

# **HASC Members' Briefing on Afghanistan/Pakistan**

## **Opening Remarks for Under Secretary Flournoy**

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Mr. Chairman (Rep. Buck McKeon, R-California); Ranking Member Smith (Adam Smith, D-Washington); and distinguished Members of the Committee.

Thank you for inviting us here to update you on Afghanistan.

As you know, in his December 2009 speech at West Point, President Obama announced a surge of 30,000 U.S. troops, with the clear objectives of seizing the initiative from the Taliban and reversing the momentum on the ground.

At that time, the President specified that the surge would not be open-ended, and that he would begin to reduce U.S. surge forces beginning in July 2011.

Last night, true to his word, President Obama announced to the American people that the United States is beginning a deliberate, responsible drawdown of our surge forces from Afghanistan. An initial drawdown of 10,000 troops will occur over the course of this year, with a further drawdown of the remainder of the surge by the end of summer 2012. Secretary Gates believes that this decision provides our commanders with the right mix of flexibility, resources, and time to continue building on our progress on the ground.

Even after the recovery of the surge forces, totaling 33,000 troops, we will still have about 68,000 U.S. service members in Afghanistan. That's more than twice the number as when President Obama took office. Clearly, this is not a "rush to the exits" that will jeopardize our security gains.

More importantly, at the end of summer 2012, when all of the surge forces are out, there will actually be more Afghan and Coalition forces in the fight than there are today.

That's because by the time we complete our drawdown, the Afghan National Security Forces will have added another 55,400 members, not including the Afghan Local Police.

The growth in the quantity and quality of the ANSF – which have fielded more than 100,000 additional forces over the past 18 months – is one of the critical conditions that is enabling the drawdown of U.S. surge forces.

More broadly, our strategy in Afghanistan is working as designed: The momentum has shifted to Coalition & Afghan forces, and together we have degraded the Taliban's capability and achieved significant security gains, especially in the Taliban's heartland in the south. These security gains are enabling key political initiatives to make progress. We have begun a transition process that will ultimately put Afghans in the lead for security nationwide by 2014. We are beginning to see reintegration and reconciliation processes gain traction, and we are discussing a strategic partnership with the Afghans to signal our enduring commitment to the Afghan people and to regional

peace and stability. Together, these initiatives promise a future Afghanistan that is stable, peaceful and secure.

I want to emphasize that this announcement in no way marks a change in American policy or strategy in Afghanistan. It is wholly consistent with the goals that President Obama and our allies agreed to at the NATO Lisbon Summit last year. At Lisbon, we committed to the gradual transfer of security leadership to the Afghans by the end of 2014 and to an enduring commitment to security partnership with Afghanistan to ensure that we never repeat the mistake of simply abandoning that nation to its fate and risking the reestablishment of an al Qaeda safe haven there.

I want to emphasize that although our progress in Afghanistan has been substantial and our strategy is on track, some significant challenges remain.

In the months ahead, we will be confronted by an enemy that will try to regain the momentum and territory that it has lost to Afghan and Coalition forces.

However, that enemy will face an Afghan population that is increasingly experiencing the benefits of security and self-governance. Those benefits will only become clearer as we begin the transition to full Afghan security responsibility in selected areas. Those communities will provide useful lessons on security and governance – as well as a potential model for other parts of the country.

Finally, let me emphasize how crucial it is for us to maintain a continuing role for our Coalition partners in Afghanistan – 48 countries with some 47,000 troops. These partner nations have made significant contributions and significant sacrifices. Even as we recognize the progress that we and our partners have made toward our shared goal of destroying terrorist safe havens, we must sustain this partnership to ensure that we ultimately leave behind an Afghanistan that will never again serve as a base for terrorist attacks on the United States and our allies.

Thank you, Distinguished Members of the Committee. That concludes my prepared remarks. ###