

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

TUESDAY, JUNE 15, 2010

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:32 a.m. in room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Senator Carl Levin (chairman) presiding.

Committee members present: Senators Levin, Lieberman, Reed, Akaka, Bill Nelson, E. Benjamin Nelson, Webb, Udall, Hagan, Bingaman, Kaufman, McCain, Inhofe, Sessions, Chambliss, Graham, Thune, Wicker, Brown, and Collins.

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

Majority staff members present: Joseph M. Bryan, professional staff member; Ilona R. Cohen, counsel; William G.P. Monahan, counsel; Michael J. Noblet, professional staff member; and William K. Sutey, professional staff member.

Minority staff members present: Adam J. Barker, professional staff member; Michael V. Kostiw, professional staff member; Daniel A. Lerner, professional staff member; David M. Morriss, minority counsel, and Dana W. White, professional staff member.

Staff assistants present: Jennifer R. Knowles, Christine G. Lang, and Hannah I. Lloyd.

Committee members' assistants present: James Tuite, assistant to Senator Byrd; Vance Serchuk, assistant to Senator Lieberman; Carolyn Chuhta and Nick Ikeda, assistants to Senator Reed; Greta Lundeberg, assistant to Senator Bill Nelson; Ann Premer, assistant to Senator Ben Nelson; Gordon I. Peterson, assistant to Senator Webb; Tressa Guenov and Stephen C. Hedger, assistants to Senator McCaskill; Jennifer Barrett, assistant to Senator Udall; Roger Pena, assistant to Senator Hagan; Lindsay Kavanaugh, assistant to Senator Begich; Halie Soifer, assistant to Senator Kaufman; Anthony J. Lazarski, assistant to Senator Inhofe; Sandra Luff, assistant to Senator Sessions; Jason Van Beek, assistant to Senator Thune; Brian Walsh, assistant to Senator LeMieux; Kevin Kane, assistant to Senator Burr; and Ryan Kaldahl, assistant to Senator Collins.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CARL LEVIN, CHAIRMAN

Chairman LEVIN. Good morning, everybody. This morning the committee receives testimony on the progress in Afghanistan from

Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michele Flournoy and General David Petraeus, Commander, U.S. Central Command.

General Petraeus, please extend to all of the men and women who are serving under your command the thanks of this committee for their tremendous service, their valor, their dedication to the causes of this country. They deserve our support and I know our committee gives them that full support, and to their families as well.

General PETRAEUS. I'll do that, Mr. Chairman. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Last month a milestone was reached when it was announced that for the first time more U.S. troops are serving in Afghanistan than in Iraq. This month marks 1 year since General Stanley McChrystal took command of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force, or ISAF. The news from Afghanistan in recent weeks has been largely negative: the increase in casualties among U.S., coalition, and Afghan Security Forces, the mixed results in Marjah, and the apparent return of Taliban intimidation and assassinations of local officials there, the failure of Afghan government officials to deliver much-needed services, to win local allegiances, the delay in the Kandahar campaign, the resignation of two senior Afghan security officials who seemingly were among the most competent members of the cabinet and had strong coalition support, the role of local power brokers, including members of the Karzai family, in Kandahar, the growth of militias, and the counterproductive activities of some U.S.-hired private security contractors, apparent differences with the Karzai regime over approaches to reconciliation with the Taliban.

At a press conference last week, General McChrystal acknowledged these press reports, but he emphasized that "You also have to step back and see the trend in direction." Well, this morning we want to hear from our witnesses on how they see these trends.

My focus is and always has been on getting the Afghan National Security Forces trained and equipped to take over the responsibility for their country's security. Doing so is the key to success in Afghanistan. As General McChrystal said at a press briefing last week, the Afghan security forces are "the strategic main effort and they're key to the long-term stability in Afghanistan." General McChrystal has repeatedly set out the goal of putting Afghans in the lead and making them responsible for their future, and Afghan leaders have said they want to be responsible for their own security and their own affairs.

At the Consultative Peace Jirga held at the beginning of this month, the 1,600 Afghan delegates adopted a resolution calling on the international community to "expedite the process of equipping, training, and strengthening the Afghan National Security Forces so they can get the capability in taking responsibility to provide security for their own country and people."

But progress towards the goal of Afghans taking the lead in operations has been unsatisfactory. Today operations in Afghanistan are excessively dependent on coalition forces. The campaign plan for Kandahar which is under way anticipates increases in Afghan and ISAF forces in and around Kandahar City to create a "rising tide of security," but at a one to two ratio, that is one Afghan soldier or policeman for every two ISAF troops. That's not good

enough. Our partnering goal should be at least a ratio of one to one in Kandahar and Afghan troops should be in the lead in many, if not most, operations.

Having Afghan units in the lead is critical in Kandahar since the likelihood of success there is based on popular support. That support is at the heart of the counterinsurgency strategy which is so well set forth by General Petraeus. The Afghan Army has broad public support and even the Afghan government has more than twice the support that the United States does. Polling numbers in The New York Times indicate that 90 percent of Afghans support the Kabul Government over the Taliban, but only 40 percent of Afghans have a favorable view of the United States.

The 100 or so elders that we met in a local shura in southern Afghanistan last year, when we asked what they wanted the United States to do, told us that we should train and equip the Afghan security forces to provide for their own security and then depart.

Last week General McChrystal announced that ISAF would slow the expansion of the Afghan and coalition troop presence in Kandahar in order to allow time to secure the support of local tribal leaders for that effort. I trust General McChrystal's judgment on the timing. He's right that "It's more important we get it right than we get it fast," and he's also saying correctly in my judgment that when you go to protect people the people have to want you to protect them.

So I'd rather delay a few months and have a few more Afghan forces in the lead when the security presence is expanded and operations begin more forcefully than to have an ISAF-dominated force attempt to secure Kandahar a few months earlier. Our top priority then must be training, mentoring, and partnering in the field with Afghan troops and placing them in the lead in operations against insurgents, backed by U.S. and coalition support.

Currently, according to ISAF, the growth of the Afghan security forces is on track. The NATO Training Mission- Afghanistan under Lieutenant General Bill Caldwell reports that recruitment for Afghan Army and Police now actually exceeds monthly recruitment goals. These forces are above where they need to be to meet the end strength goals for October 2010 of 134,000 army and 109,000 police personnel.

What is disturbing and hard to comprehend, however, is that the training mission still does not have enough trainers to process all the Afghan recruits who are signing up to join in the security forces. The most recent available figures show that, of the more than 5,200 trainers that we need, only about 2,600 are on the ground.

Secretary Gates has deployed 850 U.S. soldiers and marines to Afghanistan to serve as a stopgap. According to a May 29th report—according to a May 29 report from Lieutenant General Caldwell, the training mission has yet to receive 750 trainers pledged by NATO members. Further, last week NATO Secretary General Rasmussen announced that NATO members have yet to pledge an additional 450 trainers needed to meet training requirements.

It's totally unacceptable that this shortfall persists. NATO members who, for whatever reason, do not send additional combat troops or who intend to reduce their combat troop presence in the near future, should at least be willing to provide trainers who operate away from the heavy fighting.

The question remains, why are more Afghan forces not in the lead in Kandahar, using forces that are trained and ready? According to figures provided by the ISAF joint command, 25 Afghan battalions, or kandaks, are able to operate independently, 42 Afghan kandaks can operate with coalition support. Now, that's 67 of 113 total Afghan Army kandaks. More recent ISAF data on Afghan forces' capability casts some doubt on the accuracy of that assessment of the Afghan Army's capabilities, but they do not explain why it is U.S. or coalition forces that are usually leading operations instead of the other way around.

The Afghan Army has about 125,000 troops available, more than we do. But it is our troops that are concentrated in the areas where the fighting is heaviest and where Afghanistan's future may well hang in the balance.

So many questions regarding the Afghan National Army remain unanswered and perhaps we will hear answers today. Why aren't more Afghan Army troops leading security operations in the south? How many Afghan combat battalions and how many Afghan combat troops are there in Kandahar? When will the Afghan units take the lead there? Why aren't large numbers of Afghan Army troops from other areas moving to Kandahar in preparation for the push? And why isn't the ratio of coalition to Afghan troops in Kandahar at least one to one, instead of two coalition troops to one Afghan?

I know American troops are better equipped and trained than Afghan troops. But the issue isn't force on force. If it were I would accept our taking the lead most often in Kandahar operations. The issue is who can best connect with and protect the population of Kandahar. As Afghan Defense Minister Wardak recently and aptly described the situation in Kandahar, "It is a different type operation. It is not like Marjah. It is not going to be that kinetic."

The Afghan Army can handle the population protection mission adequately and is equipped to do so. It is the hearts and minds of Afghans, particularly the Pashtun population in Kandahar, that must be won over. That population wants security and it wants that security provided by Afghans. Having Afghan troops among the Afghan people is more accepted by them, with coalition forces in the background providing support for those Afghan troops. Success in Kandahar will be more likely with Afghan troops in the lead.

I'm going to put the balance of my statement now in the record and simply conclude by saying that the Afghan government and people need to demonstrate a sense of urgency and commitment to succeed in building a lasting peace in Afghanistan. If the Afghan government and people demonstrate a willingness to fight and assume increasing responsibility for their security and affairs, then the American people will be steadfast partners in that endeavor.

Senator McCain.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JOHN MCCAIN

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And I thank our distinguished witnesses for joining us this morning to discuss events in Afghanistan. Let me thank you for your leadership of our men and women in uniform, especially those in harm's way.

As is well known, I believe that winning the war in Afghanistan is a vital national security interest. I've said for years that the best way to achieve a success is through a properly resourced counterinsurgency strategy backed by strong civil, military, and U.S.-Afghan partnerships. For this reason, I have supported and still do support strongly the President's decision to increase our commitment in Afghanistan.

I'll be brief, Mr. Chairman, and come right to the point. As I gauge the progress of any war effort, I look at the broader trend lines, and it is for this reason that I am deeply concerned about our campaign in Afghanistan. Many of the key trends seem to be heading in a bad direction, perhaps even signaling a mounting crisis.

As an example, 10,000 additional NATO troops are supposed to deploy along with our surge forces. But we presently have just over half that number and, more importantly, it's not clear when or from where the rest of them will arrive. At the same time, the Dutch and Canadian governments continue to play for an imminent withdrawal of their forces, while just yesterday the government of Poland, which has been a major troop contributor, called on NATO to draw up a timetable to end the alliance's mission in Afghanistan and withdraw our forces.

In Marjah our troops are performing exceptionally, but it appears that we and our Afghan partners have not been able to provide durable, consistent security to the population. Not surprisingly, governance and development seem to be lagging. General McChrystal recently referred to Marjah as a "bleeding ulcer" and questioned whether we have enough troops there.

Rather than serving as proof that NATO and the Afghan government will succeed, which was the intention, I fear that Marjah at the moment is sending a much more troubling signal. In Kandahar, where the success of the war itself could be determined, I agree with General McChrystal's recent comment that "It's more important we get it right than we get it fast." That said, the delay in our operation is not projecting an air of confidence and success.

To get Kandahar right, we all know that we need an integrated political-military strategy. But as far as I can tell, the political part of that strategy still isn't there. I hear a lot about the number of civilians who will deploy in Kandahar, but I still haven't heard a convincing explanation for how we will begin to change the complex balance of power within the province, the troubling behavior of key local power brokers, the performance of the Afghan police in the city, and the counterproductive contracting practices that we are dependent on.

Meanwhile, it's very troubling that President Karzai has decided to remove his minister of interior and his head of intelligence, two of our most important partners in his government and two men I know to be upstanding and effective. I don't know why President Karzai made this decision, but the explanation given by his former intelligence chief which we read in the newspaper this weekend

seems to have a ring of truth to it: that President Karzai no longer believes the United States will succeed and that he is shifting as a result to a policy of accommodation with the Taliban and the Pakistani military. If true, this could be very dangerous.

That's the larger trend that underlies all the others, the mounting loss of confidence in America's commitment to succeed that seems to be shared by both our friends and enemies in Afghanistan as well as its neighbors. As our witnesses know, especially General Petraeus, a counterinsurgency is a battle for the thoughts and allegiance of people. It's about demonstrating to those sitting on the fence that they should throw their lot in with our partners and us because we're going to win.

No matter how much it's been explained and fixed with caveats, the decision to begin withdrawing our forces from Afghanistan arbitrarily in July 2011 seems to be having exactly the effect that many of us predicted it would. It's convincing the key actors inside and outside of Afghanistan that the United States is more interested in leaving than succeeding in this conflict. As a result, they're all making the necessary accommodations for a post- American Afghanistan.

This is not to say that we cannot succeed. I think we can and we must. But it is to say that, with ongoing difficulties in Marjah, a delayed offensive in Kandahar, growing concerns about the Afghan government, troop commitments still lagging from NATO, and the final units of our own surge not set to reach Afghanistan until the 1st of September, it now seems increasingly clear that hoping for success on the arbitrary time line set by the administration is simply unrealistic.

Again, I'd echo General McChrystal: "It's more important we get it right than we get it fast." That goes for Kandahar and for the war itself. It's time for the President to state unequivocally that we will stay in Afghanistan until we succeed. We need to begin a realistic debate about what it will take and how long it will take to achieve our goals. I look forward to having that discussion with our witnesses.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator McCain.
Secretary Flournoy.

**STATEMENT OF HON. MICHÉLE A. FLOURNOY, UNDER
SECRETARY OF DEFENSE FOR POLICY**

Ms. FLOURNOY. Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain, and distinguished members of the committee:

Thank you very much for inviting us here to testify today. I'd like to give you an update on recent progress and remaining challenges in Afghanistan. As you know, President Obama announced a number of key refinements to our strategy last December, including the deployment of an additional 30,000 U.S. service men and women. Today over 18,000 of these additional troops have deployed and the remainder will be in place by the end of the summer.

Our own troops will be joined by over 9,000 international troops. Approximately 60 percent of NATO and partner troops are currently in place in Afghanistan and more will come in the coming months.

Currently the main operational effort for ISAF and our Afghan partners continues to be in Central Helmand, the Central Helmand River Valley, and Kandahar. Our focus in these operations is on protecting the population and fostering Afghan security and governance capacity. So far, we believe we have been making gradual but important progress. The coalition is contesting the insurgency more effectively, in more places, and with more forces.

But this insurgency is both resilient and resourceful. In both April and May, we saw insurgent activity resume in Marjah and much of Central Helmand. Nonetheless, the nature of recent insurgent attacks is beginning to indicate a possible reduction in some of their operational capacity. For example, the percentage of complex attacks, those employing more than one means of attack, has steadily dropped since its peak in February, and the average number of casualties per attack is below 2009 levels.

Local Afghans in the region have also shown an increased willingness to report suspected IEDs and insurgent weapons caches, which suggests growing pockets of confidence among ordinary people and a willingness to support ISAF and Afghan efforts to establish security and governance.

In Kandahar Province, we are taking a deliberate approach, gradually expanding our efforts to improve local governance in key districts as coalition and ANSF operations improve the security situation gradually.

Some in Congress have expressed concern about the impact of local power brokers on our efforts in Kandahar. We share this concern and we recognize that there are ways in which our own contracting practices have actually had unintended consequences, concentrating wealth among a relatively small number of Afghans who control companies large enough to procure contracts. General Petraeus and Admiral Mullen have created a two-star task force to examine our contracting practices with a view to reducing these unintended consequences. When we have evidence of corruption, we will also work with the Afghan government to prosecute those who have violated the law.

Let me turn now to our efforts to build the capability and capacity of the ANSF. Building an effective Afghan National Security Forces capacity remains key both to the long-term security and stability of Afghanistan and to our ability to transition security responsibility and draw down our forces as conditions allow. While we are still short about 450 institutional trainers, we have reduced the instructor-to-trainee ratio from about 1 to 80 to now 1 to 30.

The Afghan National Army is on schedule to meet our goal of 134,000 troops for fiscal year 2010, and nearly 85 percent of the ANA is now fully partnered with ISAF forces as they operate in the field. The Afghan National Police is on track to reach its goal of 109,000 police by the end of the fiscal year and we have increased the capacity to conduct ANP training by 400 percent over the last 12 months, and follow-on training has been provided to both Afghan uniformed police in 83 key districts as well as the Afghan Border Police.

Recent salary and benefits initiatives have addressed pay disparities between the ANA and the ANP and these initiatives appear to be improving retention and attrition. Literacy programs

have also proven to be a positive incentive. Further, we believe that rising end strength numbers and newly instituted rotation schedules will further reduce attrition. Consequently, we believe ANSF end strength goals for 2011 are achievable.

Needless to say, the purpose of these efforts is to ensure a gradual transition of security responsibility to the Afghan government. I want to emphasize here that transition does not, does not, mean abandonment or withdrawal. We are committed to supporting the people of Afghanistan over the long term and we will not walk away from this commitment. Nonetheless, we cannot and should not remain in the lead combat role indefinitely. As the international military presence begins to shift from a combat role to an advise and assist role, it will be absolutely vital to ensure a more robust and long-term international civilian assistance effort focused on capacity-building, governance, and development.

We are working closely with the Afghan government to plan for the transition process. In May President Karzai and 14 members of his cabinet were here for just about a week in Washington for a strategic dialogue. At the Kabul conference in July, the Afghan government will present further plans for achieving progress in governance and development across four ministerial clusters. We also expect to hear more from President Karzai regarding actions taken to address corruption as well as plans for reconciliation and reintegration.

Let me say a few words about reconciliation and reintegration since I know it's an issue that has generated a great deal of interest. All parties to the conflict in Afghanistan recognize that in the end some political resolution will be required to bring this conflict to a close. This recognition has driven the Afghan government to begin to develop plans to reconcile insurgent leaders and reintegrate low-level fighters. In early April President Karzai presented his interim plans for reintegration. In May a Consultative Peace Jirga gave President Karzai conditional—a conditional mandate to move forward in this area.

The U.S. supports an Afghan-led process that seeks to bring back into society those who cease violence, break ties with Al Qaeda, and live under the Afghan constitution and all of its requirements.

Let me conclude by underscoring that our overall assessment is that we are heading in the right direction in Afghanistan. Of the 121 key terrain districts identified by ISAF in December of last year, 70 were assessed at that time to be sympathetic or neutral to the Afghan Government. By March of this year, that number had climbed to 73 districts. This and other indicators suggest that we are beginning to regain the initiative and the insurgency is beginning to lose momentum.

That said, the outcome is far from determined, and these are still early days for the administration's new strategy. It's only a matter of months since the President's announcement. When I briefed this committee in February, I said: "Inevitably, we will face setbacks, even as we achieve progress." None of what we are doing in Afghanistan involves quick fixes. These are long-term problems and their solutions will require patience, persistence, and flexibility. But we are making progress, sometimes slow, but we believe

steady. And we are confident that General McChrystal will be able to show more progress by the end of the year.

We greatly appreciate this committee's continued support for our efforts, from the OEF budget to our supplemental request. Particularly, we appreciate your support for full funding for the Afghan security forces, for coalition support funds, and for the Commanders' Emergency Response Program authority, which we believe is an absolutely critical tool in the counterinsurgency fight.

Thank you again for inviting us here today for this discussion and for your support, your continued support to the men and women who serve in uniform, and your support to enable progress in Afghanistan. Thank you and I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Flournoy follows:]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Secretary Flournoy.
General Petraeus.

**STATEMENT OF GEN DAVID H. PETRAEUS, U.S. ARMY,
COMMANDER, U.S. CENTRAL COMMAND**

General PETRAEUS. Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain, members of the committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide an update on the situation in Afghanistan and our execution of the comprehensive civil-military counterinsurgency campaign that is being conducted there. I note that it's a pleasure to do this with Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michèle Flournoy, who I might note was a contributor to the conference at Fort Leavenworth in January 2006 that launched the effort to develop and draft the Army and Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Manual.

I'll begin with some brief context. As you'll recall, soon after the 9-11 attacks an international coalition led by the United States conducted an impressive campaign to defeat the Taliban, Al Qaeda, and other associated extremist groups in Afghanistan. In the years that followed, however, members of the Taliban and other extremist elements gradually reconnected in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border regions and rebuilt the structures necessary to plan and execute insurgent operations.

In recent years, these groups have engaged in an increasingly violent campaign against the Afghan people, their government, and ISAF forces, and they have demonstrated symbiotic relationships, ambitions, and capabilities that pose threats not just to Afghanistan and the region, but to countries throughout the world.

In response to the threat posed by these extremists, ISAF forces and our Afghan partners are engaged in a campaign intended above all to prevent reestablishment of transnational extremist sanctuaries in Afghanistan like the ones Al Qaeda enjoyed there when the Taliban ruled Afghanistan prior to September 11.

To achieve our objectives, we are working with our ISAF and Afghan partners to wrest the initiative from the Taliban and other insurgent elements, to improve security for the Afghan people, to increase the quantity and quality of the Afghan National Security Forces, and to support establishment of Afghan governance that is seen as legitimate in the eyes of the people.

Over the past 18 months we and our ISAF partners have worked hard to get the inputs right in Afghanistan. We have worked to

build the organizations needed to carry out a comprehensive civil-military counterinsurgency campaign. We've put the best military and civilian leaders in charge of those organizations. We've refined and, where necessary, developed the plans and concepts needed to guide the conduct of a comprehensive effort. And we have developed the substantial—correction. We have deployed the substantial additional resources, military, civilian, funding, and so on, needed to implement the plans that have been developed.

I note here that the deployment of the 30,000 additional U.S. forces announced by President Obama last December and their equipment is slightly ahead of schedule. Nearly 21,000 of the additional 30,000 as of the latest numbers are now in Afghanistan, and by the end of August all the additional U.S. forces will be on the ground except for a headquarters that is not required until a month or so later.

Meanwhile, the efforts to increase the size and capability of the Afghan National Army and Police are also now on track, though there clearly is considerable work to be done in that critical area and to sustain the gains that have been made recently in recruiting and attrition.

Even as we continue the effort to complete getting the inputs right, the actions taken over the last 18 months, which include tripling the U.S. force contribution and increasing similarly the U.S. civilian component, have enabled the initiation of new efforts in key areas in Afghanistan. The initial main effort has of course been in the Central Helmand River Valley, and U.S. and U.K. forces have made progress there, though, predictably, the enemy has fought back as we have taken away important sanctuaries in Marjah, Nad-i-Ali, and elsewhere.

The focus is now shifting to Kandahar Province, where the effort features an integrated civil-military approach to security, governance, and development. In the months ahead we'll see an additional U.S. brigade from the great 101st Airborne Division deploy into the districts around Kandahar City together with an additional Afghan Army brigade. We'll see the introduction of additional Afghan police and U.S. military police to secure the city itself, along with other U.S. forces and civilians who will work together with the impressive Canadian provincial reconstruction team that has been operating in the city.

As you have heard General McChrystal explain, the concept is to provide the Kandaharis a rising tide of security, one that will expand over time and establish the foundation of improved security on which local Afghan governance can be built and that will enable improvements in the provision of basic services and other areas as well.

There will be nothing easy about any of this. Indeed, I noted several months ago during my annual posture hearing that the going was likely to get harder before it got easier. That has already been the case, as we have seen recently. But it is essential that we make progress in the critical southern part of the country, the part where in fact the 9-11 attacks were planned by Al Qaeda during the period when the Taliban controlled it and much of the rest of the country.

Central to achieving progress in Afghanistan and to setting the conditions necessary to transition security tasks from the international coalition to the Afghan government is increasing the size and capability of the ANSF. To that end, with the assistance of the Afghan Security Forces Fund, Afghan security forces are now on track to meet their targeted end strength objectives by the end of the year, as the Under Secretary explained.

In 2009 the ANSF numbered 156,000. Today there are over 231,000 ANSF members. To help achieve greater quality as well as greater quantity, General McChrystal has directed much greater partnering with the ANSF, an emphasis that is on display daily in operations throughout Afghanistan. Considerable progress has been made in getting the concepts right for developing the ANSF and also in developing the structures needed to implement those concepts.

Improving the ANSF has been facilitated considerably, for example, by the establishment last November of the NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan, the organization created to help the ANSF expand and professionalize. It's worth noting that the NTMA commander, Lieutenant General Bill Caldwell, assessed that in NTMA's first six months NATO and Afghan security leadership have made progress in reversing adverse trends in the growth and professionalization of the ANSF.

Nevertheless, as General Caldwell has also observed, there is much work remaining to reduce its attrition further and to develop effective leaders through considerably augmented partnering, training, education, and recruiting, and initiatives are being pursued in each of these areas.

In all of our efforts, we and President Karzai continue to emphasize the importance of inclusivity and transparency on the part of the Afghan government and its leadership, especially in linking nascent local governing structures to the decisionmaking and financial resources in Kabul.

Needless to say, innumerable challenges exist in all areas' governments and much more needs to be done to help the Afghan government assume full responsibility for addressing the concerns and needs of Afghan citizens. The National Consultative Peace Jirga held in Kabul earlier this month was a constructive step in this effort, providing an opportunity for President Karzai to build consensus, to address some of the political tensions that fuel the insurgency, and, appropriately, to promote reconciliation and local reintegration as means that can contribute to a political resolution of some of the issues that exist. The shura council that he conducted on Sunday in Kandahar furthered this process and the effort to set the political conditions for progress in Kandahar.

Another critically important part of our joint civil- military campaign in Afghanistan is promoting broad-based economic and infrastructure development. We've seen that improvements in the Afghan government's ability to deliver basic services, such as electricity, education, and basic health care, provide positive effects in other areas, including security and economic development. We've worked closely with the international community and the Afghan government to support robust strategies for these areas, again water, governance, energy, education, health, and road programs.

We're now embarking on a project jointly developed by the government of Afghan and various U.S. Government agencies to dramatically increase production of electricity for the Kandahar area and parts of southern and eastern Afghanistan. To complement this effort, we also promote agriculture and economic programs to help Afghans bring licit products to market rather than continuing to grow the poppy.

Again, none of this is easy or without considerable challenges. However, the mission is, as the members of this committee clearly recognize, hugely important to the security of the region and of our country. In view of that, we are obviously doing all that we can to achieve progress toward accomplishment of our important objectives in Afghanistan and we are seeing early progress as we get the inputs right in that country.

In closing, I want to thank the members of this committee once again for your unwavering support and abiding concern for the more than 215,000 troopers deployed throughout the CENTCOM area of responsibility, and for their families as well. Thank you very much.

[The prepared statement of General Petraeus follows:]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, General Petraeus.

I think we'll try a 7-minute first round. General, let me start with you relative to the issue which I raised about the Afghan Army not being adequately in the lead down in the south, where the major fighting is taking place and where it's going to take place in the months ahead. As I understand it, we have approximately 94,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan. About half of them are deployed in Helmand and Kandahar, down in the south. That's the main focus of our counterinsurgency effort.

How many Afghan troops are there currently in Kandahar and Helmand and about how many Afghan troops do we expect will be there in September?

General PETRAEUS. Mr. Chairman, I'll be happy to get that for you, for you for the record. If I could rather just provide the overview of what it is that we're trying to accomplish in that area, and you certainly touched on the importance of, obviously, getting the Afghans in the lead. We had a video teleconference with General McChrystal this morning, in fact, the normal weekly one that the Secretary does. The Chairman, Under Secretary Flournoy, and I participate in that. In that he described, for example, how he will use some of the elements of the additional brigade going into the Kandahar belts, the districts around Kandahar City, indeed to work with their Afghan partners, so that they can do what President Karzai also wants them to do, as he announced in the shura council on Sunday to the 4 or 500 or so local leaders there in discussing what is coming to Kandahar Province. That is that Afghan forces lead wherever that is possible.

Chairman LEVIN. What percentage of the time do you figure they're going to be in the lead in this Kandahar operation? Will it be most of the time? Will it be less than half the time? Roughly how often in these operations that are going to take place will it be Afghan troops in the lead? Can you give us some estimate?

General PETRAEUS. It will depend on which component it is, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Not the special forces. Other than the special forces.

General PETRAEUS. Well, with respect to the police, for example, the police are in the lead in Kandahar.

Chairman LEVIN. Other than the police. I'm talking about troops.

General PETRAEUS. And the Afghan National Civil Order Police will be in the lead. With partners, but not by any means full numbers, alongside them, they will be conducting the operations and they will be leading in those.

Chairman LEVIN. Just for the regular army kandaks, give us an idea? Do we expect that most of the time that the operations will be led by Afghan troops or not?

General PETRAEUS. I would think that the presence patrols, if you will, will be ones that are led by the Afghan forces, and that the more high end operations that require the integration of intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance systems, and so forth, that are an important component of this overall effort, would still be led by U.S. forces.

Chairman LEVIN. Okay. Now, the numbers that we have, the ISAF numbers, are that more than half of those Afghan battalions are capable of operating either independently or independently with coalition support. And even if you reduce that number down to 30 percent, which is what I think ISAF is going to be doing, there's a lot more kandaks or battalions of the Afghan Army that are able to operate independently than we are using down in the south.

Why are we not and why are the Afghans not moving more of their troops down to the south for this upcoming campaign?

General PETRAEUS. Well, first of all, they have moved more of their troops to the south, Mr. Chairman. Second, they are going to move more of their troops to the south. And third, there are other missions in Afghanistan that require Afghan troops.

Chairman LEVIN. Are they capable, General, of leading most of these operations where you call high end operations? Are there enough Afghan troops capable of leading those "high end operations"?

General PETRAEUS. The very high end operations, we have Afghan partners on those and we are developing. Now I'm talking the very high end operations.

Chairman LEVIN. I say leading.

General PETRAEUS. Not the very high end. Again, those are dependent on U.S. intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets that they don't have the ability to pull down, nor does virtually any other force in the world, for that matter.

What I think is probably more relevant would be more of the standard activities. The standard patrols I think they have the capability to do and are doing. They do secure large numbers of convoys of various movements, again the presence patrols, the framework activities, as it's termed. But when you get into the more challenging scenarios, certainly in the difficult operations in Marjah, U.S. forces ended up leading the bulk of those.

Chairman LEVIN. General, let me ask you whether or not you continue to support the strategy of the President which has the additional forces coming in, but, more specifically, do you continue to

support that July 2011 date for the start of reduction in U.S. forces from Afghanistan?

General PETRAEUS. I support the policy of the President, Mr. Chairman. As I have noted on a number of occasions, my sense of what the President was seeking to convey at West Point in December were two messages. One is a message of enormous additional commitment, again culminating in the more than tripling the number of U.S. forces, triple the number of civilians, substantial additional funds that you have authorized for the Afghan National Security Forces, etcetera, and also a message of urgency. The urgency was the July 2011 piece, noting that what happens in July 2011 is a beginning of a process for transition, that it's conditions-based, and the beginning of a "process of responsible drawdown of U.S. forces."

Chairman LEVIN. When you say that you continue to support the President's policy both in terms of the additional troops, but also the setting of that date to begin the reduction for the reasons that you just gave in terms of laying out the urgency for the Afghans to take responsibility, does that represent your best personal professional judgment?

General PETRAEUS. In a perfect world, Mr. Chairman, we have to be very careful with time lines. We went through this in Iraq, as you will recall, and I did set a time line ultimately in Iraq. In fact, testifying before this body in September 2007 I said we would start the drawdown of our surge forces in December, based on a projection of conditions that would be established.

We are assuming that we will have those kinds of conditions that will enable that by that time in July 2011. That's the projection and that is what again we have supported.

Chairman LEVIN. Do I take that to be a qualified yes, a qualified no, or just a non-answer?

General PETRAEUS. A qualified yes, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

Senator McCain.

General PETRAEUS. Again, I think—again, there was a nuance to what the President said that was very important, that did not imply a race for the exits, a search for the light to turn off, or anything like that. It did imply the need for greater urgency. And that target was—I think a number of targets that was aimed at. It included the leaders in Afghanistan. It undoubtedly included some of our partners around the world. It may have included some of us in uniform.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

Senator McCain.

Senator MCCAIN. Well, General, just to follow up here, there's a great deal of confusion about this. You just said that beginning withdrawal, and it would be conditions-based and contingent upon certain factors. And yet there's a recent book by Jonathan Alter that basically quotes—and it has quotes:

"Inside the Oval Office, Obama asked Petraeus: 'David, tell me now. I want you to be honest with me. You can do this in 18 months?'"

"Sir, I'm confident we can train and hand over to the ANA in that timeframe," Petraeus replied.

“Good, no problem,” the President said. “If you can’t do the things you say in 18 months, then no one is going to suggest we stay, right?”

“Yes, sir, in agreement.”

“Yes, sir,” Mullen.”

Then Mr. Alter goes on to say: “Obama was trying to turn the tables on the military, to box them in after they had spent most of the year boxing him in. If after 18 months the situation in Afghanistan had stabilized as he expected, then troops could begin to come home. If conditions didn’t stabilize enough to begin an orderly withdrawal of U.S. forces or if they deteriorated further, that would undermine the Pentagon’s belief in the effectiveness of more troops.”

And then at the end: “At the conclusion of an interview in his West Wing office”—referring to the Vice President—“Biden was adamant: ‘In July 2011, you’re going to see a whole lot of people moving out. Bet on it.’”

Now, I don’t know if that book is accurate. It has quotes in it. But honestly, General, there’s a disconnect between the comment that you just made in response to the chairman and what is being depicted here and the President’s repeated statements that in July of 2011 that we will begin withdrawal. This obviously sends a message to our enemies that we are leaving and our friends that we are leaving, and then there is accommodation in the region.

So I guess maybe could you clarify the difference between what you just said and what is quoted in the book that are direct quotes: “I am confident that we can train and hand over to the ANA in that timeframe.” “Good, no problem.” “If we can’t do the things you say you can in 18 months, then no one is going to suggest we stay, right?” That’s a quote from, apparently a direct quote from the President of the United States.

General PETRAEUS. Well, Senator, I’m not sure it’s productive to comment on conversations that took place in the Oval Office.

Senator MCCAIN. I understand that. I understand that.

General PETRAEUS. What I would come back to is what the President said at West Point, and that is something that I support, as I just told the chairman. That is that July 2011 is not the date where we race for the exits; it is the date where, having done an assessment, we begin a process of transition of tasks to Afghan security forces based on conditions and begin a process of a “responsible drawdown” of our forces.

Senator MCCAIN. Do you believe that we will begin a drawdown of forces in July 2011, given the situation as it exists today?

General PETRAEUS. Well, it’s not given as the situation exists today. Obviously, it is given as projections are for that time. And I do believe that that will be the case.

Senator MCCAIN. Do you believe we can begin a drawdown in July of 2011 under the projected plans that we have?

General PETRAEUS. That is the policy and I support it, Senator.

Senator MCCAIN. Well, I understand you support the policy. Will conditions on the ground indicate that we will begin a withdrawal, in the words of the Vice President, “July of 2011, you’re going to see a whole lot of people moving out. Bet on it.”

Well, do you agree with the comment of President Karzai's former intelligence chief that Karzai has lost confidence in the ability of the United States and NATO to succeed in Afghanistan, General?

General PETRAEUS. I do not, Senator. Again, as I mentioned earlier, in fact we just did a video teleconference, a weekly video teleconference with General McChrystal. He spent the bulk of Sunday with President Karzai in the process of conducting the shura council in Kandahar, going to and from with him as well, and in that process there was certainly no sense on General McChrystal's part, nor on those of the others who were with him, that there was a lack of confidence in the United States' commitment to Afghanistan.

As I mentioned earlier, the fact that we have more than tripled, will have more than tripled, our forces from January 2009 to the end of August 2010 is of enormous significance. The same with the civilian force structure, the same with the funding, and the same with others.

Senator MCCAIN. Well, let me reiterate my admiration and respect, General, for you and our military leaders in the task, in the difficulty of the task before them. I think you are one of America's great heroes.

But I continue to worry a great deal about the message we are sending in the region about whether we're actually going to stay or not and whether we're going to do what's necessary to succeed, rather than set an arbitrary time line. And the best way to—

[Pause.]

Chairman LEVIN. We're going to recess. We're going to recess now for a few moments. We'll recess until the call of the chair.

[Recess from 10:23 a.m. to 10:33 a.m.]

Chairman LEVIN. General Petraeus appears to be doing very well, and we will make a decision as to whether to proceed in, hopefully, a few minutes. He's eating. He probably didn't have enough water to drink coming in here this morning. But he appears to be doing very much better.

Again, we will make a decision hopefully in a few minutes as to whether we're going to proceed this morning or not.

Until then, we'll stand in recess.

[Recess from 10:34 a.m. to 10:50 a.m.]

[Applause.]

General PETRAEUS. Senator, my apologies.

Chairman LEVIN. Are you kidding?

General PETRAEUS. I got a little bit light-headed there. It wasn't Senator McCain's questions, I assure you.

[Laughter.]

Chairman LEVIN. I know, it was mine.

General PETRAEUS. No, it's just that—

Chairman LEVIN. Clear me too, would you, with the same breath, if you would? Just kidding.

At any rate—

General PETRAEUS. I just got dehydrated, sir.

Chairman LEVIN.—General, you've told us that you're more than ready to go.

General PETRAEUS. I am.

Chairman LEVIN. You always are. You're that kind of an incredible person.

I have consulted with colleagues and we're going to overrule you, and we're just not going to continue—

General PETRAEUS. Civilian control of the military action here?

Chairman LEVIN. Yes, proving it again, right

[Laughter.]

We just would feel better about it. We're going to try to continue tomorrow morning. We think at 9 o'clock is fine. But you look great, and we just would feel better.

Secretary Flournoy, I don't know if you've checked your schedule or not, but if you could also do that.

We thank both of you.

Senator MCCAIN. Mr. Chairman, could I just mention, I would finish the thought that I had when General Petraeus felt a little ill. You are one of America's greatest heroes and we're glad you're recovered and we look forward to seeing you again tomorrow.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

We all feel better. I know you feel better, but we all feel better doing it this way. So we will stand adjourned until tomorrow morning, tentatively at 9 o'clock.

[Applause.]

[Whereupon, at 10:52 a.m., the committee adjourned.]