

**OPENING STATEMENT OF U.S. SENATOR JACK REED
RANKING MEMBER, SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE**

**ROOM SD-G50
DIRKSEN SENATE OFFICE BUILDING
Thursday, February 4, 2016**

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

Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I would like to join you in welcoming back General John Campbell for what may be his last appearance before this committee. The past 18 months have seen significant transition in Afghanistan and, during this time, you have provided critical leadership to the men and women under your command as well as mentorship to many of our Afghan partners. As you look forward to your planned retirement, I would also like to congratulate you on the extraordinary service you have provided our Nation over your decades in uniform. I would also like to thank your family for the sacrifices they have made and support they have provided.

As President Obama announced on October 15, 2015, U.S. troop levels will remain at 9,800 personnel for most of 2016, with a planned reduction to 5,500 personnel by January 1, 2017. Our forces, in conjunction with our NATO and other allies continue to (1) train, advise and assist the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces, or ANDSF, and (2) conduct counterterrorism operations. Key to enabling both missions, the President also announced in October that our troops would “remain at a small number of bases, including at Bagram, Jalalabad in the east, and Kandahar in the south” rather than falling back to a Kabul-centric footprint.

This adequately staffed and geographically dispersed approach has allowed us to support our missions in Afghanistan and encourage political and governmental reforms by President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah. It also signals to our allies of our resolve and the need for their continued commitment.

The ANDSF recently completed their first calendar year bearing sole responsibility for the security of Afghanistan, albeit with significant enabling support from the Coalition. The past year presented the ANDSF with an array of challenges, but they maintained their overall operational coherence despite a notable shift in Taliban operations from seasonal fighting to a continuously sustained effort, the emergence of the Islamic State in the Khorasan Province or IS-KP, and the continuing threat posed by al Qaeda and others. General Campbell, I look forward to your assessment of the performance of the ANDSF over the past year and plans for addressing remaining capability shortfalls.

Given the dynamic security environment in Afghanistan, it is important that we continually evaluate the assumptions underpinning our force posture in Afghanistan. As Lieutenant General Nicholson stated last week, if confirmed, he intends to take the first few months of his command to assess what capabilities and associated number of troops he believes will need to remain in Afghanistan in order to successfully carry out the train, advise and assist and counterterrorism missions.

I believe that additional troop withdrawals from Afghanistan should be conditions-based and that any recommendations resulting from Lieutenant General Nicholson's assessment should be given extraordinary weight. General Campbell, I hope you will share with the Committee your views on the number of troops and pace of withdrawal you would recommend for 2016 and whether events of the past year have illuminated ways in which we can better enable security operations by the Afghans.

Lastly, as we look forward to the 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit in July, it will be important for the National Unity Government led by President Ghani and Chief Executive Officer Abdullah to demonstrate progress on anti-corruption and other governance initiatives to give the international community confidence that its assistance is being effectively utilized. Continued international support is going to be very important over the next few years. General Campbell, I

would welcome your assessment of progress on these issues and how your command is assisting the Afghans in providing accountability for support provided through the Afghanistan Security Forces Fund and other sources.

2016 is going to be a critical year of transition for Afghanistan and decisions by the U.S. and our coalition partners over the next few months could significantly impact the trajectory of the country. I believe steady, predictable U.S. presence and assistance is necessary for continued success.

General Campbell, I thank you again for your service to your country.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.