

SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

STATEMENT OF  
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Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the situations in Afghanistan, where nearly 98,000 U.S. forces are currently deployed; in Pakistan; and in Iraq, where we are transitioning to a more normal military-to-military relationship. As this should be my last appearance before you, I want to thank you for your unwavering commitment to our national security and especially to our service members and their families. I greatly appreciate the tremendous support you have consistently given our military.

The security situation in Afghanistan is steadily improving. The military component of our strategy—to the extent it can be separated from the strategy as a whole—is meeting our objectives. Afghan and ISAF forces have wrested the initiative and momentum from the Taliban in several key areas of the country and have forced them out of critical population centers, particularly in the south and southwest. Some of these areas have been Taliban controlled for years. Our combined forces are placing sustained pressure on insurgent groups. As a result, the number of insurgent-initiated attacks has for several months been lower than it was at the same time last year. Security is holding in most cleared areas, particularly in those districts where governance and economic opportunity were also playing a constructive role. Critically, NATO members and other coalition partners remain committed.

As a result, the insurgents have predictably shifted tactics. Rather than confront Afghan and international security forces directly, insurgent groups have and will increasingly focus on high profile attacks as well as assassination attempts against high-level officials. Like the recent complex attack in Kabul and the assassination of former president Rabbani, these incidents are designed to reap a maximum strategic and psychological effect with minimal input. And make no mistake, combating an insurgency is about combating perceptions. We must not attribute more weight to these attacks than they deserve. They are serious and significant, but they do not represent a sea

change in the odds of military success. We will step up our protection of key officials, continue our pressure on the enemy, and patiently, inexorably expand the ANSF, their capability, and the territory they hold. I expect that following the consolidation of gains in Kandahar in the south and Helmand in the southwest, our forces will increasingly focus on eastern Afghanistan going into next year's campaign season. Given the sequencing of this campaign plan, we do not expect to see the full extent of the effects of our military operations until late next year.

While ISAF and Afghan forces are fighting, they are also transitioning security responsibilities. A sensible, manageable, and, most importantly, Afghan-led transition process is up and running. The first tranche of transitions – selected by President Karzai in March 2011 – has already changed hands. The three provinces and four districts in which ISAF forces have transferred lead for security responsibilities to the ANSF are home to nearly one quarter of the Afghan population. However, it is too early to judge how well Afghan structures handle transition, because the first tranche locations were already fairly developed and secure. The Afghan government and ISAF are receiving feedback from these districts and provinces and incorporating lessons drawn from the experience into future plans. President Karzai is expected to announce the areas in the second tranche of transitions in the next few weeks. I expect ISAF will be able to thin out forces and employ them elsewhere in the country, and as conditions on the ground allow, U.S. and other coalition forces will redeploy. As directed by the President, we will withdraw 10,000 American troops by the end of this year and complete the withdrawal of the remaining 23,000 surge troops by the end of next summer.

Vital to this process is ANSF development. Placing security responsibilities into Afghan hands rests on the availability of capable, credible, and legitimate Afghan security forces. The Afghan army and police have progressed in quantity, quality, and effectiveness far more than we thought possible one year ago. We have helped the ANSF to already reach their 2011 end strength goal of 305,600. They are ahead of schedule. More important,

the ANSF are in the fight, and the reviews from the field are increasingly positive. The Afghan National Police, whose capabilities and professionalism for a long time lagged behind the Army's, are also seeing capability gains. The ANSF now have a training base, and they will be taking on more force-development tasks during the coming year. Overwatch remains essential, and reports of human rights violations are serious and will be investigated and fixed. I expect the ANSF to be able to increasingly assume responsibility for securing Afghanistan and to meet the goal of assuming lead responsibility for security by the end of 2014.

Despite this steady progress in the areas of security and ANSF development, however, a successful military strategy alone cannot achieve our objectives in Afghanistan. Other critical problems remain, problems that will undermine hard-won gains if they are not addressed.

The fact remains that the Quetta Shura and the Haqqani Network operate from Pakistan with impunity. Extremist organizations serving as proxies of the government of Pakistan are attacking Afghan troops and civilians as well as U.S. soldiers. For example, we believe the Haqqani Network—which has long enjoyed the support and protection of the Pakistani government and is, in many ways, a strategic arm of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence Agency—is responsible for the September 13<sup>th</sup> attacks against the U.S. Embassy in Kabul. There is ample evidence confirming that the Haqqanis were behind the June 28<sup>th</sup> attack against the Inter-Continental Hotel in Kabul and the September 10<sup>th</sup> truck bomb attack that killed five Afghans and injured another 96 individuals, 77 of whom were U.S. soldiers. History teaches us that it is difficult to defeat an insurgency when fighters enjoy a sanctuary outside national boundaries, and we are seeing this again today. The Quetta Shura and the Haqqani Network are hampering efforts to improve security in Afghanistan, spoiling possibilities for broader reconciliation, and frustrating U.S.-Pakistan relations. The actions by the Pakistani government to support them—actively and passively—represent a growing problem that is undermining U.S. interests and may violate international norms, potentially

warranting sanction. In supporting these groups, the government of Pakistan, particularly the Pakistani Army, continues to jeopardize Pakistan's opportunity to be a respected and prosperous nation with genuine regional and international influence. However, as I will discuss later, now is not the time to disengage from Pakistan; we must, instead, reframe our relationship.

There is also notable lack of progress in improving governance and countering corruption in Afghanistan. Pervasive corruption, by criminal patronage networks that include government officials—at both national and local levels—impedes all efforts to consolidate tactical successes. Corruption makes a mockery of the rule of law, something demanded with increasing urgency by peoples across the region. It also hollows out and delegitimizes the very governing institutions to which we will be transitioning authority. Few efforts to improve government capabilities and legitimacy over the past several years have borne fruit, and without a serious new approach, systematic change in next three years, before 2015, increasingly seems improbable. If we continue to draw down forces apace while such public and systemic corruption is left unchecked, we will risk leaving behind a government in which we cannot reasonably expect Afghans to have faith. At best this would lead to continued localized conflicts as neighborhood strongmen angle for their cut, and the people for their survival; at worst it could lead to government collapse and civil war.

Pakistan also increasingly faces the threat of corruption. It consistently ranks among the most corrupt countries in the world by numerous international organizations. Corruption is a hidden tax that retards business investment and economic growth, makes politicians less responsive to people's needs, degrades the ability of the government to provide services, and undermines public confidence. Just as in Afghanistan, the people of Pakistan will struggle until the country's leadership addresses corruption head-on.

Despite these challenges and their implications for local and regional stability, al-Qaeda in this part of the world seems increasingly incapable. With Pakistan's help, we have disrupted al-Qaeda and its senior leadership in the border regions and degraded its ability to plan and conduct terror attacks. The deaths of al-Qaeda founder, Osama bin Laden, and a great number of other senior leaders and operators have put the organization in the worst position it has seen since the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks. While the terrorist group still retains the ability to conduct murderous attacks, with continued pressure on all fronts, the defeat of al-Qaeda's leadership and dismantlement of its operational capabilities in the region is within reach.

Our interests in the region, however, do not rest solely in the operational effectiveness of al-Qaeda's senior leadership. The United States, the countries in the region, and their neighbors all share interests in regional stability, nuclear surety, and increased prosperity. That stability is threatened by too many other factors for the United States to simply walk away once al-Qaeda is effectively crippled. We must and will remain steadfast partners with Afghanistan and, yes, work closely with Pakistan, as difficult or as uneven as that relationship might be. Even as we remain committed to a conditions based drawdown in Afghanistan and the transition of lead for security responsibilities by the end of 2014, we must further develop the ANSF. We should shape our ongoing assistance to Afghanistan so as to promote reliability, accountability, and representation in both governance and the economic environment. And we must continue to work with the government and military in Pakistan to forge a constructive relationship.

I have spent a great amount of time during the past four years cultivating a relationship with Pakistan's military. I have been dedicated to this task because I know the importance of this relationship, strained as it is, and because I recognize the difficulties Pakistan has had and the many sacrifices it has made in its own internal fight against terrorism. And despite deep personal disappointments in the decisions of the Pakistani military and government, I still believe that we must stay engaged. This is because while

Pakistan is part of the problem in the region, it must also be part of the solution. A flawed and strained engagement with Pakistan is better than disengagement. We have completely disengaged in the past. That disengagement failed and brings us where we are today. Thus, our engagement requires a combination of patience with understanding what is in Pakistan's national interests, and a clear-eyed assessment about what is in ours.

Even in the midst of extraordinary challenges in our relationship today, I believe we can take advantage of this situation and reframe U.S.-Pakistan relations. While the relationship must be guided by some clear principles to which both sides adhere, we can no longer simply focus on the most obvious issues. We must begin to address the problems that lie beneath the surface. We must also move beyond counter-terrorism to address long-term foundations of Pakistan's success – to help the Pakistanis find realistic and productive ways to achieve their aspirations of prosperity and security. Those foundations must include improved trade relations with the United States and an increasing role for democratic, civilian institutions and civil society in determining Pakistan's fate. We should help the Pakistani people address internal security challenges as well as issues of economic development, electricity generation, and water security. We should promote Indo-Pak cooperation and strategic dialogue. We should also help create *more* stakeholders in Pakistan's success by expanding the discussion and including the international community; isolating the people of Pakistan from the world right now would be counter-productive.

In summary, success in Afghanistan and in the broader region will require substantial efforts outside the realm of security—they are now largely in the political domain. We must address the unfinished business of safe havens in Pakistan, poor Afghan governance, and corruption for there to be any hope of enduring security in Afghanistan. We must work toward a reconciliation process that produces both an intra-Afghanistan compromise providing for a real redress of grievances and state-to-state interaction between Afghanistan and Pakistan to resolve matters of sovereign concern. And we

must agree upon a Strategic Partnership Declaration with Afghanistan that will clarify and codify our long-term relationship. Addressing these and other internal problems will require hard work by the Afghans and by the Pakistanis and also by us. We cannot afford to put off tackling these problems for later.

Turning briefly to Iraq, we have ended our combat mission there, and, over a year ago, we successfully transferred lead for security responsibilities to the Iraqi Security Forces. Iraq's military and political leaders are responding to the residual, but still lethal, threat from al-Qaeda and Iranian-sponsored militant groups. As a result, and despite a drawn-out government formation process, the security situation there remains stable, and the Iraqi people are increasingly able to focus on jobs and development. However, the end of the war in Iraq will not mean the end of our commitment to the Iraqi people or to our strategic partnership. We must focus on the future to help Iraq defend itself against external threats and consolidate a successful, inclusive democracy in the heart of the Middle East. As we continue to draw down forces through December 31, 2011, in accordance with the U.S.-Iraqi Security Agreement, we will transition to a more normal military-to-military relationship.

It has been a privilege working with this Committee over the past four years while serving as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and in my previous positions, as well. Your untiring efforts, while important in themselves to our nation's security, also serve as a much appreciated salute to our men and women in uniform and their families during this time of war. I thank you, and the entire Congress, on their behalf, for your unwavering support.