

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF
GENERAL JOHN F CAMPBELL, USA
COMMANDER
U.S. FORCES—AFGHANISTAN
BEFORE THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN
6 OCTOBER 2015
Version 1.9_FINAL

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I. Introduction

Over 14 years have passed since we commenced military operations in Afghanistan, and we have not forgotten the original motivations for our mission, and why we remain. *U.S. Forces-Afghanistan (USFOR-A) remains focused on our most vital national security interest: protecting the U.S. homeland. In this all-important endeavor, we continue to be successful.* Through our continued presence, active support of the Afghan National Defense & Security Forces (ANDSF), and Counter-Terrorism (CT) operations, we are preventing Afghanistan from once again becoming a safe haven for al Qaeda, other international extremist groups, and their hosts.

Since 2001, the extraordinary efforts of both our conventional and special operations forces (SOF) have ensured that another terrorist attack originating from Afghanistan and directed against the U.S. homeland has not occurred. Today, U.S. SOF, alongside our Afghan counterparts, continue to impose considerable pressure on what remains of the terrorist networks that attacked us.

Simultaneously, U.S. advisors and their Coalition counterparts continue to provide invaluable support and oversight of the Afghan Security Institutions (ASI) at the ministerial-level, ANDSF units at the corps-level, and Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF) at the tactical-level.

Working by, with, and through our Afghan partners, our advisors serve as our primary means to improve the ANDSF's capabilities and build their self-sustainability.

Yet in spite of our considerable progress, it is clear that our campaign will remain a challenging one. The National Unity Government (NUG) and the enemy are still locked in a fierce struggle. While I do not consider the insurgency capable of overthrowing the NUG by force, the enemy remains

capable and lethal. The ANDSF, in turn, have thus far proven unable to eradicate al Qaeda entirely or compel the Taliban (TB) to negotiate a political settlement. In an ongoing, unstable security environment, other extremists groups are emerging to include Daesh, or the Islamic State in Khorasan Province (IS-KP). These nefarious elements continue to sow fear among the Afghan population. The insurgents also continue to inflict a serious, disruptive effect on the NUG's ability to govern. The war continues to undermine public confidence in the NUG and stymie economic progress, thereby prompting the exodus of tens of thousands of Afghans.

The ANDSF have had to adapt during a year of significant transition. There are still a few weeks left in the traditional Fighting Season, and intense combat continues in several parts of the country. Overall, the ANDSF have rendered a creditable overall performance for a young force that has been severely tested, but has remained resilient. In the wake of our drawdown since 2011 and drop in enabler support, the ANDSF have taken ownership of the fight. They have admittedly faltered at times; however, they continue to evolve, improve, and fight hard in spite of increased casualties. Significantly, they have demonstrated no signs of fracturing.

II. Results of this Fighting Season (FIGHTING SEASON) / State of the ANDSF

Before further evaluating the results of this Fighting Season, it is important to place this year in *context*. This year has been unique for many reasons. In the wake of the Coalition's redeployment, the ANDSF and insurgents both accepted that this fighting season could be decisive. There was no winter lull, and since February, the fighting has been nearly continuous. Casualties on both sides have risen, and violence has moved beyond the traditional insurgent strongholds.

Other factors are also contributing to the uptick in casualties and spread of violence. Pakistan Military (PAKMIL) operations have displaced foreign fighters into eastern and northern Afghanistan. The emergence of Daesh, or the Islamic State-Khorasan Province (IS-KP), has further complicated the theater landscape, and potentially, expanded the conflict. Most recently, the Taliban have increased the tempo of their operations in order to reassert their prominence within the insurgent syndicate after the announced death of their spiritual leader, Mullah Mohammed Omar (MMO).

We are also now seeing how our redeployment and transition from combat operations to TAA have changed battlefield dynamics. Only a few years ago, our Coalition numbered over 140,000 military personnel. Now our force is comprised of fewer than 14,000 of which approximately 10,000 are U.S. servicemen and women. In years past, our aircraft provided responsive and often decisive close air support (CAS) to Coalition and Afghan troops in contact. This is no longer the norm—but the exception. Our force reduction, drop in enablers, and resultant CAS gap have created challenges for the ANDSF; they have understandably struggled at times to adjust.

Within this context, the fluidity of the current security situation is not surprising. This Fighting Season, the Taliban surged forces into northern Helmand. Most recently, they overran Kunduz. Nevertheless, the ANDSF rallied and regained control of most of the areas lost in Helmand, just as they have successfully retaken other ground temporarily lost throughout this Fighting Season. I am confident that they will regain control of Kunduz as well. Still, the Taliban achieved their aim in Kunduz.

The fighting in Kunduz underscores several shortcomings in the ANDSF to include poor intelligence fusion, lack of cross-pillar coordination, and sub-optimal utilization of their forces. They do not possess the necessary combat power and numbers to protect every part of the country. This makes it very difficult for the ANDSF to counter the Taliban's ability to temporarily mass, seize an objective, and then blend back into the population when confronted with an ANDSF counterattack. Hence, a reprioritization of the ANDSF's security efforts within the framework of their larger, multi-year campaign will be required at the conclusion of this Fighting Season. They also need to improve the responsiveness, flexibility, and preparedness of their forces at the tactical and operational levels. Ultimately, ANDSF leaders also need to discern better when to take the offensive, when to defend, and where to assume risk.

Despite these shortcomings, however, the ANDSF have displayed courage and resilience. They are still holding. GIRoA retains control of Kabul, Highway 1, its provincial capitals (with the exception of Kunduz for now), and nearly all district centers. The ANDSF are effectively protecting the principal population centers. It is also apparent that our advisory, resourcing, and contracting support and financial backing are strengthening their resolve and building their systems and processes.

In general, *I would characterize the ANDSF's performance this fighting season as uneven and inconsistent.* They have learned some hard lessons from their mistakes. On the positive side, when the ANDSF seize the initiative, deliberately plan their operations, and coordinate their actions across the security pillars, they achieve notable results. When they execute deliberate, cross-pillar operations that are thoroughly planned and resourced, they are highly successful. On the negative

side, when they act hastily and employ their forces in a haphazard, uncoordinated manner such as in Helmand, they are far less effective. They have also struggled to optimize their force laydown and employment. They remain tethered to isolated checkpoints and static defenses, which increases their vulnerability and reduces their ability to maneuver effectively.

The ANDSF's mixed performance underlines both their weaknesses and strengths. A closer examination of ANDSF actions and inactions in Helmand in August and September underscores this point. Elements of the 215th Corps and local police units responded poorly to the initial insurgent attacks on Now Zad and Musa Qala. To bolster the faltering ANDSF, I directed the immediate employment of our Advise & Assist Cell-Southwest (AAC-SW) and additional elements from NATO's Special Operations Component Command-Afghanistan (NSOCC-A). We also provided CAS for ANDSF units in-extremis. Fortunately, the Afghans recovered and counter-attacked. While the tactical situation remains challenging in Helmand, it is clear that the reinforced ANDSF have blunted the Taliban offensive there.

The outcome in Helmand could have undoubtedly been much different. President Ghani responded decisively to the crisis, and after a frustrating start, senior ANDSF leaders took control of the situation. Our advisors and enablers provided invaluable support, without which, the ANDSF would most likely have suffered significantly more casualties and a strategic setback. These events underscore that *the ANDSF still require broad support*. They have repeatedly shown that without key enablers and competent, operational-level leaders, they cannot handle the fight alone in this stage of their development. Ultimately, I am convinced that improved leadership and accountability will address most of their deficiencies. ANDSF soldiers

and police perform well when they are well led and appropriately resourced. That is why our insistence on sound leadership and strict accountability remains our top priority for our TAA programs and activities. However, it will take time for the Afghans to build their human capital.

The Afghan Special Security Forces (ASSF), in particular, have demonstrated improved proficiency in the last year. Many military analysts consider them the best SOF in the entire region. Their commando units are now conducting raids independently using their own intelligence to drive their operations. The Special Mission Wing (SMW), recently aligned under the Ministry of Defense (MoD), is also executing long-range sorties in low illumination. Working together as envisioned, the commando units and SMW are frequently carrying out unilateral direct action missions against insurgent leaders and facilitators. These are remarkable achievements, which reflect the maturation of their formidable capabilities and the overall potential for the ANDSF writ large.

While the conventional ANDSF still have capability gaps and shortfalls, they do possess and are capable of leveraging significant enabling assets to fight the insurgents (e.g., heavy mortars, D-30s howitzers, armed Mi-17s, MD-530 attack helicopters, armored vehicles, etc. and dedicated training for these platforms.) The insurgents have none of these.

ANDSF Attrition

Of note, ANDSF operational tempo (OPTEMPO) has been twice as high in the first nine months of 2015 than 2014. Not surprisingly, ANDSF casualty rates have also increased this year. (The ANDSF have, however, inflicted far greater casualties on the enemy.) The combination of an

increased OPTEMPO, assumption of greater security responsibilities, rapid drawdown of Coalition forces and enabler support, and the aggressive pursuit of the enemy all contributed to a marked increase in ANDSF casualty rates. The ANP and Afghan Local Police (ALP) have borne a disproportionate share of these losses. The ALP are not as well equipped or trained as other ANDSF. They have often been misemployed as regular ANP in distant checkpoints even though they should only operate within their local villages.

A high ANDSF attrition rate, which accounts for casualties and all other losses to the force, has impacted combat readiness. Conspicuously, non-battle attrition, particularly unauthorized absences, have induced approximately 70% of the ANDSF's personnel losses. If present rates continue, attrition will pose increasingly significant challenges to force generation, development, and readiness over time. The main causes of ANDSF absenteeism are assessed as poor leadership, high operational tempo, inadequate soldier/police care, and poor force management. They have sometimes failed to relieve forces committed in combat areas for sustained periods. We continue to help the Afghans reduce combat casualties and to address systemic causes of attrition in order to ensure the long-term health and sustainability of their forces.

Persistent ANDSF Capability Gaps

The ANDSF's uneven performance this Fighting Season underscores shortfalls that will persist well beyond this year. Capability gaps still exist in fixed and rotary-wing aviation, combined arms, intelligence, logistics, maintenance, and sustainment. Other needed areas of improvement include resource management, cross-pillar synchronization, and intelligence-based operations. One of the greatest tactical challenges for the ANDSF this Fighting Season has been overcoming the Afghan

Air Force's (AAF) still extremely limited organic CAS capability. These shortfalls can be rectified over time if the appropriate time, money, and resources are allocated, and most importantly, ANDSF leaders continue to mature and develop sufficiently to implement these changes and needed reforms.

I remain concerned about the long-term viability of the ANDSF. Succinctly, *Afghanistan cannot afford its security forces—particularly at their present size.* Yet their current numbers are needed to contend with the scale of the threat. If we sharply reduce their forces now, it will have a detrimental effect. The international community currently funds over 90% of the ANDSF's operating costs. The U.S. covers the majority of this amount. We must assume that that the ANDSF will not be self-sustainable for several years to come. At this stage, without adequate international and U.S. funding support and an appropriate Coalition troop presence to oversee the proper expenditure of such funds, the ANDSF could potentially collapse.

Advisory Efforts

At the security ministries, our advisors continue to focus on building ASI systems, processes, and national ANDSF sustainment capabilities. They are also working to improve integration among the different security pillars: military, police, and intelligence services. At the corps-level, our advisors continue to concentrate on developing the ANDSF planning capacity, command and control, operational capabilities, unit logistics, and operational sustainment.

Our advisors at the ministries and our regional Train, Advise, & Assist Commands (TAACs) continue to serve as important sensors and touch points that allow us to verify and validate Afghan reporting while reinforcing the use of organizational systems and processes. They

enable the Afghans to see themselves and to understand that they possess adequate supplies and equipment. Our advisors routinely find that reported shortages in operational units are most often the result of failures in accounting and distribution rather than actual deficiencies. We are assisting the Afghans to break the culture of hoarding and eliminate false claims of shortages in order to garner more resources and assistance. At all levels, our advisors also continue to emphasize and enforce Afghan financial transparency and accountability of donor resources.

III. State of the Threat

Throughout this Fighting Season, Al Qaeda, TB, Haqqani Network (HQN), Daesh, and other extremist groups have challenged GIROA (and at times, each other) as they exerted their influence and vied for prominence. Collectively, these enemies will present formidable challenges to the Afghan government, ANDSF, USFOR-A, and the Coalition for the remainder of 2015 and beyond.

In 2015, al Qaeda has attempted to rebuild its support networks and planning capabilities with the intention of reconstituting its strike capabilities against the U.S. homeland and Western interests. Due to our constant pressure, however, al Qaeda activities are now more focused on survival than on planning and facilitating future attacks. It will be critical that, in coordination with our Afghan partners, our comprehensive CT efforts continue to apply pressure against the al Qaeda network in order to prevent its regeneration, and the corresponding threat it represents to our homeland.

The Taliban established ambitious goals for this Fighting Season in hopes of capitalizing upon our transition from combat operations to advising and exploiting ANDSF vulnerabilities in their first year entirely in the lead. Their stated strategic objectives were to seize at least one provincial capital and multiple district centers, and control and hold more territory. The Taliban have attempted to gain more control of the countryside in order to expand their freedom of movement and action. They have been at least partially successful in accomplishing these goals. In the absence of Coalition CAS, they have also been more willing to mass their forces. Their main effort has focused, as usual, on retaining and expanding their traditional strongholds in Pashtun-dominated areas in the south. However, as demonstrated by recent events in Kunduz, they have also extended their influence in the north, which has further strained the ANDSF by extending their lines of operation and ability to command and control their forces over long distances. Overall, the Taliban remain a resilient, adaptable, and capable foe in spite of markedly increased casualties this year.

The death of Mullah Mohamed Omar (MMO) has generated a critical juncture for the TB. It is still unclear whether his death will lead to greater cohesion or splintering within the movement. Moreover, it is uncertain whether current infighting among the Taliban will undermine or aid reconciliation efforts. For now, Mullah Akhtar Mansour, the self-proclaimed successor to MMO, continues to exert considerable effort to legitimize his position and consolidate his power. The recent Taliban success in Kunduz may bolster Mansour's authority and potentially quell his rivals.

Al-Zawahiri, the leader of al Qaeda, recently announced their support of Mullah Mansour. He subsequently accepted their pledge of loyalty. Of note, he also named Siraj Haqqani, a known ally of al Qaeda, as one of his deputy emirs. Whether the TB's renewed partnership with al Qaeda will shift the TB's targeting efforts beyond Afghanistan has yet to be determined.

The Taliban maintain an adaptive propaganda apparatus, which they will continue to leverage to influence the Afghan people, the international community, and their supporters. Their adept use of social media to advertise their operations in Kunduz serves as a clear example of their capabilities. The Taliban will strive to shape perceptions in the information space, despite their mixed military performance, continued political failures, and moral hypocrisy.

Based in, and operating from Pakistan, HQN remains the most virulent strain of the insurgency. It presents one of the greatest risks to Coalition forces, and it continues to be an al Qaeda facilitator. HQN shares the Afghan Taliban goal of expelling Coalition forces, overthrowing the Afghan government, and re-establishing an extremist state. HQN fighters lead the insurgency in several eastern Afghan provinces, and they have demonstrated the intent and capability to launch and support high profile and complex attacks against the Coalition. In response to several dangerous threat streams against Coalition and Afghan personnel—particularly in Kabul—ANDSF and U.S. SOF have stepped up security operations against HQN. These operations have successfully disrupted several HQN attack plans that sought to inflict significant casualties on the force. It will take a concerted AF/PAK effort to reduce the effectiveness and capabilities of HQN.

The Emergence of the Islamic State in Afghanistan

Daesh remains one of my Priority Intelligence Requirements. In the last year, we have observed the movement's increased recruiting efforts and growing operational capacity. We now classify Daesh as "operationally emergent." Many disaffected TB, including Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) members, have rebranded themselves as Daesh. This rebranding is most likely an attempt to attract media attention, solicit greater resources, and further increase recruitment. We have not seen, however, a wholesale convergence of other insurgent groups collaborating with Daesh. Nor have we detected a large influx of foreign fighters joining the movement.

While they do yet possess the capacities or capabilities of the Taliban, Daesh's emergence has nonetheless challenged the ANDSF, National Directorate of Security (NDS), and GIRoA political leadership. We have not seen any indication, however, that Daesh is capable of waging a unified campaign to challenge GIRoA at this point. Notably, the ANDSF recently initiated its first named operation against Daesh. In the near term, we expect most Daesh operations to remain directed against the TB, although attacks against nearby ANDSF or other soft targets of opportunity are possible.

Of the 34 provinces in Afghanistan, a recent UN report indicates that Daesh has varying degrees of presence in all but nine. The majority of its fighters are located in the east, specifically Nangarhar Province. In the near term, we predict that they will continue to recruit and grow their numbers, using higher pay and small-scale, successful attacks as recruitment tools.

Perhaps the greatest threat that Daesh presents to the entire region is not its emerging combat power, but its virulent, extremist ideology. Daesh's success in the Middle East is beginning to attract new adherents in Central and South Asia. While many jihadists still view al Qaeda as the moral foundation for global jihad, they view Daesh as its decisive arm of action. Daesh's propaganda and recruiting efforts, furthermore, already demonstrate remarkable sophistication. President Ghani has remarked, "If Al Qaeda is Windows 1.0, then Daesh is Windows 7.0."

President Ghani has been very circumspect about the Daesh threat. While some have accused him of exploiting fears of Daesh for political aims, I do not believe these criticisms are warranted. Daesh has grown much faster than we anticipated, and its continued development in Afghanistan presents a legitimate threat to the entire region. Its adherents have already committed acts of brutality that have shocked Afghan sensibilities. Moreover, Daesh senior leadership has publically declared its goals of reclaiming Khorasan Province, which extends from the Caucuses to Western India, as its spiritual home. For these reasons, Ghani has sensibly used the evolution of Daesh as a pretext for regional engagement on a host of security and economic issues.

IV. Afghanistan/Pakistan (AF/PAK) Relations & Potential Reconciliation with the Taliban

The role of Pakistan remains integral to stability in Afghanistan. Historical suspicions and competing interests have long characterized Afghanistan/Pakistan (AF/PAK) relations. While difficulties are likely to persist past 2016, there are indicators that relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan could potentially thaw despite ongoing terrorist attacks in both countries.

Nonetheless, considerable obstacles persist. It is clear, however, that for GIROA to reconcile with the Taliban, rapprochement with Pakistan will most likely have to occur first.

To this end, there are ongoing efforts to strengthen ties between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Yet for every two steps forward in AF/PAK relations, another is seemingly taken backwards. For example, Pakistan's emergence as a broker and arbiter in formal talks between the GIROA and the Taliban in July brought all parties to the table. However, subsequent terrorist attacks in Kabul in August, which coincided with the emergence of new Taliban leadership, precipitated widespread Afghan backlash and stalled further talks.

The common threat of violent extremism can still serve as a catalyst to improve cooperation between the two countries. Pakistan, like Afghanistan, has suffered greatly at the hands of terrorists and violent extremists. The recent Pakistani Taliban (TTP) attack on a Pakistan Air Force base serves as a case in point. Senior Pakistani military officers have repeatedly declared that they can no longer discriminate between "good and bad" terrorists. They appear to be taking meaningful actions to back up their words. Aggressive PAKMIL operations over the last year have applied considerable pressure on extremists operating in the border region and Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), although additional pressure must still be applied against HQN and the Taliban more broadly.

Resolute Support serves as a key facilitator and interlocutor for Afghan and Pakistani military officials. We continue to actively encourage and enable the Afghan and Pakistani officers to meet and coordinate their security efforts through key leader engagements and monthly, one-star

meetings at the Resolute Support Tripartite Joint Operations Center (RSTJOC). We assess that AF/PAK political and military relations are likely to improve, albeit only incrementally and on a transactional basis.

V. Challenges and Opportunities

All aspects of Afghan society remain in a state of flux as we approach the end of 2015.

Challenging political and security transitions continue to occur simultaneously. The unstable security environment and lack of investor confidence continue to foil economic growth. The flight of foreign capital and sharp reduction in spending, which had occurred at artificially high levels since 2001, has also negatively impacted the Afghan economy. Significant social tensions also persist (e.g., urban progressives versus rural conservatives; former mujahedeen versus former communists; technocrats versus warlords, etc.) Perceptions of declining security amidst extensive political, economic, and social upheaval have induced tens of thousands of Afghans to flee the country. The loss of talented human capital, or “brain drain”, is particularly worrisome as gifted, educated individuals are desperately needed to lead Afghanistan through this time of transition.

Within the context of these multiple transitions and turmoil, the NUG presents both significant promise and uncertainty. President Ghani and CE Abdullah have proven to be amenable to working not only with one another for the greater good of Afghanistan, but also with the international community, NATO, and the U.S. Ghani and Abdullah have both declared the U.S. to be Afghanistan’s fundamental, foundational partner and its most critical relationship. Both are also committed to addressing the challenges of corruption and nepotism. Both are likewise

supportive of the rights of women and their empowerment in Afghan society. Additionally, both are committed to achieving an enduring peace in Afghanistan and the region.

We now have an opportunity with the NUG. However, Afghan leadership vacancies, which persist at the local, provincial, and national levels, continue to hinder the NUG's progress and the effectiveness of our supporting efforts. Afghan parliamentarians, unfortunately, have often vetoed qualified candidates for extraneous or simply political reasons. An attorney general has yet to be appointed, and the Acting Minister of Defense (MINDEF) continues to serve in spite of the Afghan Parliament's rejection of his candidacy.

While Ghani and Abdullah have developed an effective, trusting, and complementary relationship, their respective supporters often clash. Both leaders must resolve how they will address and placate their constituents while still promoting good governance and the fundamental pillars of their recently published National Security Policy. Fortunately, the very competitive political dynamics that often threaten gridlock in the current Afghan government also promise that, when policies are set, the vast majority of legitimate Afghan political interests will be represented.

Despite myriad challenges, the fundamental partnership between the Coalition and the Afghan Government, to include ASI and ANDSF, remains durable. The difference between the Ghani administration and the previous administration is like night and day. Throughout USFOR-A, we have developed close professional relationships with nearly all senior Afghan leaders, who have welcomed U.S. support and assistance. At every level, Coalition and Afghan leaders continue to

work together in pursuit of shared strategic objectives. Moreover, the Afghan government, civil leaders, and military commanders demonstrate a growing appreciation for the Coalition's efforts. Afghan leaders are genuine in their gratitude for our shared sacrifice and commitment to their nation. I have also seen our Afghan partners develop a sense of ownership and pride in their army and police force. Afghan citizens realize and appreciate that they now have an increasingly credible, professional security apparatus.

President Ghani has asked NATO and the U.S. to provide some flexibility in our planning to account for the fact that his government remains in transition while the threats it faces are diversifying. He has asserted that a sustained Coalition and U.S. presence provides actual and psychological stability to the country as the new government solidifies. He recognizes, moreover, that his new administration will require considerable time and effort to address the challenges of systemic corruption. He has also acknowledged that while the ANDSF are better equipped and trained than ever, much work remains to build their bureaucratic processes and systems as well as improve their leader development.

VI. Conclusion

In closing, the challenges before us are still significant. In an extremely tough fight, the ANDSF continue to hold. They have remained resilient and have not fractured. When properly led, they are a formidable force. Fully supported by a commander-in-chief who supports his forces, embraced by the Afghan people, and backstopped by our military advisors, resources, and enablers, the ANDSF and Afghanistan's future and prospects for an eventual peace still remain promising.

If we were to fail in this worthwhile mission, Afghanistan would once again become a sanctuary for al Qaeda and other terrorists bent on attacking our interests and citizens abroad and at home.

Similarly, if a security vacuum were to emerge, other extremist networks such as Daesh would also rapidly expand and sow unrest throughout Central and South Asia.

The hard work and sacrifices of countless Coalition military personnel and civilians over the last 14 years have created the conditions in which the Afghans can and are now taking responsibility for their own security and governance. *The Afghans welcome the opportunity to shape their destiny, but they still desire, need, and deserve our assistance.* Our support, however, cannot and should not be indefinite or unconditional. The Afghans must continue to do their part; if they do, we should continue to exercise strategic patience and sustain our commitment to them.

Working together, we can be successful. A proactive, cooperative Ghani administration and committed ANDSF offer us a unique opportunity to develop further a meaningful strategic relationship in a volatile, but vital area of the world. Our continued efforts to stabilize Afghanistan will benefit the entire region, and in turn, offer greater security for the U.S. homeland and Americans at home and abroad.