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Statement of
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Senate Armed Services Committee
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Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain, distinguished members of this committee, thank you for the chance to appear before you today.

I welcome this opportunity to testify on our way ahead in Afghanistan, and I am pleased to do so with Ambassador Karl Eikenberry, an old friend.

Let me begin by saluting the bravery of the men and women of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. They are anchored by over 68,000 courageous Americans, our close partners in the NATO alliance, and a 43-nation coalition. We honor the sacrifices of the fallen, the veterans, and their families.

We also recognize the toll paid every day by our counterparts in the Afghan Security Forces and by Afghan civilians, who ultimately suffer the most from this insurgency. It is for them -- and for all of us -- that we seek a stable Afghanistan, a defunct al-Qaeda, and a secure future in that vital region of the world.

I first deployed to Afghanistan in 2002 and have commanded forces there every year since.

Despite that experience, there is much in Afghanistan that I have yet to fully understand. For all of us, Afghanistan is a challenge that is best approached with a balance of determination and humility.

While U.S. forces have been at war in Afghanistan for eight years, the Afghans have been at it for more than 30. They are frustrated with international efforts that have failed to meet their expectations, confronting us with a crisis of confidence among Afghans who view the international effort as insufficient and their government as corrupt or, at the very least, inconsequential.

We also face a complex and resilient insurgency. The Quetta Shura Taliban, or Afghan Taliban, is the prominent threat to the Government of Afghanistan, as they aspire to once again *become*

the government of Afghanistan. The Haqqani and Hezb-e Islami Gulbuddin insurgent groups have more limited geographical reach and objectives, but they are no less lethal.

All three groups are supported to some degree by external elements in Iran and Pakistan, have ties with al-Qaeda, and co-exist within narcotics and criminal networks, both fueling and feeding off instability and insecurity in the region.

The mission in Afghanistan is undeniably difficult, and success will require steadfast commitment and incur significant costs.

I participated fully in the President's Assessment and decision-making process and was afforded multiple opportunities to provide my recommendations and best military advice – which I did.

Combined with insights and policy considerations from across our Government, I believe the decisions that came from that process reflect a realistic and effective approach.

To pursue our core goal of defeating al-Qaeda and preventing their return to Afghanistan, we must disrupt and degrade the Taliban's capacity, deny their access to the Afghan population, and strengthen the Afghan Security Forces.

This means we must reverse the Taliban's current momentum and create the time and space to develop Afghan security and governance capacity.

The President's decision rapidly resources our strategy, recognizes that the next 18 months will likely be decisive, and ultimately, enables success. I fully support the President's decision.

The President has also reiterated how this decision supports our national interests. Rolling back the Taliban is a pre-requisite to the ultimate defeat of al-Qaeda.

The mission is not only important; it is also achievable.

We can and will accomplish this mission.

Let me briefly explain why I believe so.

My confidence derives first from the Afghan's resolve, since it is their actions that will ultimately matter most in ending this conflict, with their interests – and by extension our own -- secured.

Second, we do not confront a popular insurgency. The Taliban have no wide-spread constituency, have a history of failure in power, and lack an appealing vision.

Third, where our strategy is applied we've begun to show that we can help the Afghans establish more effective security and more credible governance.

Finally, Afghans do not regard us as occupiers. They do not wish for us to remain forever, yet they see our support as a necessary bridge to future security and stability.

I've been back in Afghanistan for six months now. I believe that with the President's decision and ongoing reforms I outlined in our Initial Assessment, our efforts are now empowered with a greater sense of clarity, capability, commitment, and confidence.

Let me start with clarity.

The President's recently completed review of our strategy – to include its deep and pointed questioning of all assumptions and recommendations – has produced greater clarity of our mission and objectives.

We also have greater clarity on the way forward.

Additional forces will begin to deploy shortly, and by this time next year, new security gains will be illuminated by specific indicators, and it will be clear to *us* that the insurgency has lost the momentum.

And by the summer of 2011, it will be clear to the *Afghan people* that the insurgency will not win, giving them the chance to side with their government.

From that point forward, while we begin to reduce U.S. combat force levels, we will remain partnered with the Afghan security forces in a supporting role to consolidate and solidify their gains.

Results may come more quickly, and we must demonstrate progress toward measurable objectives, but the sober fact is that there are no silver bullets. Ultimate success will be the cumulative effect of sustained pressure across multiple lines of operation.

Increasing our capability has been about much more than just troop increases. For the past six months we have been implementing organizational and operational changes that are already reflecting improvements in our effectiveness.

But the additional forces announced by President Obama are significant. Forces to increase our capacity to train ANSF, and forces to partner with Afghan Army and Police in expanding security zones in key areas, will provide us the ability to reverse insurgent momentum and deny the Taliban the access to the population they require to survive.

Our commitment is watched intently – and constantly judged – by our allies and by our enemies.

The commitment of 30,000 additional US forces, along with additional coalition forces and growing ANSF numbers, will be a significant step toward expanding security in critical areas – and in demonstrating resolve.

The commitment of all coalition nations will be buttressed by a clear understanding of how we will mitigate risks. I'll briefly mention three.

The first is the Afghan government's credibility deficit, which must be recognized by all, to include Afghan officials, as a critical area of focus and change.

Equally important is our ability to accelerate development of the Afghan security forces. Measures such as increased pay and incentives, literacy training, leader development, and expanded partnering are necessary to position the ANSF to assume responsibility for long-term security.

Third, the hazard posed by extremists that operate on both sides of the border with Pakistan, with freedom of movement across that border, must be mitigated by enhanced cross-border coordination and enhanced Pakistani engagement.

Looking ahead, I am confident that we have both the right strategy and the right resources.

Every trip around Afghanistan reinforces my confidence in the Coalition and Afghan forces we stand alongside in this effort.

But I also find confidence in those we are trying to help.

That confidence is found where an Afghan farmer chooses to harvest wheat rather than poppy . . . or where a young adult casts his or her vote or joins the police . . . or where a group of villagers resolves to reject the local insurgency.

We face many challenges in Afghanistan, but our efforts are sustained by one unassailable reality: neither the Afghan people nor the international community want Afghanistan to remain a sanctuary for terror and violence.

And if we are to be confident of our mission and our prospects, we must also be accurate in our assessment of progress. We owe ourselves, our leaders, and the American people transparency and candor, because the price to be paid is high, and the stakes are even higher.

In closing, my team and I would like to thank you and your colleagues for your support to the American men and women currently serving in Afghanistan – and to tell you a bit about them.

We risk letting numbers like 30K roll off our tongues without remembering that those are fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters – serving far from home – selfless in their sacrifices for each of us.

The other day I asked a young, but combat experienced Sergeant where he was on 9/11 and his answer -- “getting my braces removed” -- reminded me that it has been more than 8 years since 9/11.

And many of our service members and families have experienced and sacrificed much.

But as I see them in action - at remote bases; on patrol; partnering with Afghan forces; recovering in combat hospitals – they don’t talk about all they’ve given up. They talk about all they are accomplishing – and their determination in this endeavor.

This is not a force of rookies or dilettantes. The Brigade Commander in Khowst is completing his 4th combat tour in Afghanistan – and his experience and expertise is reflective of the force that represents you. All have felt fear and loneliness – most have lost comrades. None have lost heart.

In their eyes I see maturity beyond their years. In their actions I see a commitment to succeed – and commitment to each other.

I am confident that I share your pride in what these great Americans are doing for our country in Afghanistan.

And it will be my privilege to accept your questions on their behalf.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.