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Opening Statement for Hearing on London Afghanistan Conference

U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee Ranking Member Dick Lugar made the following statement at today's hearing.

I join the Chairman in welcoming our distinguished guest to the Committee. Foreign Secretary David Miliband will be playing a leading role in the London Afghanistan Conference on January 28th. We look forward to learning his views on how this conference can contribute to strengthening and stabilizing Afghanistan. The civilian component of the multi-national effort in Afghanistan has been neglected somewhat as discussion of the way forward has centered on military resources. The London Afghanistan Conference is an opportunity to consolidate the civilian response in ways that achieve greater accountability and more demonstrable progress in developing the country.

The proposal for the London Conference called on participants to “formulate a joint framework for our transition phase in Afghanistan, i.e. to set our expectations of ownership and the clear view to hand over responsibility step by step to the Afghans, wherever possible.” This goal is reflected in the multi-lateral civil-military effort in Afghanistan that is employing the new “clear, hold, build, and transfer” strategy. This new paradigm for operations requires leaders and their governments, as well as our Afghan partners, to understand their respective roles and the means by which goals can be accomplished.

The London Conference is a crucial opportunity for President Karzai to improve cooperation with international efforts in his country, while recognizing his own responsibility to enable reform. He must find the means to consolidate disparate influences within his own government in the pursuit of national development. Too often during the last decade, development efforts in Afghanistan have been disconnected and uncoordinated. International donors must agree to consolidate their efforts, narrow their focus, and harmonize their programs in order to achieve a common end with the Afghan people. An inconclusive outcome in London, lacking in specificity and effective guidelines, will diminish the likelihood of success in the coming years.

I look forward to hearing Ambassador Holbrooke's thoughts on the details of the new Afghanistan and Pakistan Regional Stabilization Strategy. Given the cost and security ramifications of our efforts in the region, this strategy must include strong accountability elements. It is important that our collective programs in Afghanistan and Pakistan be effectively monitored and measured against a definable set of metrics. The United States has assigned numerous senior level Officers, Ambassadors, and Mission Directors to Afghanistan and Pakistan. These individuals have extensive experience in developing and coordinating programs across our agencies. They must also serve as efficient conduits of information and evaluation back to Washington about how programs are working. At the encouragement of Congress, USAID and the State Department have expanded their Inspector's General presence in these countries, which is a good first step.

A new approach to foreign aid is emerging as a priority within the Obama Administration. This approach aims to reduce reliance on foreign contractors and channel more resources through local governments. As development experts have long suggested, the goal of such a strategy is to reduce the overhead costs of our assistance and empower civilian governments with resources flowing through, rather than around, their institutions. It is reasonable to consider this approach in Afghanistan and Pakistan, but we should be mindful that institutions in these nations have very little history of effective oversight and accountability. To the extent that we funnel resources through these governments, we will require creative and robust oversight mechanisms.

I hope Ambassador Holbrooke will make clear today, for example, how the expected \$200 million in education programming slated for Pakistan this year will be monitored. Similarly, member's would gain confidence if Ambassador Holbrooke could walk us through how the more than \$300 million slated for the agricultural sector in Afghanistan will be overseen as it is dispersed across a volatile country.

While the military reform process has shown considerable progress and NATO/ISAF continues to professionalize the Afghan National Army, there are two crucial civilian sectors that must be thoroughly reformed. The first is agriculture, the mainstay of Afghanistan's legitimate economy, which must be revitalized if Afghans are to create jobs, feed the population, and deliver income for the country. The second is human security and justice, which have long been neglected. The rule of law must be a product of an essential social contract that extends across the traditional landscape and integrates governing institutions such as the police and courts.

Ambassador Holbrooke has spent much time traveling within the region seeking greater cooperation for stabilizing Afghanistan. I look forward to his testimony on efforts to convince Pakistani leaders of the importance of cooperation and the opportunities that stem from our partnership in routing terror elements in Pakistan. He also has engaged in a broader diplomatic effort to build financial and technical support for Afghanistan. He has spent a good deal of time since his appointment flying from the Gulf States and the Near East to Europe and Russia, as well as Japan and India. We are eager to learn of the impact of his outreach and hope the London Conference will serve as a rallying point for significantly increased participation, especially from the Muslim world.

I thank the Chairman for this hearing and look forward to our discussion.

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