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HEARING ON U.S. STRATEGY IN AFGHANISTAN

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Mr. Chairman, distinguished members of the subcommittee, I welcome the opportunity to discuss our strategy in Afghanistan and its relationship to our efforts in Iraq. I have closely followed events in Afghanistan since the 1980s. From early 2003 through the middle of 2005, I served as the Afghanistan Policy Coordinator and a Special Adviser on Afghanistan in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, in which capacity I worked on Afghanistan policy in the interagency process and also deployed periodically to Kabul to provide policy support to Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad. In 2005 and 2006, I provided similar support to Ambassador Khalilzad in Baghdad. The subject of today's hearing – thinking through the strategies for success in both countries – is vitally important.

To begin, I wish to make six principal points, which I elaborate upon at greater length in the course of my statement:

First, in its white paper on Afghanistan and Pakistan issued in March 2009, the Obama administration demonstrated a correct understanding of the threat posed by the syndicate of violent extremists and their supporters in western Pakistan. It stated that the only way to defeat this threat is to stabilize Afghanistan through a proper counterinsurgency and state-building strategy, to strengthen Pakistan and cooperate in efforts to pin the extremists down in a limited geographic area, and work into western Pakistan by a variety of means to eliminate these groups.

Second, the portions of the McCrystal report that were leaked to the public represent a sound implementation plan for security-related aspects of President Obama's strategy, though the version made public lacks some elements that the Congress should inquire about in order to come to complete judgment. Specifically, the subcommittee should inquire about the geographic priorities or starting points for the counterinsurgency campaign, the template for creating and expanding local security in the rural areas, and the initial expectations for the rate at which contested areas will be secured as additional international and Afghan security forces are deployed.

Third, regarding the number of requested troops, I believe the subcommittee should press the administration on a simple question: What is the level of forces that will decisively turn around deteriorating security trends and create the basis for a virtuous cycle of improving security and governance? The challenges we face in Afghanistan arise in part because of an inadequate and incremental response to the escalation of enemy activity in 2006. The subcommittee should press the administration on what is the decisive force needed to respond to the current situation.

Fourth, the Obama administration has correctly placed emphasis on the need for the Karzai administration to improve governance. However, progress in this regard will not come through blandishments and hectoring. Instead, it will come by engaging with President Karzai in ways that show an understanding of the dilemmas and risks that he faces and coming to an agreement with him to take step-by-step improvements in governance while jointly managing the risks of reform.

Fifth, turning to Iraq, the stabilization of Iraq is a precondition for shifting additional forces to Afghanistan. It is therefore vitally important that we build on the successes in political reconciliation that has taken place among Iraqi groups, starting with the constitution drafting process in 2005 and culminating during and after the surge in 2007 and 2008. While we should not play a heavy-handed role, we should remain engaged and be willing to use our influence to catalyze constructive politics if needed or when opportunities arise.

Sixth, as we look to the future of region and the imperative to constrain the threat posed by Iran, the value of our relationships with Iraq and Afghanistan rises substantially. If one of the main challenges in the region is Iran's destabilizing actions, we need to think about our partnerships with these governments as opportunities, not burdens. This, in turn, requires us to develop longer-term and more ambitious plans for our relationships.

I would like to say a little more about the nature of the threat we face in Central and South Asia. It arises from what might be called a syndicate of violent extremist groups located in western Pakistan and supported by elements in Pakistan. It includes al Qaida, which seeks to target the United States and our friends and allies. However, the syndicate also includes groups that target Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, and Central Asia. This is best thought of as a single constellation of enemies that produces three threats: an insurgency seeking to destabilize Afghanistan, armed groups that act against Pakistan, and transnational terrorists and violent political movements based in western Pakistan but operating against distant targets.

The key point is that this threat is not divisible. We cannot work against just one element of the problem. If we were to focus only on the threat to Pakistan and abandon Afghanistan, as some advocate, the enemy will simply migrate across the border into Afghanistan, recreating the terrorist safe havens of the 1990s. If we were to focus only on stabilizing Afghanistan, we would leave ourselves open to the risk that the extremists could make gains against Pakistan, potentially destabilizing a nuclear weapons state. If we were to focus only on countering the transnational aspect of the threat, the footprint of the extremist groups would quickly spread into both Afghanistan and Pakistan. It has been an achievement of U.S. policy that the principal base of the threat is confined to a limited part of western Pakistan. The right approach is to keep it bottled up and to find ways to work into these sanctuaries, using local groups and other Pakistani and U.S. capabilities.

To defeat this multifaceted threat, U.S. strategy for Afghanistan in the widest sense requires five components. I would like to describe each component and to provide a brief assessment of our efforts to date and proposed plans, as embodied in the statements of the Obama administration and the public portions of the report from Gen. McCrystal.

Rebuilding political legitimacy. Because insurgency and counterinsurgency constitute armed political struggle, it is vitally important that we work in partnership with Afghan leaders to build the legitimacy of the political order we seek to support. The legitimacy gained through the Bonn Process, which led to the adoption of an enlightened constitution and the election of a national government, created a sound political foundation. It ensured that Afghans are in charge of governing Afghanistan and that the United States and the international community are seen as friends, not occupiers. Though polls still indicate that Afghans support their government, its legitimacy has eroded, principally because it has not met expectations in terms of providing security and good governance.

There is no substitute for working with President Karzai and other national leaders. Those who argue that we should work around the national government and focus only on dealing with local actors or delivering services or development at the local level ignore two risks. First, if we do not help Afghans build an effective state, we are consigned to an indefinite engagement in Afghanistan. Second, if we substitute ourselves for the Afghan state, we will become deeply enmeshed in local politics that we do not understand and will risk being viewed as an occupier. While we should have aid efforts directed at the local level, a major focus of our engagement at the national level should be to build up the sovereign capabilities of the Afghan state. An effective state existed in Afghanistan for much of the twentieth century. There is no reason we cannot help Afghans restore it.

In this regard, President Karzai has strengths and weaknesses. He has significant political knowledge and skills in an Afghan context. He knows his country and his people at a profound level. He has an acute sense of the internal balance of political power in the Afghan system. His network of relationships reaches deeply into the society. However, he is often inconsistent and nonsystematic in decision making. He does not have a facility for the strategic thinking and follow through needed to be a state-builder. Thus, a key to developing a more productive relationship with President Karzai is for the United States to take advantage of his abilities and compensate for his shortcomings.

In the past, he has been most successful when four conditions obtained. First, Karzai has to have confidence in his relationship with the United States, thereby rendering him willing to take on difficult internal political actors. Second, senior U.S. leaders in the field need to be deeply engaged with him in a process I would call collaborative problem solving, which entails working together to define the nature of major challenges, appropriate options, and optimal courses of action. Third, he needs to be supported by a team of senior Afghan officials, in the presidential office and key ministries, who can enable him to turn policy into programs and actions. Fourth, the international community, and particularly the United States, should be engaged in systematic programs to build key institutions, working with effective ministers and compensating for weaknesses in Afghan human resources resulting from more than two decades of conflict.

When these conditions have been absent, President Karzai has faltered, often badly. If he lacks confidence in the United States, his default approach is to manage the balance of power within the Afghan system. In part, this entails minimizing the potential threat posed by bad actors or spoilers by accommodating them, typically by allowing their patronage networks to control or take root in state institutions. This is one of the principal sources of the problem of corruption. At the same time, he seeks to create his own patronage networks to strengthen his own position in the internal balance of power.

For several years, the United States has pressed for reform and Karzai took some important actions. Yet, these have not been adequate. Going forward, Karzai must do more. However, it is counterproductive to engage him in adversarial confrontations. If you push him in this way, he will rely more, not less, on seeking support from problematic political actors or other regional powers. Instead, the administration needs to reset the relationship with Karzai. Our relationship should be based on the four-part formula noted above that creates the conditions for Karzai to be effective. It should be designed to align the goal of improved governance with Karzai's own definition of his personal political success. And in this way we can work the problem of corruption and governance jointly, ministry by ministry and province by province.

Securing contested areas. In terms of strategy for Afghanistan, the most significant positive step by the Obama administration was the decision in March 2009 to pursue a fully resourced counterinsurgency effort. At several points, a classic counterinsurgency approach has been tried – based on the formula of “shape, clear, hold, and build” – and it has worked. During 2003 and 2004, the Coalition command created an enduring security presence in contested areas and stabilized the country for the October 2004 election, resulting in several months with virtually no security incidents. In 2006 and 2007, U.S. officers in Regional Command East implemented this approach in parts of their area of operations. Even today, much of this area is “green” or “yellow,” rather than “red,” on maps showing security conditions. Also, in recent press reports, there are encouraging signs that this approach is working in places like Nawa, in Helmand province, where U.S. forces recently deployed. Now, the key is to fully resource such an approach to have a decisive effect on security trends in Afghanistan.

In a wider sense, the McCrystal report represents a major advance in terms of our strategic thinking in Afghanistan. It adopts the proven approach of making the security of the population the focal point of our efforts and the measure for our success. It recognizes that certain priority areas need to be secured first and that over time, as more Afghan capabilities become available, security can be built out into contested areas. It takes seriously the need to minimize civilian casualties and proposes concrete approaches to do so. For the first time, a U.S. commander has set forth a realistic estimate of the needed end strength of Afghan National Security Forces, including 240,000 troops for the Afghan National Army. It recommends partnering with Afghan forces at every level, which will enable the Afghans to move up the learning curve rapidly because they will see what “right” looks like and which will allow us to learn from the Afghans about the political and social context in which we are operating. It makes improved governance a political-military priority. It insists on the need to synchronize civil and military effects as part of the security campaign. It foresees a process by which the United States and its

NATO partners shift from playing the role of the principal fighting force to that of an enabling force supporting Afghan National Security Forces.

It is disappointing to see the Obama administration re-deliberate its strategy in response to this report. Thought President Obama should certainly examine the underlying assumptions, he should avoid the risk of incrementalism. He should choose an option that provides a decisive force. It is easy to select a less-than-decisive option and seek to wait and see whether it works. However, the timelines for implementing major adjustments of force levels, programs, and policies are so long that this approach risks falling behind the pace of events.

Improving governance and development. It is a cliché that in counterinsurgency the task is not to outfight the opponent but to “out govern” him. Since 2001, the effort to support the development of Afghan governmental institutions has been uneven at best. The Bonn Process itself was a great success. The division of responsibilities among donor states to support security sector reform led to notable successes, such as the restructuring of the Ministry of Defense and the building of Afghan National Army, but also shirking of responsibilities by lead donor nations in the judicial and other sectors. The Afghans themselves build some effective ministries, while others languished. At this point, a strategy should be build around four lines of action.

First, the Afghan leadership and its international partners should systematically evaluate the performance of senior ministry personnel, provincial governors, and district administrators. This information is available from a variety of sources, even for local officials. It can be collated and vetted. The Afghan government should then trade out poor performers. At the same time, an outreach effort through traditional social networks and other means should be undertaken to develop a pool of qualified personnel from which to draw replacements. There is more talent in Afghan society than is widely recognized. We need to build a system to tap into it.

Second, the United States should devote part of any increase in force deployments to creating a system comparable to the Civil Operations and Revolutionary Development Support (CORDS) program that was used in Vietnam to improve governance and economic development at the district and hamlet levels. This system created parallel advisory offices to support each level of the Vietnamese government. This gave U.S. personnel the ability to see where bottlenecks or other problems were hampering delivery of resources or other support to localities. Also, because we had this transparency, the system allowed U.S. funds to flow through Vietnamese government agencies. It fostered effective delivery of civil programs at the local level and improved the functionality of vertical links in the Vietnamese government. Though Provincial Reconstruction Teams were loosely modeled on this approach, they are designed principally to deliver reconstruction program themselves, not to enable better performance by the Afghan government.

Third, donor countries should support and build upon the successful national programs of the Afghan government. In the social and economic sphere, these include National Accountability and Transparency Program (which provided the government with an effective public finance system), the National Emergency Employment Program (which has administered projects that generated 14 million

labor days of employment since 2002), the National Solidarity Program (which has funded more than 47,000 local development projects selected by 22,000 community development councils), the National Health Program (which has provided basic health services for 85 percent of the population), the National Education Program (which has increased total student enrollment to more than 6.2 million in 2008-9), and the National Microfinance Investment Support Facility (which has made more than one million loans totaling more than \$600 million since 2003 with a 94 percent repayment record). These are successful, Afghan-led programs, funded through the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund. The national program model is one that works and should be extended to other program areas.

Fourth, the United States should undertake a large-scale educational exchange program to develop specialized human resources in areas where skilled Afghan personnel are lacking. In previous successful state-building efforts – such as the one in South Korea – the United States significantly accelerated the development of institutions through such targeted programs.

Advancing localized stabilization. In counterinsurgency, all progress is local. It is encouraging that, in public comments, Gen. McCrystal has noted the need to diagnose the reasons why local communities are “sitting on the fence” or leaning toward the Taliban in order to develop effective strategies to win their active support. In some cases, intimidation by insurgents produces coerced support. In others, tribal or other local conflicts may be driving one group toward the enemy. In still others, weak or abusive governance may be the source of disaffection. Only when we do the hard work of analyzing such dynamics locality by locality can an appropriate, tailored approaches be put together. It is the key to facilitating the reconciliation of reconcilable elements of the armed opposition.

Normalizing regional relations. Although the Obama administration has properly defined the challenge of violent extremism in Afghanistan as part of regional challenge, it is unclear whether a concerted diplomatic strategy exists to achieve a rapprochement between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Bilateral relations at the political level have improved since the government of President Zardari took office. However, the McCrystal report notes that evidence exists that some elements of the Pakistan security establishment may be supportive of the Taliban. If Pakistan were to become fully supportive of the stabilization of Afghanistan – particularly by eliminating enemy sanctuaries and support structures on its territory – the challenge of succeeding in Afghanistan would become immeasurably easier.

To normalize Afghanistan-Pakistan relations, a U.S. diplomatic undertaking should focus on three objectives. First, the United States must persuade the Pakistani leadership of our enduring commitment to Afghanistan. Pakistani officials may believe that the United States and NATO will ultimately abandon the country. As a result, they might be reluctant to undercut forces such as the Taliban that they would use in a proxy struggle with other regional powers in the aftermath of a U.S. or NATO withdrawal. This counterproductive hedging is unlikely to end absent an unequivocal U.S. commitment.

Second, the United States should mediate a negotiation to allay or address Pakistani security concerns regarding Afghanistan. These might include setting redlines on the activities in Afghanistan of Pakistan’s regional rivals or discussions about the ultimate disposition of the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. It could well be that these issues are the reasons why Pakistan is unwilling to be fully supportive of the

stabilization of Afghanistan. Only sustained diplomacy by the United States can determine the answer and potentially find solutions.

Third, the United States should launch a major initiative to open up the continental trade routes connecting Central and South Asia. The key is to open up the north-south and east-west corridors that run across Afghanistan. This would provide an enormous economic boost to all participating countries. In the first instance, the focus should be on eliminating administrative barriers to the free flow of trade by land transport. In the mid- and long-term, the United States should work collaboratively with all regional players to design, plan, finance, and build transport and transit infrastructure, including roads, railroads, and pipelines. This initiative could recreate a single economic zone that existed for centuries and that today would encompass a population of more than 1 billion people and an aggregate GDP of more than \$1 trillion. Most important, U.S. leadership in this endeavor would demonstrate commitment to the region and would create widespread benefits – particularly for Pakistan – based on the stabilization of Afghanistan as a continental land bridge.

Together, these elements constitute a mutually reinforcing strategy for security, improved governance, and economic growth. Many of the pieces are in place or could be put in place easily. As noted above, the McCrystal report offers prospects for improvements in U.S. strategy and operations in the military sphere. The renewed attention on Afghanistan can turn the situation around. It will require a sound and fully resourced strategy. Though there are reasons for optimism, it is vital that administration be urged not to fall into the trap of taking inadequate incremental steps that ultimately fail to get ahead of the power curve.

I would like to say a few words about one of the alternative strategies for Afghanistan that has been proposed in the public debate about the McCrystal report. Some analysts have called for the United States to pursue a limited counterterrorism strategy, utilizing over-the-horizon air strikes, Special Forces raids, or covert actions against terrorist targets. This would mean abandoning the effort to stabilize Afghanistan and withdrawing U.S. forces. I strongly believe that the evidence shows that this approach would not work.

It has been tried, and it has been unsuccessful. During the 1990s, the United States engaged in cruise missile strikes against al Qaida bases in Afghanistan, as well as planning potential covert actions. None of these prevented the series of attacks that culminated in the tragedy of 9/11. During the past three years, the United States has killed scores of senior and middle-level Taliban commanders in Afghanistan. Yet, this has not stemmed the rising capabilities of the Taliban. In the past two years, the United States has stepped up Predator drone strikes against terrorist leadership targets in western Pakistan. Though the enemy no doubt sleeps less well at night and some reports indicate that these strikes are having meaningful effects, it does not appear to be having a *decisive* impact on enemy operations, either in Afghanistan or Pakistan.

Also, a narrow counterterrorist strategy would likely condemn to the United States to a perpetual military engagement in this region. While a counterinsurgency campaign can culminate in the handover

of responsibilities to a partner government, a counterterrorism strategy is open ended. Moreover, the air strikes and raids will inevitably cause casualties among innocent civilians because of inherent limitations in the quality and timeliness of intelligence. This collateral damage will disaffect local populations and lead some portions to be radicalized. Unlike counterinsurgency, which seeks to produce security and progress, counterterrorism risks making more enemies than it destroys.

Mr. Chairman, you asked that witnesses comment on the relationship between our strategy in Afghanistan and the situation in Iraq. While I do not have extensive views on this subject, I believe that three brief points should be made.

First, increases in U.S. forces in Afghanistan depend on the continuing stabilization of Iraq. As the drawdown of U.S. forces proceeds in Iraq, it frees up capabilities that for Afghanistan without placing even greater pressure on the overall force.

Second, continuing progress in Iraq depends less and less on the presence of a large U.S. military force and depends more and more on a smart and active U.S. political role. It is only within the last two or three years that Iraqi political factions have begun to work out key issues. Many still remain unresolved, including the sharing of oil revenues or the future of Kirkuk. Habits of cooperation and compromise have not taken hold with all groups. We have a profound interest – accentuated by the need for additional forces in Afghanistan – in seeing continuing political progress. Therefore, our embassy in Iraq should be willing to engage Iraqi factions to catalyze progress if needed and should opportunities arise. A catalytic role of this kind is vitally important.

Third, parallel successes in Afghanistan and Iraq should provide opportunities for our efforts to constrain destabilizing actions by Iran. Iran is country with no major natural allies in the region. The United States has better relations than Tehran with virtually every one of Iran's neighbors, a fact that should facilitate containment of Iranian influence. However, the future of our partnerships with two of Iran's most important neighbors – Afghanistan and Iraq – remains in flux. As we draw down forces in Iraq and as we press to stabilize Afghanistan, we should at the same time work with these countries to fashion longer-term partnerships that will create constraints against Iran's destabilizing conduct. In this respect, our ties to Afghanistan and Iraq should be seen as opportunities, not burdens.

Mr. Chairman, the situation in Afghanistan requires renewed commitment. Although great deal has been achieved in Afghanistan, it is easier to disrupt than to build. In recent years, the enemy has gained momentum and threatens the progress we have made. Success is feasible, though it will not be easy or cheap. The Obama administration articulated a strategic concept in March 2009 to deal with the challenge of deteriorating security in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Gen. McCrystal has offered his assessment of what it will take to implement this approach. As President Obama makes his choice on force levels, I believe that the Congress has a vital role to ensure that his policy has all the components needed for success and does not contain a fatal mismatch between ends and means.

