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STATEMENT OF
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INTERNATIONAL SECURITY ASSISTANCE FORCE AND US FORCES AFGHANISTAN
BEFORE THE HOUSE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
ON
AFGHANISTAN
16 MAR 2011

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Mr. Chairman, Representative Smith, it's a privilege to be here today with Undersecretary Flournoy to report on the situation in Afghanistan.

Before I proceed, however, I would like to offer my sincere condolences to the people of Japan as they recover from one of the worst natural disasters in their history. For many years now, Japan has been a stalwart partner in Afghanistan and has made many vital contributions to the mission. Our thoughts and prayers are with all those affected by the earthquake and the tsunami.

Bottom Line Up Front

As a bottom line up front, it is ISAF's assessment that the momentum achieved by the Taliban in Afghanistan since 2005 has been arrested in much of the country and reversed in a number of important areas. However, while the security progress achieved over the past year is significant, it is also fragile and reversible. Moreover, it is clear that much difficult work lies ahead with our Afghan partners to solidify and expand our gains in the face of the expected Taliban spring offensive. Nonetheless, the hard-fought achievements in 2010 and early 2011 have enabled the Joint Afghan-NATO Transition Board to recommend initiation this spring of transition to Afghan lead in several provinces. The achievements of the past year are also very important as I prepare to provide options and a recommendation to President Obama for commencement of the drawdown of the US surge forces in July. Of note, as well, the progress achieved has put us on the right azimuth to accomplish the objective agreed upon at last November's Lisbon Summit, that of Afghan forces in the lead throughout the country by the end of 2014.

Getting the Inputs Right

The achievements of 2010 and early 2011 have been enabled by a determined effort to get the inputs right in Afghanistan. With the strong support of the United States and the 47 other troop-contributing countries, ISAF has focused enormous attention and resources over the past two years on building the organizations needed to conduct a comprehensive, civil-military counterinsurgency campaign, on staffing those organizations properly, on developing – in close coordination with our Afghan partners – the requisite concepts and plans, and, above all, on deploying the additional forces, civilians, and funding needed. Indeed, more than 87,000 additional ISAF troopers and 1,000 additional civilians have been added to the effort in Afghanistan since the beginning of 2009. And Afghanistan's Security Forces have grown by over 122,000 in that time, as well.

The Comprehensive Approach

Getting the inputs right has enabled our forces, together with Afghan forces, to conduct the comprehensive campaign necessary to achieve our goals in Afghanistan. Our core objective is, of course, ensuring that Afghanistan does not once again become a sanctuary for Al Qaeda. Achieving that objective requires that we help Afghanistan develop sufficient capabilities to secure and govern itself. And that effort requires the execution of the comprehensive civil-military effort on which we are now embarked.

Over the past year, in particular, ISAF elements, together with our Afghan and international partners, have increased all the activities of our comprehensive campaign substantially. We have, for example, stepped up the tempo of precise, intelligence-driven operations to capture or kill insurgent leaders. In a typical 90-day period, in fact, precision operations by US special mission units and their Afghan partners alone kill or capture some 360 targeted insurgent leaders. Moreover, intelligence-driven operations are now coordinated with senior officers of the relevant Afghan ministries and virtually all include highly trained Afghan soldiers or police, with some Afghan elements now in the lead on these operations.

With your support, we have also expanded considerably joint ISAF-Afghan operations to clear the Taliban from important, long-held safe havens and then to hold and build in them. ISAF and Afghan troopers have, for example, cleared such critical areas as the districts west of Kandahar city that were the birthplace of the Taliban movement, as well as important districts of Helmand Province, areas that expand the Kabul security bubble, and select locations in the north where the Taliban expanded its presence in recent years. One result of such operations has been a four-fold increase in recent months in the number of weapons and explosives caches turned in and found. Another has been the gradual development of local governance and economic revival in the growing security bubbles. In fact, Marjah, the one-time hub of the Taliban and the illegal narcotics industry in central Helmand Province, held an election for a community council on March 1st during which 75 percent of registered voters cast a ballot. And as a result of improvements in the security situation there, the markets, which once sold weapons, explosives, and illegal narcotics, now feature over 1500 shops selling food, clothes, and household goods.

We have positioned more forces, as well, to interdict the flow of fighters and explosives from insurgent sanctuaries in Pakistan. And we will do further work with our Afghan partners to establish as much of a defense in depth as is possible to disrupt infiltration of Taliban and Haqqani Network members. Meanwhile, we are coordinating closely with the Pakistani Army to conduct ISAF operations that will provide the “anvil” on the Afghan side of the Durand Line against which Pakistani Taliban elements can be driven by Pakistani operations in the border areas.

Afghan National Security Force Development

With your support, we have also devoted substantial additional resources to the development of Afghanistan’s security forces. This effort is, of course, another important component of our comprehensive approach; indeed, it is arguably the most critical element in our effort to help Afghanistan develop the capability to secure itself. We have seen significant progress in this arena over the past year, though we have had to contend with innumerable challenges and our Afghan partners are the first to note that the quality of some elements is still uneven. The train and equip mission is, in fact, a huge undertaking, and there is nothing easy about it; however, the past year alone has seen Afghan forces grow by over one-third, adding some 70,000 soldiers and police. And those forces have grown in quality, not just in quantity. Investments in leader development, literacy, and institutions have yielded significant dividends. In fact, in the hard fighting west of Kandahar in late 2010, Afghan forces comprised some 60 percent of the overall force, and they fought with skill and courage.

The Afghan Local Police Initiative

President Karzai's Afghan Local Police initiative has also been an important addition to the overall campaign. It is, in essence, a community watch with AK-47s, under the local District Chief of Police, with members nominated by a representative Shura Council, vetted by the Afghan intel service, and trained by and partnered with Afghan Police and US Special Forces elements. The initiative does more than just allow the arming of local forces and the conduct of limited defensive missions; through the way each unit is established, this program mobilizes communities in self-defense against those who would undermine security in their areas. For that reason, the growth of these elements is of particular concern to the Taliban, whose ability to intimidate the population is limited considerably by it.

There are currently 70 districts identified for ALP elements, with each district's authorization averaging 300 ALP members. Twenty-seven of the district ALP elements have been validated for full operations, while the other 43 are in various stages of being established. This program has emerged as so important that I have put a conventional US infantry battalion under the operational control of our Special Operations Command in Afghanistan to increase our ability to support the program's expansion.

We have increased as well our efforts to enable the Afghan government's work and that of international community civilians to improve governance, economic development, and the provision of basic services. They are essential elements of the effort to shift delivery of basic services from Provincial Reconstruction Teams and international organizations to Afghan

government elements, thereby addressing President Karzai's understandable concerns about "parallel institutions."

And we have provided assistance for new Afghan government-led initiatives in reintegration, supporting the recently established Afghan High Peace Council and Provincial Peace and Reintegration Councils. Indeed, we recognize that we and our Afghan partners cannot just kill or capture our way out of the insurgency in Afghanistan; Afghan-led reintegration of reconcilable insurgents must also be an important element of the strategy – and it now is. In fact, some 700 former Taliban have now officially reintegrated with Afghan authorities and some 2,000 more are in various stages of the reintegration process.

All of these efforts are part of our comprehensive approach. And we have worked hard to coordinate ISAF activities with the international organizations and diplomatic missions in Afghanistan, as well as with our Afghan partners. We have also sought to ensure that we minimize loss of innocent civilian life in the course of our operations, even as we also ensure protection of our forces and our Afghan partners. Of note, a recently released UN study observed that civilian casualties due to ISAF and Afghan force operations decreased by just over 20% in 2010, even as our total forces increased by over 100,000 and significant offensive operations were launched. Our progress in this area notwithstanding, however, in view of several tragic incidents in recent weeks, I ordered a review of our Tactical Directive on the use of force by all levels of our chain of command and with the air crews of our attack helicopters. I

have also issued instructions on reducing damage to infrastructure and property to an absolute minimum. Counterinsurgents cannot succeed if they harm the people they are striving to protect.

Transition

As I noted at the outset, the Joint NATO-Afghan Transition Board has recommended to President Karzai and NATO leaders commencement of transition in select provinces in the next few months. President Karzai will announce these locations in his Nowruz speech on March 22nd. In keeping with the principles adopted by the North Atlantic Council to guide transition, the shifting of responsibility from ISAF to Afghan forces will be conducted at a pace determined by conditions on the ground with assessments provided from the bottom up so that those at operational command level in Afghanistan can plan the resulting “battlefield geometry” adjustments with our Afghan partners. According to the NATO principles, transition will see our forces thinning out, not just handing off, with reinvestment of some of the forces freed up by transition in contiguous areas or in training missions where more work is needed. Similar processes are also taking place as we commence transition of certain training and institutional functions from ISAF trainers to their Afghan counterparts. As we embark on the process of transition, we should keep in mind the imperative of ensuring that the transition actions we take will be irreversible. As the ambassadors of several ISAF countries emphasized at one recent NATO meeting, we’ll get one shot at transition, and we need to get it right.

2014

As a number of ISAF national leaders have noted in recent months, we need to focus not just on the year ahead, but increasingly on the goal agreed at Lisbon of having Afghan forces in the lead throughout Afghanistan by the end of 2014. Indeed, we need to ensure that we take a sufficiently long view to ensure that our actions in the months ahead enable long-term achievement in the years ahead. We have refined our campaign plan to do just that – and we are also now beginning to look beyond 2014, as well, as the United States and Afghanistan – and NATO and Afghanistan – discuss possible strategic partnerships. All of this is enormously reassuring to our Afghan partners – and of considerable concern to the Taliban. With respect to the Taliban, appreciation that there will be an enduring commitment of some form by the international community to Afghanistan is important to the insurgents’ recognition that reconciliation, rather than continued fighting, should be their goal.

Additional Issues

Before concluding, there are four additional issues I would like to highlight.

First, I am concerned that levels of funding for our State Department and USAID partners will not sufficiently enable them to build on the hard-fought security achievements of our men and women in uniform. Inadequate resourcing of our civilian partners could, in fact, jeopardize accomplishment of the overall mission. I offer that assessment, noting that we have just completed a joint civil-military campaign plan between US Forces Afghanistan and the US

Embassy which emphasizes the critical integration of civilian and military efforts in an endeavor such as that in Afghanistan.

Second, I want to express my deep appreciation for your support of vital additional capabilities for our troopers. The funding you have provided has, for example, enabled the rapid deployment of a substantial increase in the intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets supporting our forces. To take one example, we have increased the number of various types of persistent surveillance systems – essentially blimps and towers with optics – from 114 this past August to 184 at the present, with plans for continued increases throughout this year. Your support has also enabled the rapid procurement and deployment of the all terrain vehicle version of the mine resistant ambush protected family of vehicles, with 6,700 fielded since I took command. And, your support has continued to provide our commanders with another critical element of our strategy, the Commander’s Emergency Response Program funding that has once again proven absolutely invaluable as a way of capitalizing rapidly on hard-won gains on the ground. Indeed, CERP funding, the establishment of the Afghan Infrastructure Fund, and the specific authorization for the reintegration program have been instrumental in enabling key components of our overall effort.

Third, I should at this point also highlight the critical work of the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. These institutions are the largest donors to Afghanistan after the US, and they have been critical to the success of such projects as the Ring Road and the Uzbek-Afghan

railroad. We need these critical enabling institutions, and further US support for them will ensure that they are able to continue to contribute as significantly as they have in the past.

Fourth, I also want to thank you for the substantial funding for the development of the Afghan National Security Forces. The continued growth of Afghan forces in quantity, quality, and capability is, needless to say, essential to the process of transition of security tasks from ISAF forces to Afghan forces. And the resources you have provided for this component of our effort have been the critical enabler of it.

Conclusion

In closing, the past eight months have seen important, but hard-fought, progress in Afghanistan. Key insurgent safe havens have been taken away from the Taliban, numerous insurgent leaders have been killed or captured, and hundreds of reconcilable mid-level leaders and fighters have been reintegrated into Afghan society. Meanwhile, Afghan forces have grown in number and capability, local security solutions have been instituted, and security improvements in key areas like Kabul, Kandahar, and Helmand Provinces have, in turn, enabled progress in the areas of governance and development.

None of this has been easy. The progress achieved has entailed hard fighting and considerable sacrifice. There have been tough losses along the way. And there have been setbacks as well as successes. Indeed, the experience has been akin to that of a roller coaster ride. The trajectory,

however, has generally been upward since last summer – though there certainly have been significant bumps and difficult reverses at various points. Nonetheless, although the insurgents are already striving to regain lost momentum and lost safe havens as we enter the spring fighting season, we believe that we will be able to build on the momentum achieved in 2010 – though that clearly will entail additional tough fighting.

As many of you have noted in the past, our objectives in Afghanistan and in the region are of vital importance, and we must do all that we can to achieve those objectives. Those of us on the ground believe that the strategy on which we are embarked provides the best approach for doing just that, noting, as dialogue with President Karzai has reminded us at various junctures, that we must constantly refine our activities in response to changes in the circumstances on the ground. Needless to say, we will continue to make adjustments, in close consultation with our Afghan and international counterparts in Afghanistan, as the situation evolves.

Finally, I want to thank each of you for your continued support for our country's men and women in Afghanistan and their families. As I have noted to you before, nothing means more to them than knowing that what they're doing is important and knowing that their sacrifices are appreciated by their leaders and their fellow citizens back home. Each of you has sought to convey that sense to them, and we are grateful to you for doing so. Thank you very much.