

**STATEMENT OF GENERAL DAVID H. PETRAEUS
TO
THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
9 DECEMBER 2009**

Mr. Chairman, Senator Lugar, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to discuss the situation in Afghanistan and our strategy and prospects going forward in that critical theater. As you know, I had the honor of coming before this committee to provide my assessment of the situation in Iraq when I was the Commander of the Multi-National Force in Iraq and I appreciate this opportunity to offer my assessments to you on Afghanistan and to respond to your questions.

Let me state upfront that I fully support the policy President Obama announced at West Point last week. Success in Afghanistan is necessary and attainable, but the challenges are great. The United States and its ISAF partners can disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and set conditions in Afghanistan to prevent re-establishment of the sanctuaries it enjoyed there prior to 9/11. And we can degrade the capabilities of the Afghan Taliban groups while building Afghan security forces that can increasingly lead the fight against the Taliban, allowing international forces to redeploy over time. But none of that will be easy.

Improving the capacity of the Afghan Government will also be difficult, as Ambassador Eikenberry forthrightly observed during the deliberations of the President's security team.

Nonetheless, while certainly different and, in some ways tougher than Iraq, Afghanistan is no more hopeless than Iraq was when I took command there in February 2007. Indeed, the level of violence in Iraq and number of violent civilian deaths were vastly higher than we have seen in Afghanistan. But, achieving progress in Afghanistan will be hard and the progress there likely will be slower in developing than was the progress achieved in Iraq. Nonetheless, as in Iraq, in Afghanistan hard is not hopeless.

Indeed, as President Obama has observed, success in Afghanistan is vital for America's security. Helping the Afghan people to reverse the Taliban's momentum is an essential and enabling part of defeating the al Qaeda leadership in South Asia. The Taliban groups we are fighting in Afghanistan today are the same ones that sheltered and supported Osama bin Laden and al Qaeda as they prepared for the 9/11 attacks. The relationship between these groups remains strong. As Secretary Gates said last week, "the Taliban and al Qaeda have become symbiotic, each benefitting from the success and mythology of the other. Al Qaeda leaders have stated this explicitly and repeatedly."

The Afghan Taliban are, to be sure, distinct from the Pakistani Taliban and their partner groups, some of which shelter al Qaeda. They are part of a syndicate of extremist groups that includes both Lashkar-e Tayyiba – the group that carried out the Mumbai attacks – and the Haqqani network, among others. That syndicate threatens the stability of Pakistan and, indeed, the entire subcontinent. Afghan Taliban leader Mullah

Omar is recognized as “commander of the faithful” by bin Laden and other al Qaeda leaders, as well as by al Qaeda affiliates and extremist groups throughout Pakistan and beyond. Although most Taliban fighters confronting our forces are local Afghans motivated by local circumstances, the Taliban leadership is organized, is ideologically-motivated, and has become a beacon and symbol for other dangerous extremist elements. As Secretary Gates noted, “Defeating al Qaeda and enhancing Afghan security are mutually reinforcing missions. They cannot be un-tethered from one another, as much as we might wish that to be the case.”

Achieving our objectives in Afghanistan will not be easy. The Taliban has, in recent years, been gaining strength and expanding the extent of its control of parts of Afghanistan. It is important to remember nevertheless that the Taliban commands significantly less support among Pashtuns than either Sunni or Shi’ite extremists groups in Iraq had in 2007, and it commands virtually no support among Afghanistan’s other ethnic groups.

Corruption within the Afghan government – particularly the serious abuse of power by some individual leaders and their associates – has eroded the government’s legitimacy. Flaws in the recent presidential election further undermined confidence in the government. Taliban sanctuaries in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border area remain a major challenge to security in Afghanistan, although we have been making progress in coordinating with our Pakistani allies to address this issue. And Iran has played a mixed role in Afghanistan, helping with the country’s development but also providing some lethal support to the insurgents, albeit on a more limited scale than it provided to militants in Iraq.

Our armed forces and civilians – and those of our NATO Allies and ISAF partners – will therefore face tremendous challenges in the months ahead. As in Iraq, our troopers together with their Afghan partners, will have to fight their way into enemy strongholds and clear enemy-controlled population centers. As in Iraq, the situation is likely to get harder before it gets easier. Violence likely will increase initially, particularly in the spring as the weather improves. Beyond that, as the Afghan government, with international encouragement and assistance, moves to combat corruption and abuses of power, the result likely will be increased reporting on those problems and greater turmoil within the government as malign actors are identified and replaced. These factors and the seasonal nature of violence in Afghanistan, will undoubtedly result in an increase in security incidents in the summer of 2010. It will be important, therefore, to withhold judgment on the success or failure of the strategy in Afghanistan until next December, as the President has counseled. That will be the right time to evaluate progress, consider the way forward, and begin discussing the nature and pace of the transition of lead security responsibility to Afghan forces and initial reductions of U.S. forces in Afghanistan that will begin in July 2011 – transitions and reductions that will, as the President noted, be based upon the conditions on the ground.

To address the challenges in Afghanistan, we have already implemented important changes that have improved our prospects for progress as General McChrystal works

with 43 ISAF member nations and the Afghans in waging our joint campaign. We have fundamentally restructured ISAF to create unprecedented unity-of-effort. General McChrystal is dual-hatted as ISAF commander and commander of U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, giving him control over the operations of all U.S. and ISAF forces in Afghanistan. Lieutenant General Dave Rodriguez is commanding the first-ever 3-star operational command in Afghanistan, which frees up General McChrystal to focus on strategic and coalition aspects of the war. The critically important training command has moved from being a U.S.-led coalition effort to one augmented by the new NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan. And its new commander, Lieutenant General Bill Caldwell, is setting conditions to accelerate the critically important expansion and improvement of Afghan security forces. U.S. combat forces will actively assist in this process by training and partnering directly with Afghan units at all levels, a concept that has been effective in Iraq but was only recently implemented in Afghanistan. Furthermore, we're working not just to secure the Afghan population but also to mobilize and enable local citizens – engaging them in community defense initiatives so that they can help defend themselves against the extremist elements trying to reestablish control in various areas.

We have also worked to improve coordination between the military and all other agencies of government. Wearing his U.S. hat, General McChrystal has worked with Ambassador Eikenberry and the U.S. Embassy in developing a U.S. civilian-military campaign plan. We have established a Joint Task Force for Detainee operations, an Afghan Threat Finance Cell, an Information Operations Task Force, and a coordination cell to oversee reconciliation and reintegration efforts – and each will partner with Embassy and USAID officials, as did similar elements in Iraq. U.S. forces have also established partnerships between battlespace owners and senior civilian representatives at several echelons in Regional Commands East and South, and launched other initiatives to improve unity of effort in the north and west, as well.

General McChrystal has also transformed the way our forces operate. He has developed a coherent and focused campaign plan for the entire theater, assisted in this effort by Lieutenant General Rodriguez and his two-star French deputy. He has issued new counter-insurgency guidance to ensure appropriate focus on the critical task of securing the population in order to help facilitate Afghan-led reintegration of reconcilables – a core objective of any sound counter-insurgency effort. And he has updated the ISAF Tactical Directive and taken a number of other steps to reduce civilian casualties without compromising the ability of our forces to operate.

As we focus on the U.S. civilian-military effort, we must also remember that we are not fighting this war alone. In addition to our Afghan partners, U.S. forces are part of an international coalition that includes forces from 43 countries. Our ISAF partners have recently committed some 7,000 additional soldiers and more are likely to be pledged in advance of the international conference planned for January 28th in London. All told, next year over 45,000 international troops will be working together with American and Afghan forces. Allied forces have been fighting skillfully and bravely – and taking casualties – from Herat to Kabul and Mazar-e Sharif to the Pakistan border. And while

there are concerns that some partners have declared end-dates for their combat participation, there is hope they will be able to continue to contribute in other roles.

One of the most important developments over the past year has been the impressive determination of Pakistan's efforts against extremists, some linked to those we are fighting across the border, that threaten the stability of the Pakistani state. Pakistani operations in Bajaur, Mohmand, Khyber, Swat, Buner, Lower Dir, and now South Waziristan have significantly degraded Pakistani Taliban groups. These are the largest and most successful operations Pakistan has conducted against internal extremists – and we should recognize the losses the Pakistani military, Frontier Corps, and police have sustained in the course of these operations.

To be sure, these operations have not directly engaged the sanctuaries of the Afghan Taliban groups in Pakistan, nor those of some of the extremist syndicate I described earlier; however, the determination of Pakistan's civilian and military leaders to fight portions of the extremist nexus is an important step forward, and does facilitate our efforts to degrade some of the elements in the border region and to defeat al Qaeda.

Success in Afghanistan is, again, of enormous importance and it is attainable, but achieving our objectives will not be easy. To paraphrase what the great Ambassador Crocker used to say about Iraq, everything in Afghanistan is hard, and it's hard all the time. Nonetheless, I do believe that the policy the President announced last week and the additional resources being committed will, over the next 18 months, enable us to make important progress in several critical areas: to reverse the Taliban's momentum, to increase the security of the Afghan people, to increase the capabilities of the Afghan security forces, to help improve Afghan governance, and to set conditions for the start of the reduction in U.S. combat forces in a way that does not compromise the progress that has been achieved.

The American military has been at war or had forces deployed on robust contingency operations continuously since Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait in August 1990. And for the past eight years, we have fought terrorists and insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq. The all-volunteer force has been tested during this period as never before. But, it has also performed as never before. It is, without question, the finest fighting force and, in particular, the finest counter-insurgency force, our Nation has ever fielded. The determination, skill, initiative, and courage of our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines, and Coast Guardsmen are awe-inspiring. So are the sacrifices they and their families make every day. It continues to be the greatest of privileges to serve with them – and with our civilian and coalition partners – in such important missions as those we are undertaking in the Central Command Area of Responsibility. And I want to thank you and your colleagues for the continued great support that you provide to our wonderful men and women in uniform and their civilian colleagues. Thank you very much.