delicate coalition governments, and so their domestic politics are a real concern for them, in terms of what they can do. The will is there; the political capacity to deliver is—has been a challenge for some of them. And I think—our hope is that what the President has decided will help change that dynamic.

But, specifically, to your question, I'm only aware of the Canadians and the Dutch that have a specific deadline.

Senator HAGAN. I was also wondering about the budgets. I know that as many countries are—experience a decline in the economy right now, budgets are tight. And, Admiral Mullen, I was wondering how this is affecting NATO, and particularly some of the PRT projects. And how do you foresee Admiral Stavridis addressing these issues?

Admiral MULLEN. Well, I mean, he's—he has—not unlike you've heard from Secretary Clinton and Secretary Gates, he has been incredibly active in engaging the leadership—both civilian and military leadership—of these NATO countries.

And what I haven't see, certainly that they have concerns, just like we do, with respect to the budget, but—and I—for me, it really—a demarcation point was the NATO summit, in April, where—I mean, the support and enthusiasm and, actually, hard work to figure out how we can do this better together has—it's just taken a marked turn for the positive, very unlike anything that I've seen 2 or 3—for the previous 2 or 3 years.

There are concerns about budgets in each of these countries, and yet they continue to—in many cases, now, they've added more troops, more capabilities; they're making contributions in very difficult economic times—not as many as we would like, sometimes. But, again, the overall thrust and approach from the—from our—NATO and other non-NATO contributing nations, has been very, very positive, and I am encouraged by that.

Senator HAGAN. Thank you.

I wanted to follow up a little—

Secretary GATES. Could I just say—

Senator HAGAN. Please.

Secretary GATES. Because I—I think, when I listed some of our NATO allies and the contribution that they have made and the sacrifices they've made, and giving them an A in response to Senator Graham's question, there was—there is a non-NATO ally that has played a significant role with us in Regional Command South, and that's the Australians. And I wouldn't want to omit the contribution and the sacrifice they've made.

Senator HAGAN. They're doing a great job.

Secretary CLINTON. I would just add—we don't want to get in trouble with any of our friends or allies—there are many smaller countries that have really punched way above their weight. And we'll submit, for the record, a list of all of them.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Secretary CLINTON. Because we are also seeing a number of them—the Poles, for example, have been extremely responsive and very helpful. So, there's a—there are a lot of other countries that have done their part.

And we also are seeing in—you know, in some ways, more of an international element to this. And again, when all of it's put together, we'll submit that for the record.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator HAGAN. I see that my time is up, but I did want to say that I know that the 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade from Camp Lejeune is fighting the terrorists in Afghanistan, as well as Fort Bragg's 82nd Airborne, and I wanted to echo the support that I have from North Carolina on behalf of all the troops that are serving us in such a valiant way.

Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Hagan.

Senator WICKER.

Senator WICKER. Well, thank you, to all three members of our panel. It's been a long and good hearing, and you've, all three, been wonderful.

I have to say, at first, I want to thank Senator Sessions for bringing up the issue of the tanker.

And, Secretary Gates, I want to say that I agree with everything you said. There were minimal discrepancies last year that caused this award to Northrop Grumman to be tossed out, and one can only read the RFP, this year, as almost directing a lighter, smaller, and inferior product. And I think Northrop Grumman is absolutely justified to take itself out of the competition at this point. I hope that can be rectified.

Admiral Mullen, how quickly can we deploy these additional troops—30,000 American troops—and their equipment to, not just theater, but the ultimate destination? And how difficult will that be?

I notice, in the press yesterday, a White House official said, "The President is saying this has to happen, so the military will make it happen." How difficult is that going to be?

Admiral MULLEN. It is—a big difference between Iraq and Afghanistan is, we don't have a Kuwait. So, what we deploy into Afghanistan, in great part, goes straight in. And it's not as robust, from an infrastructure standpoint, et cetera. So, the logistics challenges are significant. That said, Secretary Gates—

Senator WICKER. Significantly greater.

Admiral MULLEN. They're significantly greater than Iraq. But, we've been working this for months. And as Secretary Gates said in his opening statement, actually the first part of the—the first troops will be there in a couple of weeks and are already under or-

ders, since the President made his announcement last night. Significant number of them to arrive in the spring—March-April timeframe—and roughly 20- to 25,000 by the July timeframe. And that is getting them in, getting them prepared, and obviously getting them on mission.

Senator WICKER. And when will we be at 30, sir?

Admiral MULLEN. Pardon?

Senator WICKER. When will we be at 30?

Admiral MULLEN. Later in the summer, is the estimate—summer, fall—for—and the precision there—one of the things that the President did in his decision was give the commander on the ground the flexibility to say what troops he wants, when. And we're working our way through that, quite frankly, with General McChrystal, given that flexibility, and so it'll take us a while to be exact. But, the vast majority of them will go, by the summertime, and certainly finish out by the fall.

Senator WICKER. Have we ever done it that quickly before?

Admiral MULLEN. Yes. In fact, in Iraq we actually did it more quickly, because we had a better infrastructure.

Senator WICKER. Under less difficult circumstances.

Admiral MULLEN. I'm not—say—I'd say less difficult circumstances.

Senator WICKER. All right, sir.

I'm sort of betting cleanup on our side. About the allied troops, our hope for 5- to 7,000 additional troops from those allies—and, by the way, let me say, I'm glad, Secretary Clinton, that you hastened to add that the smaller deployments are also appreciated. Secretary Gates, you mentioned specifically several countries as getting an A, and I'm afraid that those that weren't specifically named may be wondering what their grade is going to be.

But, it appears, from what you say, the firm information we have actually takes us in the wrong direction, that the two firm numbers we have mean less allied help. So, our decision not to do the 40,000, rather to do the 30,000, is based on a hope and not based on any assurances from these allies. I think that's the testimony today, but I just wanted to nail that down.

Secretary GATES. Well, I—the situation that we have is that we have received private commitments from some countries, but, because they have not yet announced them at home, we're not in a position to make that announcement for them. I will just give you an example. I made two telephone—out of—I made two telephone calls, day before yesterday, and we have—I received the assurances of between 1800 and 2,000 troops. And those—

Senator WICKER. Additional troops.

Secretary GATES. Yes. So—and we've all been talking to different people. So, I think there's a fair degree of optimism, in terms of the additional troops.

And I would also make the point that I made earlier in the hearing with respect to the 40,000. Well—early in this process, it seemed to me that, because the final brigade combat team that General McChrystal had asked for could not deploy before July of 2011, that there was no need to make a commitment to that, up front, that I would rather use a smaller number on the American side to leverage both the Afghans and our allies. But, General

McChrystal, essentially, is going to get more troops, earlier than he would have with the original 40,000 request.

Senator WICKER. Thank you very much.

Admiral Mullen, somebody just handed me a little sheet of paper. Let me see if I can ask this, quickly.

You've been doing this a long time. You're a graduate of Annapolis, and advanced degrees. When in history has a Commander ever announced both a surge and a withdrawal at the same time? And I think it's—I think that's been very rare in history. And if so, what gives us a comfort level that this sort of approach is going to work?

Admiral MULLEN. Well, I have great comfort in the quickness with which we will deploy these forces to reverse the momentum, which is absolutely critical. I spoke, earlier, to my belief that we will know well by mid-2011 where we stand and which direction—whether we're succeeding or whether we're not, and that, from my perspective, what the President said was to start to transition—transfer responsibility, which is critical as we turn—I mean, it really is the way home, as it has been in Iraq—transfer that security responsibility, and then start to transition, based on the conditions on the ground at the time.

I think that is doable. That, from my perspective, makes sense, at this point, based on our overall understanding of the situation. And so, from that standpoint, again, I'm very supportive of the decision.

And the message that it sends to the Afghans, to our allies, the commitment, the resolve that this additional troop force shows, as well—all those are really positive message. But, come mid-2011, we're going to know whether this is working, or not.

Senator WICKER. Well, I'm going to support this Commander in Chief because the alternative is unacceptable, but perhaps you would like to—or, Secretary Gates—submit, for the record, if you can think of, ever, an occasion in history when a Commander has announced both a surge and a withdrawal at the same time.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator WICKER. You're in a very difficult position. You've had to parse words today and make sense out of a contradictory policy, a policy that, at first blush, on its face, is a paradox and a contradiction. I expect the left is going to rise up this afternoon, based on testimony, based on your answers to Senator Graham, and protest vehemently the statements that you've made about the flexibility and about the President always having the opportunity to change his mind and do what's right for the country and right for national security.

I'm going to support this President. I put great stock, Admiral Mullen, in your statement that you enthusiastically and without hesitation, without qualification, support this policy. And I wish you well. I want to be your teammate.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Wicker.

Senator BEGICH.

Senator BEGICH. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, all three of you. Being one of the last, most of my questions have been answered, but I do want to—I don't think you're necessarily in a difficult position; I think you've done very well for the last 3 hours, answering questions very directly, and the policy and the comments you've made, that this patience that we have as a country of what more sacrifices we have to make, in the sense of the civilian end, the military end, the President spending the time to review the policy and set it out and create flexibility, I think, has been the right move. So, I disagree with my counterpart on the other side, or my Republican friend.

But, I would say that one thing I want to put to rest, and I want to make sure I'm clear on this, because I think you've said it 100 times, and I'm going to pound this one more time, and that's on the whole issue of withdrawal. It—you've made it very clear, withdrawal and transition are similar but different, in that July occurs—and it's kind of a statement; I hope that I'm right on this, that July occurs in '11, withdrawal will occur, in some form—might be 100 troops, might be 50,000 troops. Undetermined. It may last 1 year, may last 1 month, might last 3 years. But, the withdrawal process, which really is a transition process, is a goal that we're shooting for in 2011. Is that what I understand?

Secretary GATES. Yes.

Senator BEGICH. Okay. I've heard this—and we're going to hear this—I hate to say this, even though I think this committee is very bipartisan, spending the time to look at this issue—there's agreement, all across the board here, of supporting the President's mission, here, and I agree with it 100 percent. But, this whole issue of the withdrawal, everyone's trying to pull that apart. And really what you've done is set a target, giving the Afghan government a target of what we're trying to shoot for, in the sense of when we think their commitment's going to be at the highest level possible to target—making this transition, and then there will be decisions made, at the end of December, leading into July, of what level that might be. It might be very small. It might be very large. But, that's undetermined yet, but that's the target. Am I correct in saying that?

Admiral MULLEN. That's fair.

Senator BEGICH. I'm hoping we're not going to——

Secretary GATES. December is more about——

Senator BEGICH. Internal reading.

Secretary GATES.—Is the strategy working?

Senator BEGICH. Right.

Secretary GATES. Are we headed in the right direction? Are things moving the way we anticipated they would? The decisions with respect to transition would begin in July, as you've described it.

Senator BEGICH. Great. I'm just hoping, as we move forward on this discussion, we're not going to beat the withdraw issue over the head so many times that—it's not hard, it is a target—a target that may mean a few people, it may mean thousands of people, but that will be determined as the strategy plays out, is—and again, I want to just echo that. Hopefully, we'll be done with that discussion, we'll support the Commander in Chief, and you all, and the

efforts of our troops on the ground, and the effort we need to do in Afghanistan.

In that, I want to ask you in—a little more in depth in regards to the Afghan troops and how you see them training up. I know you had some target amounts of 134,000, December 2010, and moving that up to 170,000, I think, by July, in hopes. How confident, if you were to measure, on a percentage scale of 100 percent—obviously, 100 percent confident—that you can reach that successfully? And what would be one or two challenges that may cause it to not get to that goal?

Admiral MULLEN. Well, I think the—that area is the highest risk area for us. We all identified that throughout and believe that. And that's where General McChrystal is. We've put great leadership in place to address that. It's got to be led by security, or we can't get there. I mean, so that we can create an environment in which more participate. Fundamental shift in the partnership piece, which is a significant breakthrough on how to do this, and we have a lot more confidence in that regard. But, it's one of the reasons we really have annual targets, so that we can look at how we're doing, and adjust accordingly. Secretary talked earlier about retention, attrition, you know, all those challenges that we have, more so on the police side than on the army side. So, I think we're very clear-eyed on what the challenge is, because—and we are going to assess ourselves rigorously throughout the process. But, it is probably the—you know, the biggest challenge that we have, with respect to meeting the goals that we've set out for ourselves.

Senator BEGICH. Very good.

Secretary CLINTON, I want to follow up with you. I'm actually very supportive of you getting as much flexibility with the use of your monies. I would even offer to suggest that, as we deal with the defense appropriation bill, why we don't figure out how to fix this now rather than waiting until next summer, because we'll lose 8 or 9 months, which every month, every day seems critical. So, I would look to you and the administration to have a suggestion, seeing that we haven't done the defense components, so why not figure out how to make that happen.

But, your number—I think you said you're going to triple up or get about 970, give or take a few there. But, you also indicated that you need more, in time. Have you figured out what that number is? I agree with you. I think, as we do the military plus-up, the civilian component is critical. And I appreciate your review and change that you've done to really focus on this component and getting unified efforts with the military. I think that is critical.

What—have you thought of a number? Or is that something you can give to the record at some point?

Secretary CLINTON. Senator, thank you. I'm hesitant to state a number now, but we will provide it to the record.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Secretary CLINTON. But, there is a large idea that I think your question suggests. We should start looking at our budgets as national security budgets if we're really intent upon having an integrated civilian-military strategy. And again, I have to compliment Secretary Gates, who's been an advocate of this long before I ever

thought I'd be sitting here at this table in this position. We have to be willing to look across the government at a whole-of-government approach to something as critical as our national security and the mission in Afghanistan. And that's going to take some changes in how we do business and how we think about it.

So, I would, obviously, welcome the continuing support from this committee and others as we try to get it right. You know, we have—I mean, this will be, I'm sure, the subject of the Appropriations Committee, but where's the money going to come from? Is it going to be part of the budget? How's it going to be costed out? All of that has to be worked through between the—our government, the administration and the Congress. But, as we're doing that, I think we—we've got to quit stovepiping our efforts and start thinking more holistically, which is really what our policy intends to present.

Senator BEGICH. My time is up, and, Secretary Clinton, I want to—I 100-percent agree with you, this hearing today—and I want to thank the Chairman for doing this—that it's—what I consider three critical pieces to the equation are sitting in front of us today, and not just one component. So, I really do appreciate your comments. And anything I can do as an individual member, I'll be happy to do that. Thank you again for all your service. And thank you for bringing forward 3 hours of answers to many questions.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Begich.

Senator Kirk.

Senator KIRK. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

First of all, let me add a word, with my colleagues, to thank you for your patience this morning, but, far more importantly, for your patriotic service to the country and your service to our Commander in Chief.

I wanted to just follow up a little bit on Senator Collins' question. When—if I understand it, when General McChrystal advocated a strategy along these lines, it wasn't just the troops, he said, and I'm quoting here, "A foreign army alone cannot beat an insurgency. The insurgency in Afghanistan requires an Afghan solution. This is their war." And he went on to say, any success must come, quote, "by, with, and through the Afghan government." In other words, without a legitimate, credible, reliable Afghan governmental partner, it sounds to me like the strategy would be flawed.

By all reports that we have, President Karzai had been installed, basically, as a result of a flawed election, if not a fraudulent election, by default, and that he presides over a culture of corruption and dependent on, unfortunately, an opium economy.

What I'm concerned about is whether we are taking a leap of faith here with respect to our Afghan governmental partner and—not irrespective of that, but related to that, if we're going to send 30,000 more troops and spend additional United States dollars, should we not be looking for more indices or evidence that he truly will be a partner that has the response from his own citizens, and support of them, so that we're not just in there without him and, maybe, unfortunately, being perceived as, quote/unquote, "occupiers"?

So, on the one hand, obviously, Secretary Clinton, you, as you have said, have been closer to him. You've heard the words. But,

I think a lot of us are wondering whether this is for real, on their side.

Secretary CLINTON. Well, Senator Kirk, first let me say, with respect to the strategy and the execution, I think it is fair to say that probably the two experts in the world right now on counterinsurgency and counterterrorism are, on counterinsurgency, General Petraeus; on counterterrorism, General McChrystal. They are very committed and confident that we will see success. Now, they could be wrong. You know, we're all human and we can make a different assessment, or reality can turn out to be a lot more ugly and difficult than any of us imagined. But, on the side of the positive with respect to the strategy, I certainly put a lot of stock into what they say, and up the chain of command to Admiral Mullen and Secretary Gates.

It is absolutely the case that General McChrystal pointed out one of the salient features of the campaign that we are waging, and that is to have a good, solid partner in the Afghan government.

I think it is unfair to paint with such a broad brush the President and Government of Afghanistan and to basically declare that they are incapable and unwilling to defend and protect their own country, and that they are fatally flawed. I do not believe that.

I believe it is a much more complex picture, as most human situations are. And I believe that the way that our government interacted with President Karzai and his government over the last several years bred a lot of the confusion and the inadequacy that we are now having to contend with.

I am not making the case that this is a perfect partnership, but I think it has the elements of real progress, if we are smart enough as to how to put them together into a winning strategy.

So, the people on the ground, the people who are responsible for implementing this strategy, including Ambassador Eikenberry, who wholeheartedly endorses the President's definition of our mission, believe it's hard, but doable. That is what I believe. And as we, you know, say, the proof is in the pudding; we're going to find out, because of the President's decision.

I think your caution has to be kept in mind. But, I also believe that we have to come at this with a sense of resolve, determination, and a cautious optimism that we can make this work. I think that there is a very strong argument that we can.

Secretary GATES. I would just like to pitch in and echo Secretary Clinton's comments about the dangers of painting the Afghan government with too broad a brush. The reality is, as she indicated earlier, there are some number of ministers—and I would say, including two that we work the most closely with, in Defense and Interior—who are quite competent and quite capable and have been good partners for us. Similarly, when we see a good governor go into a province—we have seen a situation turn around, literally in months, when a competent, honest, governor is put in place. And there are more than a few of those in Afghanistan.

All the problems that you've described and that have been discussed here this morning are real, they exist, but there are enough examples of the kind of people we need to partner with, who are already in the Afghan government or are governors, that I think

is what contributes to—I won't say "optimism," but a feeling of some confidence that this is going to work.

Senator KIRK. Thank you.

One other question. And it goes back to the Pakistan situation. And with the nuclear capabilities there, the place is rife with al Qaeda; whereas, less so, according to General Jones, on the Afghanistan side. Could you just give us a little bit of flavor about the thinking—why a—another option which might more directly or readily address the President's concerns and his mission, the option of trying to secure and seal the Afghanistan- Pakistan border while we're working to ensure the security and stability of nuclear weapons, and doing what we can to destroy the safe havens in Pakistan while we seal the border so the terrorists aren't fleeing back into Afghanistan, as one strategy, as opposed to the 30,000 troops in Afghanistan?

Admiral MULLEN. Senator, there's a—there are a lot of views on borders around the world. My experience and the experience of an awful lot of people who have been doing this for a long time, is, borders are pretty tough to seal, and certainly this one is probably as tough as any in the world.

So, at least from my perspective—it doesn't mean we shouldn't have security up there; because we have. And, in fact, we're working very hard to establish centers that are manned by both Afghanistan and Pakistani military members—and we've got one—to better secure that border. But, I don't—I think that getting to the point where you think you can secure that is just—it has not—I don't think that that can be done, first of all.

Second, I think—the focus on Pakistan—and it's been mentioned here, and I won't belabor it—is absolutely vital here. And I—but, it really—it's a sovereign country. They've really done a lot. A lot of us, a year ago, would not have predicted that they would have undertaken the efforts that they have to go into South Waziristan—and Swat, before that. We're working to support that, and their interests—you know, what we're also—our interests are very much mutual because of the threat that has been discussed before. And it's going to take some time to do that.

Then, there's that long-term partnership, actually on both sides of the border, that is absolutely critical. When I go there, I mean, one of the questions that comes very quickly from military and civilians in both those countries is, "Are you leaving? Are you going to abandon us again?" And the importance of the President's message last night, and this decision, is a significant step in that direction, that that's not the case. And I—and we can't afford to do that again.

Senator KIRK. Thank you very much. And thank you all very much again for your service and your patience.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Kirk.

Senator Bayh.

Senator BAYH. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I don't know whether this is a case of saving the best for last or simply the last for last, but I'm—[Laughter.]

—have been very gratified to hear the testimony of these three distinguished Americans here today.

Admiral, I want to thank you for your lifetime commitment to our Armed Forces.

Secretary Gates, I want to thank you for your continued service. The President was wise to ask you to remain, and you were a true public servant to decide, in spite of the advantages of private life, to remain. I'm grateful to you for that.

Secretary Clinton, I remember, with a great deal of fondness, our service on this panel together, literally side by side, and the journey that we took together to Afghanistan several years ago. I can't help but think that if we had had the kind of nuanced and complex analysis at that point, perhaps we wouldn't be here today. But, we are. And I am gratified that all of you, along with the President, took the time to think this through to maximize our chances of getting it right. So, it's good to see you again. On a somewhat lighter note, I haven't had a chance to see you since the news about your daughter was announced. Congratulations.

Secretary CLINTON. Thank you very much.

Senator BAYH. The bottom line for me—and several of you have stated this—there are no easy answers here; there are only difficult choices. And it seems—there are no guarantees, but it does seem to me the strategy you've settled on maximizes the chances of success, maximizes the chances that we will be able to ultimately leave Afghanistan, not temporarily, but permanently, while securing the national security interests of the United States. And that's what this ultimately has to be all about.

I think it's important to note that I'm sure none of you want to be here recommending that we spend more money in Afghanistan or that we send more troops to Afghanistan. But, we have to remind ourselves, and the American public, that we are there because we were attacked from that place and 3,000 innocent Americans lost their lives as a result of that. And we owe it to the American public that we maximize the chances of that not happening again. I think your strategy does that.

Regrettably, we are likely to remain under threat from radical Islam and organizations like al Qaeda, no matter what we do. If we leave, we run the risk of it returning to a safe haven from which attacks can be launched on our homeland. If we stay, regrettably our servicemen and women are placed in harm's way. But, I do think the strategy you're settled on maximizes the chances of minimizing those combined risks on an ongoing basis. And so, I thank you for that.

I want to—although neither one of them is here, I want to thank Senator Lieberman for his comments. I think he was exactly right when he pointed out, "Look, you're receiving some tough questions from both the right and the left today." The President is not doing this because it is politically expedient; he's doing it because he believes it's in the national security interests of the United States. That's the kind of decisionmaking I want to see in a chief executive, and I think it's the kind of decision making he has, with your help, exhibited here today.

I want to associate myself with some of the comments of Senator McCain and several of our colleagues on the other side of the aisle who are going to support this President in his decision making. For those who believe that the ability to forge bipartisan decision mak-

ing is just impossible in Washington, their comments today are evidence that that is not necessarily so. And so, I want to thank them for putting partisanship aside and choosing to support our Commander in Chief in a very difficult situation.

I do take issue with a couple of things that were raised by Senator McCain. And I would associate myself with your comments. I think that the notion of having—and I think, Secretary Gates, you mentioned this—demonstrating both resolve as well as a sense of urgency simultaneously is exactly the combination we need to exhibit here. So, we demonstrate resolve by maintaining our commitment, but, at the same time, we insist that the Afghans have the sense of urgency which is ultimately going to do more than we can do to make this a successful undertaking.

So, by having an exit strategy in place, I think we say to them, “We are with you, but only so long as you do your part.” I think that’s vitally important to the ultimate success of this undertaking. And I personally don’t find it incompatible to have a deadline that we aspire to meet, we do everything to meet, that we expect to meet, but, at the same time, of course take into account changes in facts on the ground that may occur over the next year and a half. And, as you pointed out, this is a longer period of time than it took for the surge in Iraq to prove to be successful. So, I think it’s important to keep that in mind.

I do have two brief questions. And you’ve been very patient and you’ve stayed a long time. But, these are two critiques that have been offered, and I want to give you an opportunity to address them. You have, in part, already.

But, you hear some people say, “Well, the Taliban and the al Qaeda are two different phenomena, and we can address combating al Qaeda without really having to combat the Taliban within Afghanistan.” You’ve pointed out that the Taliban is not a homogeneous group; there are differences, and we’re going to try and appeal to the reconcilable, to peel them away from the irreconcilable?s. But, there is still a hard core there. And I think the words that you’ve used—one of you used the words that they “collude in some of their operations,” that there’s a “symbiotic relationship between the irreconcilable elements of Taliban and al Qaeda.” So, I’d like to give you a chance, both Secretaries, to address this issue, which I understand your testimony to get to, that, with regard to that irreducible hard core of the Taliban, it simply is not possible to defeat al Qaeda or minimize the risk from al Qaeda without also combating that irreconcilable element of the Taliban.

Secretary GATES. Well, I would just say that we have to remember that it’s the part of the Taliban that we think is irreconcilable that, in fact, provided the safe haven for al Qaeda. And there is just a significant amount of intelligence of al Qaeda identifying themselves with the Taliban’s aspirations in Afghanistan and the Taliban talking about their relationship with al Qaeda and the message that al Qaeda has.

The Taliban are clever. We wouldn’t be in the situation we’re in if we did not face a—an adaptable and clever adversary. They recognize that the reason they’re not in power right now is because they allowed al Qaeda to launch the attack against the United States. So, every now and then you’ll see some report or another

that the Taliban is saying, "Well, let's downplay the relationship with al Qaeda so we don't get hit again." But, the fact is, there is plenty of evidence of these two organizations and their—as I put it in my opening statement, their symbiotic relationship.

What has made it more dangerous over the last year, as I said earlier, is that now we have the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, the Taliban in Pakistan, whose target is the Pakistani government and who are working closely with al Qaeda, along with their compatriots in Afghanistan.

Senator BAYH. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary Clinton, anything you'd like to—

Secretary CLINTON. Well, Senator Bayh, in addition to the inspirational and aspirational role that al Qaeda plays, they provide very specific services; they help to provide funding, they help to provide targeting and training and equipping. Very often they have their planners working closely with the elements of the Taliban, in both Afghanistan and Pakistan, in order to target, you know, both institutions of the respective governments, as well as international sites, embassies of other countries, and certainly our own presence and our troops.

I don't think there's any doubt any longer that there has been a developing syndicate of terror, and those tentacles reach far and wide. Yes, they do reach to Somalia, to Yemen, to the Maghreb, et cetera. But, they are focused and grounded in the border area between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

And so, it's—you know, it's our assessment that it's—it might have been possible, if we had gone at it somewhat differently in the beginning of this war, to have, you know, captured and killed enough of the al Qaeda and the Taliban leadership to have made a difference. But, we are where we are right now, and we know that the training that is done and the communication that is done out of that area poses direct threats to us, our friends, and our allies.

Senator BAYH. Thank you.

If I could be permitted one final question.

Another point of view that's offered, voices that are raised, suggests, "Well, we're focusing on the wrong place. Al Qaeda is now principally located in the tribal areas of Pakistan. We should focus on Pakistan. Why are we doing this in Afghanistan?" My understanding of your testimony here today is that, number one, were we to adopt that strategy, the Taliban would, over time, reassert itself in Afghanistan, having safe havens there from which to launch attacks against America and our interests. That's number one. Number two, we can't go into Pakistan; we have to try and build up the Pakistanis' capability of dealing with the problem on the ground there. And, number three, we are doing that. This is not an either-or choice. And, in fact, if you made it one, ignoring one would undermine the other, so we have to look at this—these two theaters in conjunction, doing both simultaneously, to ensure that we combat the threat.

So, if you'd care to address this notion that we could do one, but not the other, which seems to be out there in the minds of some.

Admiral MULLEN. They're inextricably linked, and there's no question that if the Taliban—and their strategic goal is to take

over the government again in Afghanistan—if they came back, that they certainly have all the ability to provide that kind of safe haven, and they—again, they are so linked across that border. I mean, the linkage between these two countries—in my travels, I mean, nothing is more evident than that. So, you—that’s why the President’s strategy, even in March, drove this to a regional approach, not a single-country approach. You just can’t do one without doing the other.

Secretary GATES. Let me just—and this may be the last thing I say in this hearing—but, what is essential is—for our national security, is that we have two long-term partners in Afghanistan and Pakistan. And, quite frankly, I detest the phrase “exit strategy,” because what we are looking at over time is a transition in our relationship with the Afghans, a relationship that now, where there is the preponderance of a military relationship as we try to secure the country and put it in a position where they can accept responsibility for their own security, and, frankly, to prevent al Qaeda from coming back—but, over time, as we are successful in that, the civilian component and the development component of our relationship with Afghanistan will become predominant. We may have a small residual military training-and-equipping role with Afghanistan in the future.

But, this goes to the point I made in my testimony. We will not repeat the mistake—we must not repeat the mistake of 1989 and turn our backs on these folks and, when we’ve got the security situation, with them, under control, then the civilian and the development part must be the preponderant part of our relationship far into the future.

Senator BAYH. That’s one of the truly refreshing things. You know, in past administrations from time to time, there had been friction between the Department of Defense and the Department of State, but here you’re working hand in hand, and, in fact, understand that you both have to go forward together to truly get the job done on a permanent basis. And so, I’m most gratified for your collaboration.

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for your patience.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Bayh.

Our witnesses, you’ve been excellent. You’ve been responsive. You’ve been more than patient. Because we promised you that you’d be out of here by 12:30, I believe, we owe you 10 minutes, and a lot more than that.

Thank you.

[Whereupon, at 12:46 p.m., the committee adjourned.]