

**Opening Statement of U.S. Senator Jack Reed
Ranking Member, Senate Armed Services Committee**

**Room SH-216
Hart Senate Office Building
Wednesday, February 11, 2015**

**To receive testimony on the situation in Afghanistan.
(As Prepared for Delivery)**

Ambassador Crocker, Ambassador Cunningham, Admiral Olson, and Mr. Leiter, welcome. This is an impressive panel of individuals who have served the country with distinction, and we thank you for that service.

And thank you, Chairman McCain, for holding this hearing on the situation in Afghanistan, ahead of tomorrow morning's hearing with General Campbell. The United States has devoted significant resources to the Afghanistan campaign, both in the sacrifices of our military and civilian officials and in America's financial resources. So it is important that we get this mission right, and this hearing is useful for advancing that goal.

Afghanistan has successfully come through national presidential elections and formed a new national unity government with the leadership of President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah. The hard-won gains of the past decade are significant, but remain fragile. According to recent public opinion surveys, a significant majority of the Afghan people feel their country is moving in the right direction. Compared to a decade ago, millions more students are in school, about 40 percent of which are girls; dozens of new universities are open; health clinics are available to much of the population and life expectancy is up; and women are participating in Afghanistan's civic and political life.

Afghan security forces have transitioned to having responsibility for securing Afghanistan, even as U.S. and coalition forces have drawn down and shifted to the more limited train-advise-and-assist mission and conducting counterterrorism operations. Success in Afghanistan will depend on a number of factors, including our partnership with the new government in Kabul; the willingness of that government to improve governance and fight corruption; the development of leadership within the Afghan security forces; and the political support of the American people for the mission in Afghanistan. I hope our witnesses will give us their recommendations for ensuring the success of that mission.

The President's fiscal year 2016 budget request includes funding for training Afghan forces and counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan. Yet, it remains to be seen whether conditions on the ground in Afghanistan will improve sufficiently by the end of 2016 to warrant the pace of further reductions under the current plan. During his nomination hearing, General Campbell assured this committee that, if confirmed, he would provide his best military advice on the requirements of the mission in Afghanistan. To the extent our witnesses are in a position to comment on the current conditions in Afghanistan or the mission requirements going forward, we would welcome your views.

Again, I thank the witnesses and look forward to your testimony.