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THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF

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FOR POLICY

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Chairman Levin, Ranking Member McCain, and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today on a matter of vital importance to the United States: the present status and future course of our military engagement in Afghanistan.

I welcome the opportunity to discuss both the progress we are making and the challenges that we face. I am especially pleased to be here with the outstanding Commander of the International Security Assistance Force, and of U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, General John Allen.

The United States' objectives in Afghanistan remains to deny safe havens to al-Qaida, and to deny the Taliban the ability to overthrow the Afghan government.

This administration is firmly committed to meeting these core objectives in Afghanistan. And in the past several years – due to the dedication and sacrifice of our forces, our Coalition partners, and the Afghan people – we have made enormous strides.

- Our counter-terrorism efforts against al-Qaida have been extremely successful. Although the job is not finished, we have severely degraded al-Qaida's capacity.
- As a result of the surge launched in 2009, we have broken and reversed Taliban momentum.
- The ANSF are increasingly capable, and increasingly in the lead. We have begun the transition to Afghan security responsibility, which is to be completed by December 2014.

The Afghanistan war has been a tough fight. And the last several weeks have been particularly tough. We have seen some in the United States, and indeed some in Afghanistan, question whether we are on the right path. We will have to work through the difficulties, and talk through the issues, as President Obama and Secretary Panetta did last week with President Karzai.

Members of the committee, our forces are performing extremely well, as I've seen firsthand during a week-long trip to Afghanistan that finished less than two weeks ago. U.S., Coalition, and Afghan forces are working *shohna ba shohna*, or "shoulder to shoulder," reversing the Taliban's momentum and building the capacity of the ANSF.

As a result of these shared efforts, we are well into a process of transition to ANSF leadership, as agreed at the 2010 NATO Lisbon Summit. In fact, today, approximately fifty percent of Afghans live in areas that have begun the transition process.

As an interim milestone, at some point in 2013, the ANSF will be in the lead for providing security across Afghanistan. U.S. and Coalition forces will be in a support role. This support will take a number of forms, including U.S. and Coalition units partnering with Afghan units, and the smaller footprint associated with a “train, advise, and assist” role.

By the end of 2014, the transition of security leadership will be complete, and Afghans will be fully responsible for the security of Afghanistan. U.S. and Coalition forces will have moved to a much smaller presence focused on counterterrorism, and on training, advising, and assisting Afghan forces. Of course, remaining U.S. forces will be fully combat-capable.

Despite continued progress on transition and in the overall campaign, some recent incidents have tested the relationships that we have worked so hard to build over the past decade with the government and people of Afghanistan.

The inappropriate handling of Qurans at Bagram Airbase was an error that – while unintentional – sent precisely the wrong signal. This unfortunate act stands in stark contrast to the many years during which U.S. forces have demonstrated deep respect for the religious practices of the Afghan people.

Even more recently, our nations have had to respond to the horrific killings of sixteen Afghan civilians, including nine children, in Panjwai District, Kandahar. The Department of Defense is conducting a full investigation of this senseless act of violence. A suspect is now in custody at the Joint Regional Confinement Facility – Midwest at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Justice will be done, and any responsible will be held appropriately accountable.

We have also been challenged by attacks by Afghan personnel against their U.S. and Coalition partners, so-called “Green on Blue” attacks. These include the shooting of two American

officers at the Interior Ministry in Kabul on February 25, allegedly by an Afghan police officer. With the help of U.S. and Coalition forces, the Afghans are working to improve security and counter-intelligence in order to prevent such attacks. General Allen has also directed a number of steps to improve force protection.

Working shoulder-to-shoulder with our Afghan partners is essential to our mission success. What's more, our experience to date also suggests that sustaining close relationships with the ANSF may reduce the likelihood of these horrible and unacceptable "Green on Blue" attacks.

It is critical that the tragic occurrences of the last few weeks not blind us to the very significant progress and real momentum we have seen in Afghanistan. From 2010 to 2011, enemy-initiated attacks were down nine percent across Afghanistan. This trend has continued in 2012. For January and February of this year, enemy-initiated attacks are down 22 percent from the comparable period in 2011.

Our surge forces, in Regional Command South and Regional Command Southwest, have made tremendous progress. Previous battlegrounds, such as Sangin and Marjah, are now policed by Afghans. By the end of this September, the final U.S. "surge" forces will return home, and U.S. forces will be reduced from a peak of 101,000, to 68,000.

While the surge of U.S. forces has played a major role in improving the security situation, improvements to the quantity and quality of the Afghan National Security Forces have been critically important.

Building an effective ANSF is crucial to success in Afghanistan, and we are making good progress. To get a sense of how far we have come in the last several years, in October 2008, there were only 140,000 Afghans in the ANSF. Today, there are approximately 330,000 – nearly two-and-a-half times as many. We are nearing our October 2012 goal of 352,000 Afghan soldiers and national police in uniform – and we expect to reach that goal well before October.

The quality of the ANSF is vitally important. And while there is much more work ahead, we are seeing some good signs. For example, Afghan National Army (ANA) attrition rates have improved from over three percent per month to less than two percent, although they are still short of the goal of no more than 1.4 percent per month. The Afghan National Police (ANP) has done better than its target attrition rate of no more than 1.4 percent for the last several months.

We are seeing the results of this improvement where it counts most – on the ground. Afghan forces continue to take charge and lead operations to secure their country. Almost 90 percent of Coalition operations in Afghanistan are now carried out in partnership with the ANSF. And the ANSF is the lead for more than 40 percent of operations. These figures will continue to grow.

Afghan troops gave their lives protecting Americans on numerous occasions during the recent protests. The performance of the Afghan forces under this enormous stress is a clear indicator of how far the ANSF have come.

As we transition to Afghan lead on security, we are also working to conclude a Strategic Partnership that will provide a long-term framework for the enduring relationship we hope to achieve beyond the completion of transition at the end of 2014. Concluding a U.S.-Afghanistan Strategic Partnership will send a clear signal to the Afghan people, to the Taliban, and to the region that the United States remains committed to Afghan security and to regional peace and stability. As President Obama said here at the Capitol in his State of the Union address in January, “[W]e will build an enduring partnership with Afghanistan, so that it is never again a source of attacks against America.”

This Strategic Partnership will reinforce the sovereignty of Afghanistan and address our shared national security concerns. Completing and implementing this Strategic Partnership will avoid the mistake of 1989, when our abrupt departure left our friends confused and our enemies emboldened.

In partnership with President Karzai and the Afghan government, we recently completed a crucial milestone in our transition to Afghan lead, when General Allen co-signed a memorandum

of understanding on detention operations with Afghan Defense Minister Wardak. Under this memorandum of understanding, both countries will work to transfer detention facilities in Afghanistan to Afghan control over the next six months, under guidelines designed to ensure an orderly and secure handoff of responsibility.

We are also working with the Afghans on a memorandum of understanding on “special operations,” which when completed will further reinforce Afghan sovereignty and strengthen the partnership between our two nations.

The importance of a long-term commitment extends to Coalition partners. At the NATO Summit in Lisbon in 2010, the United States, our allies and partners, and Afghanistan agreed to support an Afghan-led transition process. At the upcoming NATO summit in Chicago, we will discuss the next phase of transition, including shifting from primarily a combat to a support role in 2013, in advance of Afghans taking full responsibility for their own security in 2014.

As a part of NATO Summit transition discussions in Chicago, leaders will also discuss how we can support sustainable and sufficient Afghan National Security Forces for Afghanistan’s future, and how we can further strengthen the NATO-Afghanistan partnership beyond 2014. As NATO Secretary General Rasmussen put it in December 2011, “[O]ur commitment does not end with transition... We will finish the job to help create a secure Afghanistan – for our shared security.”

Achieving long-term stability in Afghanistan will require some form of reconciliation among Afghans. This is why the administration – with eyes wide open – supports responsible efforts toward a political settlement to the Afghan conflict. I would like to thank Ambassador Grossman for all of his hard work to help open the door, so that Afghans can talk to Afghans about the future of their country. As Secretary Clinton has said, the necessary outcomes of any negotiation are that insurgents must: (1) renounce violence; (2) break all ties with al-Qaida; and (3) abide by the constitution of Afghanistan, especially the guarantees for the rights of women and minorities.

Achievable, sustainable success in Afghanistan will depend on the participation and support of Afghanistan's neighbors, especially Pakistan. Like Afghanistan's other neighbors, Pakistan has legitimate interests that should be understood and addressed. But Pakistan also has responsibilities, including respecting Afghan sovereignty and working with the Afghan government to foster regional stability. Most importantly, Pakistan needs to take decisive steps to ensure that militant and extremist groups cannot continue to find safe haven in, or conduct attacks from, Pakistan's territory.

Members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify here today with General Allen. This has been a long and difficult war. We embarked on this fight a decade ago to ensure that the terrorist networks that struck in New York; in Washington, DC; and in the skies over Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001 would never again be able to use Afghanistan as their sanctuary and training ground.

Thanks to the great courage and skill of the U.S. Armed Forces and civilian personnel, our Coalition partners, and our Afghan partners, our strategy is working. While success in war is never guaranteed, we are on a path to meet our objectives to deny safe haven to al-Qaida, and to deny the Taliban the ability to overthrow the Afghan government.

We are moving intelligently and purposefully toward the day, in the near future, when Afghans once again are in full control of their own security, and able to define their own national destiny as a peaceful, stable member of the community of nations.

I would like to conclude by thanking the Committee for your strong continued support of our effort in Afghanistan, and of the great men and women of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.

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