

HASC Hearing on Afghan National Security Forces

Opening Remarks for Under Secretary Flournoy

Chairman McKeon (R-California), Ranking Member Smith (D-Washington), and distinguished Members of this Committee:

I would like to begin by expressing my condolences to the family of former President Rabbani – a peacemaker who shared the vision of the vast majority of his nation’s people: the vision of a peaceful, stable Afghanistan.

This senseless killing must be seen for what it is: a desperate act by an insurgency that is losing ground.

As the insurgents’ ability to control territory has diminished, they are turning more toward asymmetric efforts, such as assassinations and high-profile attacks designed to capture public attention.

Such incidents cannot obscure the larger truth, which is that the number of insurgent attacks in Afghanistan as a whole is trending downward.

In fact, insurgent attacks in July and August declined sharply in most regions—including Kabul—compared to the same months in 2010, with the exception of a modest increase in RC-East.

A major reason for this progress is the development I came to speak with you about today: the improvement of the quantity and quality of the Afghan National Security Forces, comprised of the Afghan National Army (ANA) and the Afghan National Police (ANP). This improvement is due, in large part, to the “NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan”—known as NTM-A—which we established in 2009.

NTM-A, under the command of General Bill Caldwell, brought disparate efforts under one command and established iterative, professional, and standards-based training, none of which existed before.

The ANSF is on track to reach its October goal of 305,600 soldiers and police.

As we have been meeting our numerical goals, we have also focused intensely on improving the quality of the force, especially in the areas of literacy and operational performance.

NTM-A estimates that the ANSF will achieve 50 percent overall literacy rates at the third-grade level in 2012, with over 70,000 police and 55,900 soldiers having received some level of literacy training.

This represents a major accomplishment in a country where the literacy rate of the recruiting pool of 18-40 year olds is only 14 percent.

Through a range of training and mentoring programs, we are reducing the shortage of trained ANSF NCOs and officers. The ANSF NCO and officer corps grew by over 20,000 new leaders over the last two years – from 42,500 officers in 2009 to 61,800 in 2011.

Of equal importance has been our effort to improve the ANSF's operational performance. Partnering Afghan forces with U.S. and Coalition forces on the battlefield has greatly accelerated the ANSF's development.

In January of this year, there were 124 Afghan battalions and headquarters elements rated as "effective with coalition advisors" or "effective with coalition assistance". As of August, there are now 147 units with those ratings, out of 184 units assessed, and we expect this trend to continue, if not accelerate.

These are not mere statistics. We have seen progress where it matters most – in the field.

Despite the Taliban's claim that they intend to focus on transitioned provinces, the ANSF are demonstrating effectiveness in contested transition areas such as Lashkar Gah, where violence in August 2011 was 60 percent lower than August 2010, and where the ANSF have been fully responsible for the successful defeat of Taliban efforts to reverse transition.

Most recently, during the attack on the U.S. embassy and NATO headquarters earlier this month in Kabul, the ANP took the lead in responding, and carried out a complex operation that involved clearing placed munitions from each level of a multi-story building, and killing all 11 attackers. Tragically, five police officers, as well as 11 civilians, were killed in this attack by Taliban insurgents.

I want to note the continuing sacrifices of thousands of dedicated Afghan Army and Police officers and their families. Afghan security-force casualties over the last year have included over 2,500 killed and 6,000 wounded.

The ANSF are increasingly on the front lines, and bearing the brunt of hard fighting that continues. Their willingness to fight and die for their country is testimony to the determination we see in the new ANSF that we are helping to build.

Challenges remain, however, and we are working with our Afghan partners to address them. One is attrition. Monthly attrition in the ANA has averaged 2.3 percent since November 2009, as compared with our objective of 1.4 percent. Over the past twelve months, ANA attrition has ranged as high as 3.2 percent and as low as 1.9 percent.

Average monthly attrition in the Afghan National Police since November 2009 has been on target at 1.4 percent, and for the past twelve months has ranged from a high of 1.9 percent to a low of 1.0 percent.

Actual attrition is less than what those figures reflect, as many of the ANSF personnel who have earlier been taken off the rolls actually return to their units. In addition, working with the Afghans, we continue to implement programs to reduce attrition, including providing "soldier-care" training for leaders, extending the leave policy from 20 to 30 days, and implementing predictable rotation cycles for units.

Another key focus effort is building the enablers that will ultimately make the ANSF truly capable of independent operations. NTM-A has established 12 specialty schools that are training Afghans in areas ranging from engineering and intelligence to logistics and human resources. This will take time.

Finally, there is the challenge of sustainability. Here, we are doing our part to ensure we are good stewards of U.S. taxpayer dollars and that this investment is financially sustainable.

NTM-A is reducing overall costs of the ANSF through several efforts. These efforts include "Afghan First" initiatives, including purchasing locally produced furniture, boots, and uniforms. NTM-A has also found efficiencies within Afghan units by reevaluating equipping requirements. NMT-A has adjusted building standards to a more sustainable local norm. Some examples of these Afghan standards are fielding wash basins and clothes lines in place of modern washing machines, and installing ceiling fans in place of air conditioners. These steps reduce procurement costs, maintenance requirements, and long term demands for electricity and fuel.

Due to these cost saving efforts, there will be a \$1.6 billion reduction in the Fiscal Year 2012 budget request for funding to develop the ANSF. This will mean that Fiscal Year 2011 ANSF spending of \$11.7 billion will be the high point of our spending effort. We anticipate a decrease in

estimated future-year budget requests until we reach a sustainment level, which we are still defining.

The coming years will be critical for the ANSF, as they know that they will be in charge of providing security for the Afghan people in 2014. The ANSF has already begun assuming lead security over 25 percent of the Afghan population with the transition of seven provinces and municipalities this past summer.

Later this fall, President Karzai will receive the next set of transition recommendations from NATO commanders and his own ministers. He will then announce his decision, which could result in as much as 50 percent of the population living in transitioned areas in the coming months.

In summation, ANSF development is on track as a central element of our strategy. We are meeting our growth goals and improving quality and performance. And the ANA and ANP are stepping up to take more responsibility in the field, enabling both the transition process and the drawdown of our surge forces.

I want to close by offering my thanks. Your work on this Committee, along with the tireless efforts of our servicemen and women and civilian volunteers in the field, is building the foundation for meeting our core goal of disrupting, dismantling, and defeating Al Qaeda and ensuring that Afghanistan is never again a safe haven from which terrorists can attack the United States. ###