

HEARING TO RECEIVE TESTIMONY ON THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 12, 2014

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

The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:06 a.m. in room SH-216, Hart Senate Office Building, Senator Carl Levin (chairman) presiding.

Committee members present: Senators Levin, Reed, Nelson, Manchin, Shaheen, Donnelly, Kaine, Inhofe, McCain, Chambliss, Wicker, Ayotte, Fischer, Graham, Vitter, and Lee.

Committee staff members present: Peter K. Levine, staff director; and Leah C. Brewer, nominations and hearings clerk.

Majority staff members present: Jason W. Maroney, counsel; Mariah K. McNamara, special assistant to the staff director; and William G.P. Monahan, counsel.

Minority staff members present: John A. Bonsell, minority staff director; Daniel C. Adams, minority associate counsel; Thomas W. Goffus, professional staff member; Anthony J. Lazarski, professional staff member; and Natalie M. Nicolas, minority research assistant.

Staff assistants present: Daniel J. Harder, Brendan J. Sawyer, and Robert T. Waisanen.

Committee members' assistants present: Carolyn Chuhta, assistant to Senator Reed; David J. LaPorte, assistant to Senator Manchin; Karen Courington, assistant to Senator Kaine; Paul C. Hutton IV, assistant to Senator McCain; Joseph G. Lai, assistant to Senator Wicker; and Bradley L. Bowman, assistant to Senator Ayotte.

OPENING STATEMENT OF SENATOR CARL LEVIN, CHAIRMAN

Chairman LEVIN. Good morning, everybody. We welcome today General Joseph Dunford, Commander of the International Security Assistance Force and U.S. Forces in Afghanistan, to hear testimony on the security situation in Afghanistan. We thank you, General Dunford, for your decades of great service to our Nation.

This committee has held regular hearings on Afghanistan over the years. More than 2,200 Americans have given their lives there and thousands more have been wounded. Despite those sacrifices and despite the fact that Afghanistan harbored the terrorists who attacked our Nation in 2001, a recent Gallop poll showed that for the first time a plurality of Americans believe that sending our forces to Afghanistan was a mistake.

I do not share that view. More importantly, neither do the Afghan people. A recent public opinion poll in Afghanistan shows that a large majority of Afghans believe the conditions in the country have improved over the last decade.

Our troops in Afghanistan, working with Afghan forces and the forces of other coalition countries, have taken critical steps to deny safe havens to terrorists and to ensure that Afghanistan does not again serve as a sanctuary for terrorists seeking to harm the United States. Indeed, there are a number of encouraging signs of continued progress in Afghanistan. During last summer's fighting season, Afghan forces prevented, prevented the Taliban from seizing control of any urban center or district center. A report this month by the independent Center for Naval Analyses concluded that, quote, "For a force that is very much still in its infancy, the Afghan Security Forces's performance last year, judged on its own merits, should be considered a success." And in a poll released last month, large majorities of the Afghan people expressed confidence in their army and their national police.

Better security has meant improvements in Afghan society and the economy as well. More than 8 million Afghan children are now in school, eight times as many as in 2001. Under the Taliban, virtually no Afghan girls received an education. Now 2.6 million girls are in school. In 2001, Afghanistan had 20,000 teachers, all male. Today there are 200,000 teachers, including 62,000 women. U.S. assistance has helped build or refurbish nearly 700 schools across Afghanistan. Maternal and infant mortality has declined dramatically. The average Afghan has a life expectancy now of 62 years, compared to 45 under the Taliban. Only 7 percent of Afghans support a Taliban return to power.

Now, how is it that a large majority of the Afghan people think that conditions in Afghanistan are improving when most Americans do not? Unfortunately, the American people rarely read about positive developments in Afghanistan. Instead, the media focuses almost exclusively on negative incidents, depriving the American people of the sense of accomplishment that they would receive if they were provided a balanced view. And as a result our troops have not received the recognition for the positive changes in Afghanistan for which they and their families have sacrificed so much.

The positive developments are not the whole story, of course. Real and daunting challenges lie ahead. Taliban terror attacks will continue and will be the focus of the media. The improving Afghan military has proven its willingness to fight, but is still in the early stages of building the support functions, such as logistics and maintenance and intelligence and air power, that are necessary for combat troops to do their jobs effectively.

A bilateral security agreement providing for protections for our troops is essential if even a modest number of our forces are to remain in Afghanistan. President Karzai has refused to sign a bilateral security agreement that he negotiated and that received the strong support of the loya jirga that he convened. President Obama has rightly decided to look beyond President Karzai to the next Afghan president following elections in early April. Each of the Afghan presidential candidates has indicated a willingness to sign

the bilateral security agreement and any of them would likely be a more reliable partner than President Karzai.

Much continues to be at stake for our National security, for the security of our friends and allies around the world, for regional stability, and of course for the Afghan people. A recent letter by Afghan parliamentarian Fawzia Koofi highlighted the extraordinary changes of the past decade, particularly for Afghan women like herself. She points out that 12 years ago Afghan women's participation in public life was prohibited and the prohibition was enforced through harassment and abuse. Ms. Koofi was nearly abandoned at birth simply because in the Afghanistan of that time a female child had no future.

In the post-Taliban Afghanistan, she became a senior leader of the Afghan parliament. Ms. Koofi wrote, quote: "It has been a difficult journey, marked by blood and violence, but we have made significant gains and achievements, which would not have been possible without the generous support of the international community, especially the American people."

The Taliban have announced their intention to disrupt the April 5 election. They won't succeed. The Afghan people will stand up to their threats. They do it every day. Only if President Karzai and the Afghan government permit or perpetuate fraud—perpetrate fraud, permit or perpetrate fraud, will the election fail to be credible.

All in all, we mustn't lose sight of our accomplishments in Afghanistan or we will risk losing them. And if we don't maintain a moderate level of support in the years ahead, we will also risk losing the gains that have been made at such high cost.

Senator Inhofe.

STATEMENT OF SENATOR JAMES M. INHOFE

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I was in Afghanistan in February and I observed the same thing that you did, so I won't list those things that the public just doesn't know about. There's one thing I would mention that was on my list that wasn't on yours, and that is in going through the Kabul Airport there was not one empty gate. That's usually an indication. You can see what's happening.

Well, there's a lot at stake right now. We can't repeat the mistakes of the administration in Iraq, where the abrupt drawdown resulted in a deteriorating security situation, an increase in violence, the resurgence of the al Qaeda-linked groups, and the growth of terrorists. We must ensure that decisions about the future of our mission in Afghanistan after 2014 are based on sound strategy and the facts on the ground. To do that, we must trust our military commanders on the ground, who have told me two things just a month ago: One, the ANSF has made great progress and is now bearing the overwhelming majority of the brunt of fighting against the Taliban; and two, we need to continue to support the development of the ANSF, especially in the critical areas of developing enablers and fighting terrorists.

In Afghanistan, President Karzai's refusal to sign the BSA despite support by the Afghan people has cast a doubt about the future of the Afghanistan security and stability. But Karzai's irre-

sponsibility in signing the BSA doesn't really matter. The will of the people, including through the explicit endorsement by the elders and the tribesmen and the loya jirga, make it clear that the next President will sign this. So we'll tough this one out until that takes place.

I really appreciate, General, the personal time you've spent with all of us to give us the information on what's really going on there. I only wish, as I told you yesterday, that the public were aware of what we're aware of.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you so much, Senator Inhofe.

General Dunford.

STATEMENT OF GEN. JOSEPH F. DUNFORD, JR., USMC, COMMANDER, INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE FORCE

General DUNFORD. Good morning, Chairman Levin, Ranking Member Inhofe, distinguished members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify this morning and to represent the men and women of U.S. Forces Afghanistan. Their courage, commitment, and performance are a direct reflection of your support and I'm confident that no force has ever deployed better trained or equipped.

We are now in the final year of the combat mission in Afghanistan, a mission to deny safe haven to al Qaeda terrorists who attacked our Nation on September 11. We recognize that our vital national interests are best served by a stable, secure, and unified Afghanistan, an Afghanistan that is a capable and willing partner in the war against terrorism.

We've accomplished much in pursuit of those ends. Since September 11 our forces have placed extraordinary pressure on al Qaeda and extremist networks in Afghanistan. Today, as a result of those efforts al Qaeda terrorists are focused on survival rather than on planning attacks against the West. Since September 11 and with increased emphasis beginning in 2009, we've focused on developing Afghan National Security Forces. Today, as a result of those efforts, capable and confident Afghan forces are securing the Afghan people and the gains that we have made over the past decade.

Since September 11 we've worked to improve the daily lives of the Afghan people. Today, as a result of those efforts, as the chairman outlined and the ranking member, Afghans have increased access to clean water, electricity, new roads, and education. But more important than any sign of progress in Afghanistan, the Afghan people have something today that they did not have in 2001. They have hope for the future.

We've paid the price for those achievements. The chairman mentioned the over 2,200 Americans that have been lost and thousands more Afghans and members of the coalition have also made the ultimate sacrifice. We vow to give their sacrifice meaning and never to forget them or their families.

Some people have questioned our progress and pointed out that the overall security situation in Afghanistan didn't really change between 2012 and 2013. That's true, and when put in perspective it's also extraordinary, because security remained roughly the same

with the Afghans assuming the lead and with over 50 percent of the coalition redeploying during that period of time.

After watching the Afghan forces respond to a variety of challenges since they took the lead in June, I don't believe the Taliban insurgency represents an existential threat to the government of Afghanistan or to the Afghan security forces. I'm also confident that they can secure the upcoming presidential election and the Nation's first democratic transfer of power.

Yet, to make our progress enduring work remains to build long-term sustainability of the Afghan forces. Although the Afghans require less support in conducting security operations, they still need assistance in maturing the systems, the processes, and the institutions necessary to sustain a modern army and police force. They also need continued support in addressing capability gaps in aviation, intelligence, and special operations. To address these gaps, a train, advise, and assist mission will be necessary after this year to further develop Afghan self-sustainability.

A continued counterterrorism mission will also be needed to ensure that al Qaeda remains focused on survival and not on regeneration. Without continued counterterrorism pressure, an emboldened al Qaeda will not only begin to physically reconstitute, but they'll also exploit their perceived victory to boost recruitment, fundraising, and morale.

In closing, it's fair to ask if we're winning in Afghanistan. I believe the answer is yes and several facts allow me to say that with confidence. First and foremost, our efforts in Afghanistan have pressured the terrorist network and have prevented another September 11.

Second, we have built Afghan security forces that, with increasingly reduced levels of support, are capable of providing security and denying terrorists safe haven.

Third, we're providing a stabilizing influence in the region that's providing the time and space for a wide range of complex issues to be addressed.

And finally, as a result of our efforts the Afghan people face a decade of opportunity within which they can determine their own future, free of the brutality and the intolerance of the Taliban. Despite all the skepticism surrounding our mission, that looks like winning to me.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear this morning. I look forward to your questions.

[The prepared statement of General Dunford follows:]

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much for your testimony and again for your service, and for all those with whom you work.

We have I think six votes scheduled at 10:30. We have asked if they can be delayed. Another committee is in the same situation. We don't know that that will be the case. So what we'll do is we'll have a six-minute first round to get as many of us in as possible before the vote. But there will still be many of us who will have to work around these votes, as we did I believe yesterday or the day before yesterday, and we did it very successfully. So we'll all do the best we can. But let's start with six minutes.

General, what is the latest date that we can wait in order to find out if there's going to be a bilateral security agreement, in other

words the date that we must actually begin to implement a total withdrawal if there's going to be no BSA?

General DUNFORD. Chairman, I'll address that first from just the military perspective. Whether there would be a withdrawal at the end of 2014 or whether we would maintain a mission across Afghanistan in a regional approach at the end of 2014, I wouldn't do anything different between now and July. We've stabilized the force to support the elections in April and we have plenty of flexibility to be able to adjust to either eventuality in July.

Beginning in July, I think we have manageable risks during the months of July and August, and then I would assess the risk of an orderly withdrawal begins to be high in September, and that's simply a function of the tasks that have to be accomplished and how many days it needs to accomplish those tasks.

But I would quickly add that what concerns me most about the delay in the BSA is not the physics of the retrograde or the redeployment of forces. It's the uncertainty that exists inside of Afghanistan with the Afghan people, the uncertainty with the Afghan forces, the hedging behavior that we see in the region, and as importantly and I think something we need to be very attentive to in the coming months, the coalition cohesion and ensuring that at the end of these several months of uncertainty we still have a coalition going into 2015.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

General Dunford, I understand you've presented a range of options to the White House for the size of a post-2014 military presence of our forces as part of a coalition to train and advise and assist the Afghans. Can you give us, tell us what range of U.S. troops that you would be comfortable with for a post-2014 military presence?

General DUNFORD. Chairman, for over a year we've used the guidance that we received at the defense ministerial in NATO in February of 2013 as our primary planning guidance. That guidance called for a force of 8 to 12,000 NATO forces to provide train, advise, assist at the Afghan corps level. I'm comfortable with that range and our ability to accomplish the train and advise mission with that allocation of forces. Then over and above that, we have always assumed on the U.S. side that there would be additional thousands of forces to conduct counterterrorism operations.

Chairman LEVIN. And you're talking about an additional few thousand, is that correct?

General DUNFORD. That's correct, chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. And two-thirds of the 8 to 12,000 NATO range, two-thirds of them would be U.S. forces?

General DUNFORD. As a general rule, chairman, we have provided two-thirds of the NATO force.

Chairman LEVIN. Can you—you've already characterized the performance of the Afghan security forces in 2013. Can you give us your overall assessment? You said that they were able to maintain the security that had been present in the previous summer when we were mainly in control and they did that, although they were now in control in 2013. Would you say that that control was successful? How would you give a general military characterization?

General DUNFORD. Chairman, I'd start with the summer itself. The Taliban came out in the spring and articulated their objectives for the spring, and we can say at the end of the summer that the Taliban were unsuccessful in accomplishing their objectives as a result of the performance of the Afghan security forces.

But there's been a couple of recent events I think that really highlight the ability of the Afghan forces and the progress that they have made over the last few years. The loya jirga that was conducted in November is a good example, where thousands of people met in Kabul from around the country. The city was locked down. The event was conducted without a single security incident, and we know that the Taliban and the Haqqani network in particular had every intent of disrupting that particular event.

Just last week, there was an event in Ghasni Province with over 6,000 people celebrating the Islamic festival. People from throughout the region came. The Afghan forces coordinated their efforts. The ministry of interior and the ministry of defense conducted that event as well without a security incident as well. We also know from the intelligence that the enemy had every intent of disrupting that event.

What we have seen increasingly is Afghan forces that are capable of assuming the lead. We no longer, chairman, conduct any unilateral operations except for our own security, our own sustainment, and retrograde. All other operations in Afghanistan are conducted by Afghan security forces.

But I would say that the most significant thing that I've seen since I've been there is the sense of responsibility and accountability of Afghan leaders, and also the pride and the confidence that the people of Afghan have in their Afghan security force, and I think that's been one of the biggest second order effects as a result of the transition that took place last June.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you.

A recent independent study by the Center for Naval Analysis concluded the following about the size of the Afghan security forces that would be needed, and their assessment is that, based on the likely security conditions after 2014 in Afghanistan, that the security forces should be maintained near their current size of around 374,000—that includes army, national police, and the Afghan local police—at least through 2018. Do you agree with that assessment?

General DUNFORD. Chairman, I do, and that Center for Naval Analysis study is consistent with some work that we've done over the last 2 or 3 years with the Center of Army Analysis and also our own internal assessments.

Chairman LEVIN. Well, I do, too, and I think it is really important that we provide that support. It's different from what was decided on at NATO a year or 2 ago. It's higher. But your testimony on that I think will help us to maintain a force of that size.

Senator Inhofe.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General Dunford, in my office yesterday we talked about or you talked about the difference between transition and withdrawal. Would you like to share that with us?

General DUNFORD. Senator Inhofe, we're in the process now of transitioning to Afghan security forces assuming full responsibility

for security at the end of 2014. In my mind that gives us the best prospects for success and allows us to achieve the ends that we outlined some years ago and which are articulated in my opening statement.

A transition to me means finishing the job of allowing the Afghan forces to assume responsibility and supporting the political transition that will begin in earnest with the elections this April and obviously continue to the parliamentary elections in 2015. A withdrawal in my mind means abandoning the people of Afghanistan, abandoning the endeavor that we've been on for the last decade, and then providing al Qaeda the space within which to begin again to plan and conduct operations against the West.

Senator INHOFE. Would it be very similar then as the Iraq situation?

General DUNFORD. I think that's fair to say, Senator.

Senator INHOFE. You know, one of the difficult things that's so intangible is when we talk about what would have happened if we hadn't done what we've done. I'm thinking a lot of the times NSA information will be directly linked to something that was planned in this country, like the New York City subway stuff and the jet storage field. We can identify that. This—and you and I talked about this. Just from a military perspective, from your observation would you say that we could have—our actions could have prevented another September 11 type of attack on this country?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I don't think there's any doubt that al Qaeda has an intent to once again attack the West and to use the Afghan-Pakistan region from which to make that attack. I also don't think there's any doubt that the pressure that we have had on the network over the past 10 years in particular has prevented them from doing that.

Senator INHOFE. And I believe that, but a lot of the people don't. And I think it's important that we and that you in the military talk about observations, what could have happened and what are we doing that is perhaps not as noticeable today as it should be.

I can remember in the beginning with the Afghans, because it happens that one of our Guard units, the 45th, was over there helping in the training, so I've watched them as time has gone by. The statement that has been made that the ANSF is very effective, but is not fully developed, what does that mean, "not fully developed"?

General DUNFORD. Senator, today the Afghan forces are doing the fighting. They're providing security to the Afghan people. What they don't have are the systems, the processes, and institutions that allow them to be self-sustaining. At the ministerial level that includes things like planning, programming, budgeting, and acquisition. It's simple things like getting parts distributed, pay systems, fuel, overseeing contracts. We call that the functions that allow them to be self-sustaining.

So we're providing a degree of advice and assist today that's different than what we were doing in the past. When the Afghans were not in the lead, we were partnering with them or we were providing combat advising. Now we're helping them develop those systems and processes that allow them to be self-sustaining when we reduce to a much smaller presence.

Senator INHOFE. And we're doing that without putting our people in harm's way, as it was in the past when we were having to take the lead.

General DUNFORD. In a far different way, Senator. Clearly we're still in a combat zone and our people are in harm's way, but the risk is increasingly being assumed by Afghan security forces.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Inhofe.

Senator REED.

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

Thank you, General, for your service and the service of the forces that you command.

A great deal hangs on this election that is forthcoming. Can you give us an indication of the ability of the Afghan National Security Forces to protect the election process in April and also there'll be likely a runoff? When will the election process conclude?

General DUNFORD. Senator, thanks for that question. Months ago the Afghan security forces began to plan security for the elections and they're probably five or six months ahead of where they were in 2009. I think one of the best indicators for what we'll see for security at the elections took place last summer when the Afghans were in the lead, took place during the registration process. I mentioned the security they provided to the loya jirga. I also mentioned the security they provided to the Islamic festival. Those are all indicators of the capability of the Afghans to actually provide security.

One interesting statistic is that during the elections of 2009 there were about 250,000 people in uniform. That's a combination of coalition forces and Afghan forces that were providing security during that period of time. On the 5th of April of this year, there will be 425,000 forces providing security for the elections, 375,000 of which will be Afghan. So I think that's a very strong indicator, not only their performance over the past several months, but also just their inherent capabilities that will be on display on the 5th of April of this year.

If there's a runoff, our best assessment is that we would have a new president in August of 2014.

Senator REED. So that falls within that period of time where you're still capable of making a transition or going from several options. Operationally, you still have that flexibility?

General DUNFORD. We do, Senator.

Senator REED. You've indicated several times in testimony about the positive public opinion and support for the Afghan National Security Forces. Can you give us an indication of why, if that's the case? And also, will that translate to support of the government of Afghanistan? There are situations where armies might have support or security forces, but it doesn't translate.

General DUNFORD. Senator, we really began to see the change back in June when we celebrated what was known as Milestone 2013. That's when the Afghan security forces assumed the lead. I can remember in particular one conversation I had with the former Defense Minister Wardak, a big burly man who had been a jihadi. You probably have met him. During that ceremony he leaned over

to me almost with tears in his eyes and he said: General, you have no idea what it means to once again be responsible for the security of your own country, and I want to thank you and the American people for making this possible.

We have seen through the summer as the Afghan people saw their young men and women providing security increasing pride. We set out last spring; we laid out our campaign objectives. We said we wanted to emerge from the summer with confident and capable Afghan forces, but as importantly credible in the eyes of the Afghan people. The polling data certainly indicates that, where consistently over 80 percent of the Afghan people have a positive assessment of the Afghan security forces, the army in particular.

Just recently we had a pretty sad incident take place in the Kunar Province where 21 Afghan forces were killed. That negative was turned into a positive in the wake of that event. The outpouring of pride and support for Afghan forces, the desire to take care of the families of the fallen, the outrage that the Afghan people felt that their soldiers had been attacked by the Taliban, was actually a great indicator of the developing nationalism inside of Afghanistan, the pride that the Afghan people have in their country, but as importantly the pride they have in the Afghan forces.

That clearly has had a positive effect on the Afghan forces themselves, because if the people are proud of them and what they do and they appreciate and recognize what they do and the sacrifices they make, they're more encouraged to actually do that.

So, Senator, as I mentioned a minute ago, there's a lot of things we can point to physically in terms of Afghan capability development. We can look at helicopters, we can look at mobile strike vehicles, we can look at weapons systems, we can look at their tactics, techniques, and procedures. And all those things are positive. But the human factors are as important, and what I have seen again in the leadership is a sense of pride, sense of responsibility, sense of accountability. But amongst the Afghan people what I've seen is a sense of ownership of Afghan forces.

You ask, does that translate into support for the Afghan government? Interesting enough, about 80 percent of the Afghan people have confidence that the Afghan government is heading in the right direction and 52 percent of them actually believe that things over the last year have improved. That's high when you look at I think a comparable statistic in the United States right now is about 37 percent. So there's actually a greater degree of confidence that they're moving in the right direction inside of Afghanistan right now, and we're encouraged by that.

Senator REED. General, my time is all but expired, but for the record if you could indicate to us, if there is a BSA concluded to the satisfaction of both sides, your estimate of how long the residual force will stay? Unless you can give a very brief answer, you can take that for the record.

General DUNFORD. Senator, it's a little more complicated, so I'd like to take that for the record.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator REED. Then take it for the record, sir.

General DUNFORD. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Reed.
Senator McCain.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

General, I thank you for your service. A great source of pride to all of us is your service and that of your predecessors in Afghanistan and Iraq, and we appreciate your incredible service.

General, we've heard from several officials from the Department attempting to characterize the status of al Qaeda in Afghanistan, the region, and worldwide. We've heard words like "metastasizing" and "persistent." How would you describe al Qaeda in Afghanistan and Pakistan?

General DUNFORD. Senator, today, and because of largely our Special Operations and the pressure that we have put on the network over the last few years, I would characterize al Qaeda in Afghanistan as in a survival mode.

Senator MCCAIN. General Allen stated last year that he would need 20,000 U.S. troops in Afghanistan after 2014. Now, as I understand it, we're down to 10,000 plus a few thousand NATO troops. Could you state how many troops we need and for how long?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I'm comfortable with that range that we talked about earlier in terms of the NATO 8 to 12,000 for a train, advise, assist mission, with another mission over and above that that would conduct counterterrorism. That would be a U.S. mission only. I think what's important when we start to talk about numbers is what we expect those forces to do has evolved over time as the Afghan forces have increased their capability. What we'll be doing in 2015 largely is addressing the self-sustainability of the Afghan forces. They will clearly be in the lead in the fight and the only operations that I would envision us conducting in 2015 against an enemy would be counterterrorism operations, again a U.S. mission.

Senator MCCAIN. But it is your view it would be 10,000 plus several thousand NATO troops?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I'm comfortable with the range of forces, that 8 to 12,000 NATO mission plus a counterterrorism mission on top of that.

Senator MCCAIN. According to a Wall Street Journal report from January 21st, it cited a senior Pentagon official stating, quote: "The new plan would start with 10,000 American troops at the beginning of 2015, but the number would decline sharply under a 2-year drawdown schedule. The number would be close to zero by the time Mr. Obama leaves office in early 2017."

In your professional military opinion, does this course of action entail a level of risk to our mission that you would find acceptable?

General DUNFORD. Senator, we have provided the President with a range of options. All those options have articulated conditions that would have to be met over time and the risk associated with not meeting those conditions.

Senator MCCAIN. Would you say it's a very high risk if we had a, quote, "sharp decline," "sharply under a 2-year drawdown schedule" so it would be close to zero by the time Mr. Obama leaves office in early 2017?

General DUNFORD. Senator, that would depend on the progress of the Afghan security forces and the environment within which they'd be operating.

Senator MCCAIN. So you are not willing to state whether there would be an increased risk or not?

General DUNFORD. There would be increased risk, Senator.

Senator MCCAIN. Thank you.

I can only speak for myself, but if that's the plan, that we would be close to zero by the time Mr. Obama leaves office in early 2017, I would not support keeping troops behind, because it would be a needless risk of American lives.

We all know that you can't deal any further with President Karzai, right, on the BSA?

General DUNFORD. I think that's fair to say, Senator.

Senator MCCAIN. But we also know that all of the presidential candidates favor a BSA and say they would sign it; is that correct?

General DUNFORD. Senator, all the candidates do and the overwhelming majority of the Afghan people also support the BSA.

Senator MCCAIN. And you are capable and ready to make plans for the signing of that BSA sometime after the presidential election? You are capable of adjusting to that eventuality?

General DUNFORD. Absolutely, Senator.

Senator MCCAIN. But it would be much harder if there's a runoff?

General DUNFORD. It would be much harder if there's a runoff. If we have a new president by August, I'm comfortable that we'll be able to maintain the options through that period of time without any difficulty.

Senator MCCAIN. It's very disturbing to me to hear the President say that the longer Karzai waits the lower the number of troops will be. I don't get that connection. Why would Karzai's intransigence dictate the number of troops and missions that we would want as part of the residual force?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I can't talk to that.

Senator MCCAIN. I'm sure you can't.

So are we able to get out all the equipment that we need to get out of Afghanistan on schedule?

General DUNFORD. I'm absolutely confident we'll be able to do that, Senator.

Senator MCCAIN. Even if the Russians cut off one of the avenues?

General DUNFORD. Yes, Senator. Due to the great efforts by TRANSCOM and CENTCOM, we've got resilience in the system and I'm not concerned at all about a loss of the Russian Northern Distribution Network, the Russian piece of that.

Senator MCCAIN. Are you confident with the level left behind of, say, 10,000 plus some NATO forces, that the Afghan military will have capability such as air evacuation, close air support, and especially intelligence capabilities?

General DUNFORD. Senator, two of the things you mentioned are actually gaps that will exist in 2015. The Afghan Air Force won't be fully developed. The intelligence enterprise won't be fully developed. Their special operations capability won't be fully developed.

And they'll still have gaps in their ministerial capacity. Those are the four main areas we'll be focused on in 2015.

Senator MCCAIN. So in your view if we left Afghanistan with no residual force, we could see a replay of the Iraq scenario?

General DUNFORD. Senator, if we leave at the end of 2014 the Afghan security forces will begin to deteriorate. The security environment will begin to deteriorate, and I think the only debate is the pace of that deterioration.

Senator MCCAIN. I thank you, General. I just want to say again, you're in a long line of really outstanding leaders and all of us are very proud of the service that you have rendered and continue to render to our country.

I thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator McCain.

Now Senator Manchin.

Senator MANCHIN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you, General Dunford. Again, as everyone has alluded to, your service; we're very appreciative of that.

This war has defined a whole generation of Americans and we have reached a decision point in the conflict, and we owe the American people an awful lot of explanations. I know Senator McCain was just talking about the transition that's going on and you talked about the amount of time that you would need if there is a new elected president and going in a different direction.

It doesn't look like Karzai's going to release his hold whatsoever, building his castle or his mansion or whatever they're building a fortress for. So he remains to be a force for a long time. I don't see how anything would ever change, knowing his intentions and being telegraphed as well as they are. Do you acknowledge that?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I acknowledge President Karzai's intent to remain influential in Afghanistan. But I also look at all the presidential candidates who have very strongly and very publicly articulated the need for a U.S. coalition presence after 2014, but am actually more encouraged by my day to day engagement with the Afghan people and the polling that we have done, where 80 percent of the Afghan people recognize that their future is inextricably linked to a presence of coalition and U.S. forces.

Senator MANCHIN. I'm just saying the appearance has basically Russia-Putin all over it with Karzai right now in Afghanistan. I'm just saying.

General DUNFORD. Senator, that may or may not be President Karzai's intent. I don't know. But I'm not sure that reflects his capability.

Senator MANCHIN. Let me speak to this, then. I've been very critical about the amount of contractors we have, and I understand right now we have 78,000 contractors in Afghanistan and only 33,000 troops.

General DUNFORD. Senator, a number of the contractors also support the NATO force of about 45,000 total forces.

Senator MANCHIN. Can you tell me that contracting with those forces will be reduced relative to the combat forces?

General DUNFORD. We would be over time reducing. In fact, we're in the process now of reducing contractors. I think we've reduced them some 50 percent over the past 12 months.

Senator MANCHIN. The other thing. For the life of me, I can't understand—I'm understanding we have about 2,000 MRAP's over there at a million dollars apiece, \$20 billion worth of MRAP's?

General DUNFORD. We still have on the ground 2,000 MRAP's that are being used. Are you referring to the ones that we have declared excess?

Senator MANCHIN. It's hard for people in West Virginia, and for me to go home and explain to them how we can build something that costs that much, take it over there, and just disregard it like it wasn't any value at all. There has to be value somewhere.

General DUNFORD. Senator, we're not discarding 2,000 MRAP's. We have about 1200 right now that the services have declared as excess to their requirements. We're now in the process—

Senator MANCHIN. What will happen with those?

General DUNFORD. We're in the process right now of seeing if there are any of our allies that can use those vehicles. The services are also going back to review those requirements. I've put a stop on any destruction of vehicles except those that are battle damaged.

One of the challenges, Senator, is that if we want to give them to somebody they have to accept them as is, where is. So it's very expensive for countries to take those vehicles from Afghanistan. It costs us less than \$10,000 to destroy a vehicle. It would cost us over \$50,000 to move a vehicle to another location. So in order for us to give it to somebody else we'd have to invest a significant amount of money to move the vehicles.

Senator MANCHIN. But if we're drawn into another conflict, we'd have to spend a million dollars to replace it.

General DUNFORD. Senator, we have in the United States—the services again have identified the requirements that they believe they'll need for future conflicts, and the majority of the MRAP's that we purchased are already back in the United States, not in Afghanistan.

Senator MANCHIN. Sir, I just—can you honestly tell the American people, can you tell the people in West Virginia, that we should be in Afghanistan and stay in Afghanistan, it's our purpose to do that? Our mission was to fight al Qaeda, to fight the terrorists, not to rebuild that nation or change the culture of that nation.

I cannot explain to a—and we're a very hockey State. We like a good fight and sometimes if there's not a good fight we'll fight each other just to stay in practice and get ready for the next fight. This one makes no sense to any West Virginian at all, not anywhere I go in my State.

General DUNFORD. Senator, I would assess that if we don't stay there, continue the job of growing the Afghan forces so they can replace us in providing security in Afghanistan, we'll actually have a good fight.

Senator MANCHIN. What's the casualties right now between green on blue?

General DUNFORD. We had 14 incidents of insider attacks during 2013. We had 48 in 2012.

Senator MANCHIN. Sir, it's unbelievable. I've gone to a Wounded Warrior dinner and talked to a young man. It didn't look like he'd been injured. I thought he was one of the support staff. And he was

very distant, and when I started talking to him he began to engage more. His story, it tore me apart. He says: I was shot, I was shot by the person I trained for six months.

They live in this constant fear, and you're saying it's going to get better and we have to get them to a higher level? I don't think we're ever going to change that mentality. How do you—I don't know, sir. I have all the respect in the world, but I don't know how we answer these types of questions.

General DUNFORD. Well, Senator, when I look at where we were in 2009, the very first trip I made to Afghanistan, there was ten of us to one member of the Afghan security forces. The ratio now is completely inverse. And with a very small presence that we have today and we continue to have after 2015, we're going to ensure that the investment that we have made in blood and treasure over the past 12 years actually results in us achieving our objectives of a stable, secure, unified Afghanistan from which we cannot be attacked.

Senator MANCHIN. Let me just ask one final question, sir. Are we to tell the American people and I'm to tell the West Virginian citizens that we have to maintain a constant presence from now in perpetuity, as we have done in Korea? Is this what Afghanistan is turning into?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I wouldn't assess that to be the case.

Senator MANCHIN. So you think there's a time that we can exit?

General DUNFORD. I absolutely do believe that.

Senator MANCHIN. And I'm saying if 13 years haven't done the job, how many more years do you think it'll take? That's the question I cannot answer. We're just basically saying, if you can't do the job in 10, 12, 13 years, you're not going to get the job done.

General DUNFORD. Well, Senator, I would assume because we have vital national interests in the region that the United States would be engaged in the region for a long period of time to come. The nature of our engagement and the nature of our presence would of course change over time.

Senator MANCHIN. Again, sir, thank you so much for your service. I just would respectfully disagree. Thank you, sir.

General DUNFORD. Thank you, Senator.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Manchin.

Senator Wicker.

Senator WICKER. Thank you. General, thank you for your service. And Mr. Chairman, thank you for your service, too.

It's not—it's not hard to understand how my friend from West Virginia could have the view that he has. I must say that I disagree most vigorously with the point of view that he has just set forth in his questions. I think it's remarkable, and I hope people listening today in the United States, on Capitol Hill, and in Afghanistan and Pakistan and any place where we have interests, I hope people are listening to the chairman of this committee, who I think made a profoundly remarkable opening statement, which I'd like to refer to.

Frankly, I'd say to my colleagues who have a different view, there's a frustration on the part of our chairman that the American people haven't been given a balanced view about the success we've had in Afghanistan and a balanced view about the American inter-

ests that we will continue to have, regardless of what the decision of this administration is going forward over the next few months.

The chairman in his opening statement today regrets that a plurality of Americans believe that sending our forces to Afghanistan was a mistake. General, I don't think we should forget what happened in 2001. We went into Afghanistan by a virtually unanimous vote of this Congress. I was in the House of Representatives at the time. There was one dissenting vote in the House of Representatives, and as far as I know, Mr. Chairman, it was unanimous here in the Senate.

Now, I'm not going to say that every decision that has been made since we went in in early 2002 has been correct. But I do think it's remarkable, as the chairman has pointed out, a recent public opinion poll in Afghanistan shows that a large majority of Afghans believe that conditions in the country have improved over the last decade.

While the American people are not being given the entire picture of the success story there, the Afghan people see it on the ground. I think that's reflected by the vote of the loya jirga.

Tell me, General, is the loya jirga some sort of elite group that represents only a section of the country or is it pretty much of a cross-section? Enlighten the committee about how many factions and tribes and ethnic groups were represented by the loya jirga?

General DUNFORD. Senator, it was over 2,000 participants from all of the 34 provinces in Afghanistan. All the tribes were represented. I think it's fair to say it was a representative sample of Afghan leadership.

Senator WICKER. What was their view about the importance of continued American participation and involvement in the stability of this region after this presidential election?

General DUNFORD. Senator, they unanimously endorsed the requirement for the bilateral security agreement and a continued U.S. and coalition presence after 2015. I'd also point out that that loya jirga, and most importantly would point out, that that loya jirga is representative of the sentiment of the Afghan people, where at the lowest 67 percent, at the highest 80 percent in the polling that we have done, support the bilateral security agreement and a continued presence.

The one thing I'd also like to say, Senator, is that just ten days ago I met with nine members of the Afghan parliament, basically the oversight committees of the Afghan National Security Forces. I asked them what message I should come back and deliver when I came back for testimony. They also, all of them overwhelmingly, said: Don't let one individual speak for Afghanistan. The Afghan people appreciate what the American people have done and recognize that their future here in Afghanistan is inextricably linked to continued presence.

Senator WICKER. So it's not the view of the loya jirga and not the view of the polling that the United States has invaded this country or that the United States of America wants to occupy Afghanistan over the long haul? That's not their view, is it?

General DUNFORD. Senator, that's not at all the feeling of the Afghan people at this time, and we certainly have no intention of doing that.

Senator WICKER. I believe you mentioned in your testimony that this is a feeling of Afghan government officials, civil leaders, and that there's a growing appreciation of the coalition's efforts; is that correct?

General DUNFORD. That's correct, Senator.

Senator WICKER. I just wish—and I have to underscore—I wish this message were getting through. I have to underscore what our distinguished chairman has said on the second page of his testimony: “Unfortunately, the American people rarely read about the positive developments in Afghanistan. Instead, the media focus almost exclusively on negative incidents, depriving the American people of the sense of accomplishment they would receive if they were given a balanced view.”

So I appreciate you being here today, General, to give us a balanced view. I think it may be incumbent upon us on both sides of the dais, not as Republicans and Democrats, but as Americans, to say the troops that have sacrificed, the American taxpayer that sacrificed over more than a decade, has resulted in tangible positive accomplishments for the people in this region, and also that affect the American interests in a positive way.

I just hope we don't lose our resolve. I think we can decide as a body politic to lose this war nonetheless. We could do it if we try. But we are at the point of having a success, and if we don't send to the Afghan people a signal that we're abandoning them, that we're once again going to look another way and get interested in something else, we don't send that signal, we can have an historic partnership that can leave us there with a very small footprint, with the United States still looking out for its national interest, but doing, as you so successfully have done, General, and your comrades, turning this fight over to the locals, but having us there as partners who are sending a signal that we're not going to forget about them once again.

Thank you for indulging me, Mr. Chairman. And, Mr. Chairman, thank you for your profound statement which tells the truth to the American people about the success of our troops in this area. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Wicker. Personally, let me thank you for your steadfastness also along the way here.

Senator Shaheen.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Senator Wicker, I can't imagine the press ever focusing on negative and controversy.

General Dunford, thank you very much for being here this morning, for your service to the country.

One of the things that has impressed me on the trips that I have made to Afghanistan has been the close relationship between what happens in Afghanistan and what happens in Pakistan. I wonder if you could assess the kind of role that you think Pakistan can play post-2014, and also if you could speak to the efforts in Pakistan to engage in talks with the Taliban and how that might affect what's happening in Afghanistan?

General DUNFORD. Senator, thanks for that question. I find it difficult to envision success in the region without cooperation of Paki-

stan and without an effective relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Over the past year I've been encouraged on a couple of fronts. One is I believe that Pakistan also recognizes the existential threat of extremism to their own security, and they also recognize that it's not in their best interests to have anything other than a stable, secure, and unified Afghanistan.

Since August the heads of state have met four times, which I think is very positive. That hadn't happened in quite some time. With Prime Minister Sharif has come new resolve to improve the relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The two areas that they have identified for cooperation I think are important to point out. One is to have a common definition of extremism and to cooperate on dealing with extremism, and the other is to come up with a broader border management framework that would address the political issues, the economic issues, as well as the security issues between the two countries.

Our role is to work on developing a constructive military to military relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. I've met with the new Army chief of staff, General Raheel Sharif. He's indicated strong resolve to improve the relationship between the Afghan security forces and the Pakistani army, as have his Afghan counterparts, and we'll spend a lot of time over the next several months doing that. One of the things we want to accomplish by the end of the year is to have a constructive bilateral relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Heretofore, over the last few years, it's actually been trilateral. We have played an important facilitating role. We hope over time to work ourselves out of that role, certainly maintain effective bilateral relationships with both countries, between the United States and Pakistan, the United States and Afghanistan, but play less of a role in the important relationship between those two countries.

Senator SHAHEEN. Can you speak to efforts to engage in talks with the Taliban on the part of Pakistan?

General DUNFORD. Senator, we're watching that very carefully. To be honest, we don't have any insight into exactly the status of those discussions. What we have seen recently is continued violence by the TTP, the Pakistani Taliban, if you will. We've also seen some limited military operations, particularly in the North Waziristan area, against the TTP. But what we know is what you know, and that is that Prime Minister Sharif and the leadership in Pakistan are committed to try to find some peaceful resolution. That's certainly in Pakistan and as well as in Afghanistan what needs ought happen in the long term. It's just not clear to me today if the conditions are set for constructive peace talks between the TTP, the Pakistani Taliban, and the government of Pakistan. But it's clear that they're working to that end.

Senator SHAHEEN. Thank you.

We had a few minutes to chat before the hearing started and one of the things you commented on were the number of women who had been—who are volunteering and signed up to help with the elections in April. For the first time since the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund was established, money was explicitly authorized last year for recruitment and retention of women in the Afghan security forces. Now, obviously that's a separate issue from the elections,

but I think it speaks to the empowerment of women in Afghanistan.

I wonder if you could talk about how that dedication of that fund to help assist with recruiting women and keeping them in the services in Afghanistan will work and whether we're seeing any of the benefits of that yet.

General DUNFORD. Senator, thanks for that question. It's clearly a very difficult issue. There's a strong cultural bias against women participating in the security forces, in the army or the police. There's a stated goal of 10 percent and we're at about 1 percent. There are some signs of progress. We just recently saw the first woman appointed as a police chief in Afghanistan and there's a second now that is in line to become a police chief. That's a positive sign. There are some general officers both in the ministry of interior and in the ministry of defense, so there are some role models coming up.

In the case of these 13,000, it's kind of interesting. There's 13,000 female searchers who have been identified. That in itself was difficult again because of the cultural bias. But in a conversation with the MOI which I think you'll find encouraging, Minister Daudzai, he plans to use these 13,000 as a pool from which to recruit policewomen. So as he gets women that identify themselves as willing to step up and do something as important as be a searcher at the elections and facilitate the transition that's going to occur subsequent to 5 April, he also recognizes that that's an eligible pool of women who would probably make good policewomen and he plans to use that.

He has a stated goal of increasing the numbers of policewomen in Afghanistan by 5,000 in the next 24 months and then 10,000 by 2017. My sense is he's very committed to that. My sense also is that the cultural challenges that exist are very real and it's going to take some time before that happens.

But certainly if you would look at the plight of women today and the prospects for their participation in success in the security ministries, it's certainly much higher than even 2 or 3 years ago.

Senator SHAHEEN. My time is up, but if I could just make a follow-on comment. That is, to the extent that we can encourage that sentiment to continue as we look at the new administration taking over in Afghanistan, certainly I think that's something that all of us here support.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

Senator Ayotte.

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I want to thank you, General Dunford, for your steadfast leadership in such an important time. We just, I know all of us admire your leadership and your service to our country, and I want to thank you for the sacrifice that your family's been making during your service in Afghanistan as well.

I want to ask you, General, if we were to withdraw from Afghanistan this year, what happens to the women in Afghanistan?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I think the plight of women would be pretty dire if we were to withdraw at the end of 2014. We are actually providing—I think the support we provided in security, the support we're providing for political transition, actually creates the

climate within which women and other members of society can actually flourish and achieve their own goals and objectives.

I would say again the prospects are not very good if we were to withdraw at the end of 2014 for women.

Senator AYOTTE. I don't think any of us will ever forget the images in the soccer stadiums with the Taliban and what they did to women. So I think as we look toward the importance of our commitment in Afghanistan, let us not forget what you just said, that if we leave and we abandon the work that we have done in Afghanistan that we could send women back in those soccer stadiums, and I don't think that's acceptable to any of us. Would you agree, General?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I would. I think it's probably important for me to share with you that I didn't provide you a minute ago with my own assessment in isolation. That's the feedback that I received from the Afghan women that I've spoken to. So I'm actually voicing on their behalf their concerns about 2015 and beyond were we not to maintain a presence.

Senator AYOTTE. If we don't maintain a presence, what happens with al Qaeda? Also I would ask you, how quickly would this happen? We talk about—when I hear, for example, why does it matter in terms of people at home if we were to withdraw this year, what happens with al Qaeda and how quickly does this all unravel? I think this is important for people to understand, that we've made great success, but if we suddenly pull back what happens and how quickly?

General DUNFORD. Senator, thanks. First of all, I think the deterioration of the Afghan forces begins to happen fairly quickly in 2015. That's because again where we are today in the campaign is we've focused on quality of the force, building battalions, building brigades, building corps. What's now our focus is building the systems and the processes that allow those tactical units to sustain themselves.

So things that would happen almost immediately after we would leave in 2015 is units would run out of fuel, pay systems would not be completely operable, spare parts would not be available for vehicles. So we'd start to see decreased readiness in the Afghan security forces and obviously their operational reach would be less.

We also would not be able to complete our work with the Afghan Air Force, which really is 2 or 3 years away. We're still in the process of actually fielding the Afghan Air Force.

With regard to al Qaeda, again my assessment is that the pressure that we put on al Qaeda virtually every day in operations by our Special Operations in cooperation with their Afghan partners is what has kept the al Qaeda from reconstituting. We know from intelligence that they have every intent of continuing to operate from Afghanistan and Pakistan. They would view it as a great victory were we to withdraw and were they to then have the space within which to conduct operations against the West once again. Again, I think it would not only be a physical reconstitution, but a huge moral factor for al Qaeda as a movement were we to withdraw from the region in 2015 and allow them to once again establish preeminence in the region and become the vanguard for the al Qaeda movement from the region.

Senator AYOTTE. So the vanguard for the al Qaeda movement and a risk to the United States of America again, correct, General?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I don't think there's any question that eventually there'd be a risk to western interests, including the United States.

Senator AYOTTE. So no doubt it's so important that we get this right. One of the things that I've been encouraged by is that all the presidential candidates—Karzai's gone, right? With all due respect, he's made a lot of troubling comments that I think all of us disagree with. But he's gone. I mean, he's gone because there's going to be a new election, and all of the candidates that are running have committed to signing the BSA if elected, correct?

General DUNFORD. That's correct, Senator.

Senator AYOTTE. How quickly in terms of—I know that you said as long as the runoff goes in August. How important is it that we announce our follow-on commitment, that the President do that, with regard to the timing of the runoff in August? So what's the timing there and how important is that timing in terms of us making a commitment on behalf of our country as to what our follow-on force will be?

General DUNFORD. Senator, what really—again, there's several issues. If you don't mind I'd like to just touch on all of them very briefly. To me, the delay in the BSA, part of it is the military campaign, and I mentioned that it begins to be high risk if we don't make a decision by September; we have a high risk against an orderly withdrawal. That's simply because of how long it takes to get all the equipment out, all the people out, and to transfer all the facilities. We start to run into a situation where there are as many tasks to do as there are days to do those before the 31st of December. So that's why I characterize that as high risk subsequent to September.

But I think the real challenge with the delay in the BSA and the delay in certainly post-2015 actually starts in Kabul with the leadership, the Afghan people, and the Afghan security forces across the country. I think it also is fair to say that currently the uncertainty about 2015 affects the behavior of regional actors, to include Pakistan. Those nations are hedging, not certain what will be, what the facts on the ground will be in 2015.

Then the other issue that I'm concerned about in terms of how long this uncertainty would last would be the willingness and the ability of the coalition to maintain cohesion and actually participate. I think it's very important to point out that the contribution of the coalition has been significant, and I assess that in a future mission it would be very important for us to do a future mission also as a coalition.

Senator AYOTTE. Thank you, General. I know that my time is up, but I would just say this. We know that Karzai is going, that the newly elected president, whoever comes out of this, is willing and is committed to signing the BSA. I would hope that our President would make an announcement to give certainty to the situation in Afghanistan as to what our follow-on commitment will be and to make that announcement to ensure that the Afghan people know that we are committed to following through here and that we are going to ensure that Afghanistan does not, for example, become a

safe haven for al Qaeda, all the things that you just talked about. So I hope that Mr. President will come forward and really give that certainty.

I understand and respect that that is contingent on the BSA being signed and protection for our troops. But I believe the President could make that contingent upon that signing.

Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Ayotte.

Senator Kaine.

Senator KAINE. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

General Dunford, good to see you again. I enjoyed our visit in July and I appreciate your service. I echo the comments that Senator McCain made.

I also want to underline points made by the chair in his opening statement. The American role in improving the life of Afghans has truly been massive, and the more we do that the more we inoculate against extremism. The mission is about training the Afghan security forces, but it is also about making Afghans understand that they don't have to go back to what they had.

Just one bit of evidence that I just find staggering: Since the Taliban fell in Afghanistan, life expectancy in Afghanistan has improved from 45 years to 62 years. Now, in a country of 30 million people if you can improve life expectancy by 17 years in about a decade that's an additional 500 million years of life for the current Afghan population that has been a result of the work that the United States and other nations have done. It has largely been done by public health investments that have reduced child mortality.

You tell me that the polling suggests that Afghans like the United States. If you can reduce the risk of my children dying young and increase life expectancy in my country by 17 years, I'm going to like the United States too. I'm going to like the partnership. I'm not surprised at all that the polling results are so strong.

I think we do have to explain. Maybe our citizens are not thinking that the investment that we should be making should be about the improvement of life expectancy in Afghanistan, but this is inoculation against extremism. This is the kind of real life tangible evidence that Afghans can see that will help them not fall backward into the Taliban or other al Qaeda or other extremists.

So I want to associate myself with the comments made earlier that the comprehensive nature of the investment by the United States and its partners in Afghanistan has made a significant difference and that bodes well going forward.

I met in Bahrain in December with the foreign minister of Iraq, Foreign Minister Zebari, and he is now very public about this: I wish in Iraq we had worked out an acceptable bilateral security agreement with the United States and the United States had stayed. He says this publicly. He says: We made a mistake by not being willing to work out a BSA with the United States and we now regret it. And he has even indicated that he has said that directly to Hamid Karzai: Do not make the mistake that we made in Iraq, because what's happening in Iraq now is tragic, could have been avoided.

But for all the good that we can do, we shouldn't stay unwanted. We shouldn't stay if we can't work out a bilateral security agreement. We're not interested in being occupiers. We're interested in being partners. And I'm happy to hear your testimony, General, that the Afghan people want us to be partners.

A couple questions about the election. These are very important. It's kind of hard to fathom. I mean, here it's—what's today, the 12th of March, and these elections are going to happen in the next three and a half weeks. You have indicated that the candidates, all the presidential candidates, support a bilateral security agreement with the United States. I know I'm saying this for the record. I know the answer to this. This isn't like private support, where they've said to us: Hey, we'll sign a bilateral security agreement. They're taking this position publicly in the midst of an election campaign and telling their voters, their electorate, when asked: We want the United States to stay and we want to work out an acceptable bilateral security agreement. Isn't that correct?

General DUNFORD. Senator, that's correct. This is the very first time they've had a very public campaign process, to include televised debates. So these comments have been made in the context of televised debates and public appearances, which included media engagement. So it's absolutely their public position. And clearly they wouldn't be saying that if it didn't reflect the electorate.

Senator Kaine. Right. I'm sure they're as responsive to the electorate as we are. They can read polls just like we can. But this issue of U.S. presence is not a minor little issue in the presidential campaign. There are other issues certainly, but I imagine, and from the press I've read, it suggests that the continuing U.S. presence and the working out of this deal is a major piece of the public dialogue and debate in the runup to these presidential elections, and therefore the result of the elections will be a mandate from the Afghan public in terms of their desire about this continuing relationship, correct?

General DUNFORD. Absolutely, Senator. I believe that whoever the next president of Afghanistan will be, he will come into office with a mandate to enter into a partnership with the United States and the coalition.

Senator Kaine. Now, I know that that creates some real anxiety in the Taliban, and they have just recently done very public calls for violence to disrupt the elections. Those elections were disrupted to some degree in election day violence a number of years ago. But, General Dunford, you indicate your belief that the increased size of security forces, the ANSF, should be sufficient to protect against significant violence marring these elections. That is your thought today?

General DUNFORD. Senator, it is, and it's based on my assessment not only of the Afghan performance day to day, but again the major events that have occurred in Afghanistan over the last year where the enemy has had a demonstrated intent to disrupt those events. Again, the Islamic festival that I mentioned, the *loya jirga* itself in Kabul, where they locked down the entire city, really demonstrated to me the ability of the Afghan security forces to create a climate within which inclusive elections could take place.

I would not say that it'll be violence-free. There will certainly be high-profile attacks and the enemy will have a concerted effort to disrupt the elections. But at the end of the day I'm confident that there will be unsuccessful in their efforts to disrupt the elections.

Senator KAINE. That is good to hear, General. Thank you very much.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you, Senator Kaine.

Senator Graham.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

I'd like to add my compliments to the chairman for his opening statement. I just can't believe you're leaving the Senate in mid-life like you are. Very disappointing.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you. Thanks for the "mid-life."

Senator GRAHAM. From the South Carolina point of view, you're just getting started.

One observation. The room is almost empty. We've got a few reporters. Thank you for coming. General, I remember when all these rows were full, with people carrying bags and everybody was hanging on every word about Afghanistan. I'm just here to say that the decision we're about to make as a Nation regarding Afghanistan is probably the single most important decision we'll make in the 21st century in securing our homeland other than the Iranian nuclear program. I can't think of a more important decision for America to make than how we transition in Afghanistan. And there may not be a lot of interest in the room, but to the members of the committee, thank you; you've acquitted yourselves well.

No BSA, no troops, right?

General DUNFORD. That is correct, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. So to the Afghan people: If we don't have a bilateral security agreement, not one troop with my support will be left behind. We're not going to put our young men and women in that situation.

The good news is most Afghans want us to stay, right?

General DUNFORD. That's correct, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. Maybe what you're telling us, if we're smart and we end this well we can construct a scenario where the Afghans will help defend America.

General DUNFORD. Well, Senator, if you look back at the Nations that we helped in the 1990s, many of them are actually on the ground with us in Afghanistan today. I'd point out Georgia as one of the examples.

Senator GRAHAM. But what's in it for us is a fair proposition for us to be exploring. What's in it for us to me would be an Afghanistan willing to fight the terrorists and help defend our Nation from attack. Do you agree with that?

General DUNFORD. I agree, a partnership with Afghanistan in the fight against terrorism is absolutely where we're trying to go.

Senator GRAHAM. You want to help women in America, make sure al Qaeda can't kill a bunch of us here in the homeland, right?

General DUNFORD. That's correct, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. It's just not about Afghan women; it's about American women, about American men. So we've got an historic opportunity to turn a country that's been isolated in history into

an ally and can be a front-line defense against al Qaeda. Do you agree with that?

General DUNFORD. I agree with that, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. So the goal is to keep the enemy away from the homeland and to build partnerships. Isn't that the general goal in how to win the war on terrorism?

General DUNFORD. It is, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. Would you agree that Afghanistan is the central front in that battle, because this is where it all started?

General DUNFORD. I do, and particularly in South Asia, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. So if you believe this is the place it all started and we can leave behind a scenario where it ends well, the question is the cost-benefit analysis. Before September 11, on September 10, 2001, how many troops did we have in Afghanistan?

General DUNFORD. We didn't have any troops on the ground.

Senator GRAHAM. How many ambassadors did we have in Afghanistan?

General DUNFORD. We did not have an ambassador.

Senator GRAHAM. How much money did we give to Afghanistan?

General DUNFORD. We didn't give any, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. So I've tried that. Didn't work.

How much has September 11 cost us in terms of dollars?

General DUNFORD. Billions of dollars, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. A lot more than the presence in Afghanistan?

General DUNFORD. That's fair to say, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. So if you looked at the cost to the country in terms of financial costs, going to the model of leave them alone, they'll leave us alone, did not work. To our folks in West Virginia: It cost us a lot more to ignore Afghanistan than it has to be involved.

Now, the 6,000 lives plus lost in Afghanistan and Iraq are heart-breaking, but these were soldiers that signed up and were willing to defend the Nation. 3,000 civilians died in the blink of an eye on the homeland.

Do you believe that if we ignore the threats coming from that part of the world that the next attack on the United States could be greater than it was on September 11?

General DUNFORD. I absolutely believe there will be another attack. Whether it be greater or not I don't know, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. Would you agree with me the capabilities that are beginning to be available to terrorist organizations are greater than they were before September 11?

General DUNFORD. Yes, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. So Karzai's an outlier, let's just leave it at that, right? He happens to be the president, but he doesn't represent Afghanistan's view of what to do regarding the U.S.-Afghan relation; is that a fair statement?

General DUNFORD. It is, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. The Afghans don't see us as the Russians or the British occupiers because they could kill us all tomorrow if they wanted to, couldn't they? How many people are in Afghanistan?

General DUNFORD. 25 to 30 million.

Senator GRAHAM. Okay. How many are there of us?

General DUNFORD. Right now there are 33,000 Americans.

Senator GRAHAM. How long could 33,000 survive if 25 or 30 million saw us as an occupier?

General DUNFORD. It would be a difficult circumstance to find yourself in, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. Yes. I wouldn't want to be there.

So the point is you've got green on blue. That happens in every war. But I'm here to tell you, if they didn't want us we wouldn't be there. And it offends me when people suggest that we're the British Empire of a long time ago or the Russians. We're not, not in the eyes of the Afghans.

So you've got two choices. One choice is to go back to the pre-September 11 nobody there, no money there. The cost of staying: How much would it cost the American taxpayer to maintain a 350,000-plus Afghan army? How much would it cost to maintain 10 to 12,000 troops? Compare the benefit we would achieve from that investment versus leaving, nobody left behind, and see where the smart play's at. Can you run us through that right quickly?

General DUNFORD. Senator, the cost of Afghan security forces at about 352,000 in 2015 would be \$5 billion. Our coalition partners have committed to pay \$1.3 billion of that. Afghanistan will pay approximately \$500 million of that. So the cost to the United States would be somewhere on the order of \$3 billion.

We're still working the cost figures for our actual presence overall right now, but certainly far less than the cost that you just outlined.

Senator GRAHAM. So you put that in one bucket. The other bucket is the cost if we leave, and you're telling us the cost of leaving is far greater than staying under the configuration you've just indicated; is that correct?

General DUNFORD. Absolutely, sir.

Senator GRAHAM. A final thought. Is it fair to say that our National security interests are not going to be judged in history by the day we left Afghanistan, but by what we left behind?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I think it's how we leave, absolutely, not when we leave.

Senator GRAHAM. It's how we leave and what we leave behind. And you're here to tell us as the commander of our forces in Afghanistan if we're smart and we do this right, conditions-based withdrawal, we can leave behind a stable country that can help defend the American homeland or we can leave behind a disaster that will haunt us for decades?

General DUNFORD. I believe that, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you.

Chairman LEVIN. Thank you very much, Senator Graham.

Senator McCaskill.

Senator McCASKILL. Thank you.

Thank you, General, for being here today. I want to talk a little bit—I know I sound sometimes like a one-note chorus here—about SIGAR and reconstruction efforts and accountability for that money. But what I'm really concerned about in the coming months is that the SIGAR, John Sopko, has indicated to you that no more than 21 percent of Afghanistan will be accessible to civilian oversight going forward.

Now, that's a 47 percent reduction since 2009. So we had eyes and ears on the majority of Afghanistan during a time period that hundreds and hundreds and in fact billions of dollars of American taxpayer money was being spent to build things. We're only going to have eyes and ears in 21 percent of the country right now. Do you agree with that assessment, that our ability to oversee any kind of ongoing work is going to be severely curtailed and limited under the current scenario?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I may be able to make you feel a little bit better about that. In 2015 we'll—I'll speak from the DOD perspective—we'll have 32 projects ongoing in 2015. All but five of those projects will fall in areas where we will be able to provide proper oversight. Five projects will fall outside of that range, and what we're working with the State Department now is to ensure that we have Afghans that can help us provide oversight and ensure that we provide the kind of stewardship that I know you're addressing.

Senator MCCASKILL. Well, I haven't seen—none of us have seen the OCO funding. Of those 31 projects that you're going to be working on in 2015, is there going to be any more money requested for any of that work in this coming OCO budget?

General DUNFORD. Senator, that is largely—it will be in 2015. Some of that is 2015 money. So yes, part of those projects would be there. The projects in total are somewhere between 6 and \$700 million. These are the last 32 projects that were part of the original program of record for Afghan forces. So when I talk about projects, they're virtually all either Afghan National Police or Afghan National Army projects that are again the back side of the program of record that was outlined a couple years ago.

Senator MCCASKILL. So there have been no new projects started this calendar year?

General DUNFORD. Senator, there is no projects now that we're starting that aren't part of the program of record, that's absolutely true. No new starts.

Senator MCCASKILL. Okay. Before I move on to another area, quickly, I have asked some of the leadership—I think it's really important that we get a clear-eyed assessment of how well this works. There has just been an assumption from day one—and I have great respect for General Petraeus's guide for counterinsurgency effort. But I'm not aware that there has ever been any data or analysis that has really said that the military getting involved in large-scale infrastructure projects works in terms of the counterinsurgency.

It certainly—it may have helped along the margins in Iraq, but most of that money was wasted, because most of those projects are not operating now. The health care centers never opened. The water park is in crumbles. A lot of the grid was blown up during the process. This notion of building major infrastructure during a conflict and the security challenges we have—and we know some of our money went to the bad guys for guarding that one highway we were building, and the whole blurring of the lines between the State Department and the Defense Department as to whose job this is and when and how—I really think we need to do a clear-eyed assessment, now that we have both Iraq and Afghanistan to look at.

I'm hopeful—and if you read the Special Inspector General for Iraq's final report, there's some real work to do here, I think, on the part of the military. I want to know, is there some discussion about that, that there will be a reevaluation of the effectiveness of this strategy?

General DUNFORD. Senator, there is, and I did hear General Dempsey's comments the other day and I'd associate myself with those. I think at the end of a decade of war it's fair to say that it's very, very important that we go back and take a look at the lessons learned and make sure we document those now while they're fresh.

Senator MCCASKILL. We've got some problems with property accountability in Afghanistan. We know that we have 26 open investigations for missing property that include weapons and weapons systems with a total of almost \$590 million, that the IG has found all these problems over there in the two places where we're trying to retrofit and account for all the equipment. Do you feel like you've gotten a handle on that?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I do. We have spent the last year and frankly even before I arrived trying to ensure that—again, this is part of lessons learned from even the Iraq experience. As we conducted a retrograde and redeployment in Iraq, I think we learned a lot of lessons, and I believe we're applying those lessons learned now in Afghanistan as we get accountability in the retrograde and redeployment process.

Senator MCCASKILL. Well, I want to—I'll have some specific questions for the record about what has changed since the IG took a look. It's a little worrisome to me since I've been at the yards that did the same thing in Iraq and I thought we had really kind of turned the corner on that. I'm disappointed that the IG would find these kinds of problems after what we did learn in Iraq. So I'll follow up on that.

Finally, I just want to mention a detainees. I understand the Afghan government released individuals with ties to attacks to coalition forces. Does a bilateral—does the BSA, does the bilateral security agreement enable our forces to continue to detain and remove dangerous individuals from the battlefield should the U.S. keep an enduring presence in Afghanistan? It's very troubling to me they released those people, and I think it's something that we should all be very worried about. I want you to tell me you are comfortable that if you catch people that are trying to kill our men and women in battle that we can keep them captured and that the Afghanistan government does not have the ability to let them go.

General DUNFORD. Senator, first, I share your concern with that. Clearly, protecting the force is my responsibility and I take that very seriously. I was greatly concerned with the release of those 65 individuals. I would say that the viability of our presence post-2014 is going to be determined by a number of factors, one of which will be an effective regime to address detainees, not only to ensure that those individuals that are a threat to the force and to the Afghan people are kept off the battlefield, but also that we would have access to the intelligence associated with those individuals in order again to protect the force and conduct effective counterterrorism operations.

So within the new administration, I think that's something that has to be arranged and it has to be very much a part of the bilateral security agreement and the other arrangements that we have with the next government.

Senator MCCASKILL. But we don't have it now?

General DUNFORD. We have an arrangement, Senator, but the government of Afghanistan did not observe that agreement.

Senator MCCASKILL [presiding]. Very disappointing. Thank you.

Senator Levin had to leave and I am going to now defer to Senator Donnelly.

Senator DONNELLY. Thank you, Madam Chair.

General, first I want to thank you for everything you've done there. It's been an extraordinary tour of duty. You've done amazing work. As I mentioned to you once before, I have family members who have a history with St. Michael's and everybody there is extremely proud of you and everything you've done.

I want to mention in regards to the MRAP's. You know, I served in the House for a little bit, too, and when we were coming and creating MRAP's and trying to get those in the field as fast as we could, we weren't worried about whether or not we were going to be able to get them home or what ship they were going to come home on or whether all the dirt was going to be cleaned out from under the tires. We were worried about saving lives. That was the whole purpose of the MRAP's.

I think if you had talked to anybody in the House or in the Senate at that time, if you had said, look, we can get these, but do you want to worry about how they come home—we obviously want to get them all taken care of, but that in a list of about 100 things was about 101. I think number one was telling families in Indiana and in Ohio and Wisconsin and New York that their sons or daughters would be in the safest vehicles possible and that they could come home safely.

So I just want to tell you that my opinion is get them back if you can, but the most important job they have had to do they've been doing.

I want to ask you about IED's a little bit, General, and the progress we're making in that area. I know there's been testing on fertilizers as well. We're trying to come up with a formula that is non-explosive. I wanted to hear how things are going in regards to fertilizer-based IED's and what are the biggest IED challenges you have right now and how we're doing overall in that area.

General DUNFORD. Senator, thanks for that question. As you know, we've worked very closely with Pakistan. Particularly the Joint IED Defeat Office has done a lot of great work over the past year. And because of that existential threat to Pakistan that I mentioned earlier, the Pakistanis are very focused on the IED challenge, as are the Afghans. So we've had a number of sessions with them and there is cooperation with the producers of—

Senator DONNELLY. I think you know one of the real bright things that we see is the cooperation on this and that we're actually going to do testing here in the States as well.

General DUNFORD. Absolutely, Senator. And the efforts that certainly the committee and again JIEDDO have done have actually paid dividends.

The greatest IED challenge, of course, today is to Afghan forces. They have increasingly borne the brunt of that, including Afghan civilians. In our focus, one, I feel comfortable with the equipment that we have, the training we have for our forces. Our focus on IED's now is equally to make sure that the Afghan security forces are capable of dealing with that challenge, and we're in the process of fielding—a lot of the equipment that we bought over the last 2 or 3 years now is finally arriving, finally being integrated, and their capabilities are improving.

But I think the real bright spot and the potential for improvement here in the coming months is that cooperation between the government of Pakistan, the government of Afghanistan, and the tripartite arrangement that we have to work on this particular issue.

Senator DONNELLY. How are we doing in terms of catching the threat before it happens, being able to protect our vehicles on the roads? We are way up from where we were, aren't we?

General DUNFORD. We've made significant improvement, Senator. But this is one of those force protection issues that I'd never appear before the committee and tell you that I'm comfortable with where we are.

Senator DONNELLY. Oh, no, not until they're all gone.

What is the material of choice now that the terrorists are using?

General DUNFORD. We still see ammonium nitrate as being—probably 60, 80 percent of the IED's contain some type of home-made explosives.

Senator DONNELLY. Well, thanks for your effort on that. That obviously has been a—has torn families and units apart. Like you said, we will not be satisfied until there are no more. So we appreciate everything you've done.

In areas like Kunar and Nuristan and in other parts, what happens even if our forces remain behind, which obviously we hope we get a BSA? But what do those areas look like post-2014?

General DUNFORD. There is still, as you know, safe haven for al Qaeda in that region and, frankly, a complex arrangement of extremist organizations—al Qaeda, TTP, Afghan Taliban, IMU. The list goes on of individuals that use that area. We have largely, again, kept them from planning and conducting attacks from that area, and largely are focused on survival.

They expect that we will leave at the end of 2014 and they expect that after we leave they'll have the opportunity to once again expand their safe haven in the region. My expectation is that again as we grow a partnership with the Afghan security forces and we grow their counterterrorism capability, that a combination of our train, advise, assist and counterterrorism capability, combined with the ever-increasing counterterrorism capability of the Afghans, will ensure that those individuals again focus more on their own survival than they do on attacks against either the Afghan people or against us.

Senator DONNELLY. After December 2014, for USAID and provincial reconstruction teams, will they have the ability to still be able to go out and put forward efforts, put forward projects and programs and be in a situation where they will feel safe or secure?

General DUNFORD. Senator, there won't be any provincial reconstruction teams in 2015. And USAID right now is with the embassy as a whole and we're certainly participating in discussions in this. I think largely their project oversight will be conducted by Afghans, except where it happens to fall in, within what we call our operational reach. In other words, where our forces are and there's a casualty evacuation capability and a quick reaction force capability we'll certainly be able to support USAID and other State Department employees. But in those areas where we don't have that kind of coverage, my expectation is that we will not have State Department employees and USAID.

Senator DONNELLY. It would not seem that without that they could be in an environment where they're going to be safe at all?

General DUNFORD. Absolutely, Senator.

Senator DONNELLY. Well, I just want to thank you again. You've done an extraordinary job under very difficult circumstances and the Nation owes a huge debt of gratitude to you.

General DUNFORD. Thank you, Senator.

Senator DONNELLY. Thank you.

Senator INHOFE. Madam Chairman.

Senator MCCASKILL. Senator Inhofe.

Senator INHOFE. Thank you very much.

I have seen some disturbing things, General, that I am concerned about, having to do with the inspector, SIGAR. That's the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. At the end of January, your staff was accused of preempting and undermining audit reports of SIGAR after a series of audits.

Now, let me ask you maybe three questions here. How do the SIGAR personnel get to audit locations, such as construction sites in southern Afghanistan, and how do they get access to the data that they need for the military organizations and the Afghan ministries?

General DUNFORD. Senator, we provide that support.

Senator INHOFE. One of the statements that I recall was SIGAR has said—and this is a quote—“No more than 21 percent of Afghanistan will be accessible to U.S. civilian oversight personnel by the end of 2014.” Do you think that's true and how important is that to their mission and to yours? I don't think it's true. What do you think?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I think it's important. What the SIGAR really is referring to there, I assume, is that 21 percent of the country will be covered by U.S. forces footprint or coalition forces footprint. That's true because we're reducing the force so much. But I also think that percentage is actually irrelevant, because what's most important is what's the coverage of those areas where there are actually projects ongoing.

There's only going to be 32 projects from a DOD perspective in 2015, and all but five of those projects will actually fall within our ability to provide proper oversight with U.S. forces.

Senator INHOFE. Okay, then it's not correct.

General DUNFORD. That's right, Senator.

Senator INHOFE. All right. I read a lot of these things and it appears to me—and I don't know that this is true—it appears that they go in there, they find out things, they go to the newspapers.

And you see a lot of headlines in very high-profile media outlets. As the commander charged with making the military campaign in Afghanistan successful, what do you consider the most important role as it's supposed to be of SIGAR and have they been focused on that role?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I welcome SIGAR and any other organization. In fact, during my time at U.S. Forces Afghanistan I've requested inspectors to come over to look at projects. I think, first of all, we take stewardship very seriously. I realize I have a responsibility to the American taxpayer to make sure that every dollar that's spent in Afghanistan results in capability development and advancement of our interests. So we take that seriously.

What I'm most interested in is the investigator's ability to tell me how I can save U.S. Government money, what decisions I'm making in the future, as opposed to what might have happened in terms of lessons learned. I don't think that—I'm not dismissing lessons learned. Those will be important to some future conflict. But for me today as a commander, I'm much more interested in the decisions I'm making today and the decisions I'll make tomorrow to make sure those are good decisions and make sure they reflect good stewardship. That's where I think the investigators can help me the most.

Senator INHOFE. Some of the headlines I'm referring to, I'm sure you're aware of them. Do you think they're all accurate?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I think that in most cases—in many cases they're sensationalized.

Senator INHOFE. Yes, I think they are, too. Does that make your job easier?

General DUNFORD. Senator, it makes it more difficult. We're in the 21st century, the information age, and I think the narrative is very important. And if there's a narrative of pessimism, if there's a narrative of abuse, if there's a narrative that we're not good stewards, I think that affects our mission.

Senator INHOFE. And I appreciate it and I agree.

Let me say one thing. I identify with the remarks that Senator Graham made about the chairman. In fact, I tried to say that in my opening statement, but not nearly as eloquently as Senator Graham did.

Thanks for your great work.

Senator Graham is recognized.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you. Thank you, sir.

Detainees. I really appreciate the stand you took against the 65 detainees being released by President Karzai. We have a resolution in Congress condemning that action. Do you believe it would be helpful for the Congress to send a signal that we object to what President Karzai did?

General DUNFORD. I do, Senator, and I'd like to thank you for what you've been doing over the last several weeks to ensure we sent a very clear message to the Afghan government.

Senator GRAHAM. And let the Afghans know that economic aid will be cut off if they continue this.

Could you send the committee a report on the status—give our guys in the 435 something to do. I'm sure they're bored out there. I wanted to just shout out the 435. Thank you for all the hard work

out there. A report on the status of detainees, third country nationals. Give the committee some indication of the problems we face between now and July with detainees, so we can make informed decisions to help you. Could you do that?

General DUNFORD. Absolutely, Senator.

[The information referred to follows:]

[COMMITTEE INSERT]

Senator GRAHAM. Finally, as to the war itself. This is an ideological struggle, do you agree? There's no nation state to conquer. When it comes to radical Islam, there's no capital to conquer, there's no air force to shoot down, there's no navy to sink. We're in an ideological battle with radical Islamists, right?

General DUNFORD. I agree with that, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. When I say "we," it's most of the Muslim world. It's not just us. Most of the Muslim world is in a battle with these guys.

General DUNFORD. And our coalition partners as well.

Senator GRAHAM. Absolutely. So what you're trying to tell us is that the best way to keep this war away from our homeland is to have sort of lines of defense throughout the world. And these lines of defense would be places like Afghanistan that had a stable government, stable, improving economy, and security forces willing to fight the radicals. That's part of America's defense strategy, do you agree with that?

General DUNFORD. I do, Senator. Terrorists thrive in ungoverned spaces and that's what we're trying to do in Afghanistan, is ensure it's not an ungoverned space.

Senator GRAHAM. So I don't know when the war will end. Radical extremist movements are marginalized over time, would you agree, by better education, better economic opportunity in the areas they operate? The biggest blow really to the Taliban and al Qaeda is girls going to school.

General DUNFORD. I agree with that, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. And people making their own choices. And I know that's complicated and frustrating for us, but if we will invest in the people who are willing to fight the terrorists along our side, in their back yard, I think we would be smart.

Now, Afghanistan under Taliban control and 30 years of previous civil war was a devastated nation, is that fair to say?

General DUNFORD. It is fair to say.

Senator GRAHAM. What happened in 2001 when we—a year later when we cleaned out the place, was a devastated society, absolutely no infrastructure.

General DUNFORD. That's correct, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. I remember going to Kabul and there were just a very few lights. You go today, it's almost like Myrtle Beach. I like Myrtle Beach. It's a very vibrant place.

Lots of challenges, but there's two ways to look at Afghanistan, where we started and where we are today. Would you agree with me, in many ways it's amazing they've come as far as they have?

General DUNFORD. Senator, I absolutely believe that. I think if just a few years ago we would have described Afghanistan in 2014, I think very few people would have believed we would be where we are today.

Senator GRAHAM. I would be among those few.

Now, there's two ways to look at this, what they haven't done and how far they've come and what they're capable of doing. I believe the capability of the Afghan people is fairly unlimited when it comes to reforming Afghanistan. It's just going to take time. Do you agree with that proposition?

General DUNFORD. I do. Given the opportunity, Senator, I've seen them accomplish an extraordinary amount in a short time.

Senator GRAHAM. The key ingredient here is will and desire.

General DUNFORD. This is a clash of wills, there's no question.

Senator GRAHAM. And the Afghan people have the will and desire to move out of the darkness into the light; is that a fair statement?

General DUNFORD. Absolutely, Senator. It reflects in the popularity rate of the Taliban, where they probably get somewhere between 11 and 15 percent at the highest in terms of the numbers of Afghan people who actually support the Taliban ideology.

Senator GRAHAM. How does the al Qaeda poll?

General DUNFORD. We don't have an al Qaeda poll, Senator, but I suspect it would be much lower.

Senator GRAHAM. Probably like some percentage below that, yes.

So the bottom line here is that the ace in the hole for America is that most people in Afghanistan do not want to go back to the dark days of the Taliban. They want to go forward. They want a different world. It won't be like America. This is not Jeffersonian democracy. But it can be representative government. They can be a good ally. Don't you believe that?

General DUNFORD. I believe that, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. So from the American people's point of view, I hope you understand that we're trying to build defenses abroad and let armies abroad do the fighting with minimal help from us, to keep the enemy at bay from attacking us, because the goal of al Qaeda is just not to control Afghanistan; it's to drive us out of the region, right?

General DUNFORD. That's exactly the plan for transition—

Senator GRAHAM. To drive us out of the region and leave that part of the world in their hands, and the economic chaos that would create would be unimaginable. Do you agree with that?

General DUNFORD. I do, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. From an economic perspective, the United States has a great interest in making sure that part of the world is stable.

General DUNFORD. I think if you look at the cost of September 11, you can make that argument very easily.

Senator GRAHAM. Would you also agree that if you're wanting to deter the Iranians from acquiring a nuclear capability, if we abandon Afghanistan that's the worst possible signal you could send to the Iranians about our resolve regarding national security matters?

General DUNFORD. I think it would have a destabilizing effect on the region.

Senator GRAHAM. And the Iranians would be one of the biggest winners of an unstable Afghanistan.

General DUNFORD. I believe so, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you and all of those under your command for extraordinary service. You've done a great job. We're inside the ten-yard line; do you believe that?

General DUNFORD. We are in the red zone, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. We're in the red zone and we can score if we don't call the wrong play.

General DUNFORD. Thank you, Senator.

Senator GRAHAM. Thank you.

Senator Levin will be back shortly, so we will stand down until he gets back.

[Recess from 10:48 a.m. to 10:54 a.m.]

Chairman LEVIN. General, thank you for your patience here. I'm not sure that any of my colleagues are coming back. I just have a couple additional questions for you, and then I hope that if the staffs are aware of any Senators that are coming back they would let us know. I don't think there are, in which case we could end fairly promptly.

I talked to you in my office about a couple incidents that occurred fairly recently during military operations. I think it's important when these incidents happen, some of which are truly tragic, that there be a prompt response on the part of our military.

The first is that radio station raid in Logar Province. Allegedly, our Special Ops forces scaled the walls of a compound, seized the owner of a radio station, and then beat and threatened him during interrogation. What can you tell us about that raid?

General DUNFORD. Senator, that raid is under investigation. I actually would prefer not to talk about it publicly now, but could in private. I reviewed the draft report of the investigation last night, actually after we spoke. I got the initial results from the commander, our Special Operations commander. So I think some time in the next couple of days we'll have the facts out.

Chairman LEVIN. That was on the radio station?

General DUNFORD. That's on the radio station.

Chairman LEVIN. Now, there was also a friendly fire incident in eastern Afghanistan where it was reported that a NATO air strike resulted in the friendly fire deaths of five Afghan army soldiers, I think also in Logar Province. Can you tell us about that incident?

General DUNFORD. Senator, that was clearly an incident of what we call blue on green. It was our aviation capability and there were Afghan soldiers that were unfortunately killed. Again, the investigation is just about complete, so I can't speak publicly about that. But we'll have the facts here in a couple days, but in all honesty, Senator, something happened that should not have happened.

Chairman LEVIN. We've been working with the Afghans on that to try to remedy the losses to the extent that we can?

General DUNFORD. Very closely working with the Afghan leadership, to both investigate and also to take care of the families of the fallen.

Chairman LEVIN. General, I had a chance to chat with a number of my colleagues running back and forth to vote and they unanimously, everyone that I spoke to, react the way I do to your service and your testimony. Most importantly, your testimony is compelling, your service is truly extraordinary over these decades. We all feel that way, and we just want to thank you. We want to thank

your family. I know that we had a chance to spend a few minutes with your wife last night. We hope you also had an opportunity to spend a few minutes with your wife. In a few days, maybe you can find a few hours with your family, away from your huge challenges in Afghanistan. But we are deeply grateful to you and to all the men and women with whom you serve.

With that, we will stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:59 a.m., the committee adjourned.]