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Opening Statement for Hearing on Afghanistan

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 witnesses, including Ryan Crocker, our former Ambassador to Iraq and Pakistan, and the Chargé in Kabul who reopened our long dormant Mission there in January 2002. His practical experience in the region and leadership in the implementation of complex civil-military policy in conflict areas is invaluable, especially as we discuss the necessity for a political resolution in Afghanistan.

While recognizing the valuable perspectives of all of our panelists in understanding the elements and dynamics of reconciliation and reintegration of belligerents in conflict-prone environments, we must acknowledge that the voice of Afghans themselves is missing. Our panel brings considerable Iraq experience with them, but all realize the situations are substantially different, beginning with the poor economic state of Afghanistan and its very limited institutional capacity. Donors cannot remake Afghanistan through the near term influx of billions in aid. The classified documents released this weekend, if they are deemed credible, attest to the special difficulties involved.

On the heels of last week's Kabul Conference, the ninth international conference on Afghanistan since 2001, this hearing provides an opportunity to discuss a topic that received little attention at the conference – namely, the prospect and means for reconciliation in Afghanistan. This is a highly sensitive and complex undertaking. I, for one, am interested in the degree to which our Administration believes reconciliation to be intrinsic to our objectives in Afghanistan. As I noted at our last hearing, with finite resources we must identify those roles and missions that are indispensable to achieving our objectives and those that are not.

If reconciliation is indispensable, we must resource it properly and provide focused high-level leadership to the task. As Ambassador Holbrooke stated at our last hearing, some \$100 million has been allocated through the \$1 billion Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) for General Petraeus to employ in assisting with Afghanistan's reconciliation plan. Specific additional resources, including from the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund, must be identified and judiciously employed, rather than attempting wholesale Afghan political and economic redevelopment.

Unfortunately, much of the reconciliation program is still undetermined beyond the vague three-phase process suggested by President Karzai last week. At this moment, the effort appears to be left to the Afghan President, whose approach has been criticized as too narrow following his June Consultative Peace Jirga. An interesting contradiction exists in that the international community has shown little confidence in almost every area of Afghan governance – except the entire reconciliation program.

Reconciliation and reintegration will have to embody the will of the population that must absorb it, rather than the political elites alone. A narrow agreement will be unstable. It will require recognition that the component elements of the conflict are more than just the Taliban and its factions. They include neighbors and their proxies, terror groups and their allies, tribal and clan antagonists, ongoing local turf battles, as well as criminal networks and newly enriched brokers who prefer the opportunities afforded by the status quo.

This Kabul Conference followed a familiar pattern, with prominent international officials descending on a beleaguered host country to hear its officials' claim a renewed commitment to productive development and a broad unifying effort. This conference was another appeal to a drifting international community to press for the outcome, at any cost, of a developed and modern Afghanistan, rather than aim toward a political resolution among a host of competing actors.

Beyond international press coverage, little headway was made in confronting the Taliban or al Qaeda; winning over reconcilable insurgents; gaining ground on criminal and terror networks in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan provinces; or battling the endemic corruption that hobbles stabilization and development efforts in Afghanistan. While donors in Kabul agreed to funnel more of their assistance through host government channels, their "steadfast commitments and support" for this effort clearly remain contingent upon significant improvements in existing Afghan governance and institutional capacity. As Secretary Clinton stated "our progress in the months and years ahead will largely depend on the people and Government of Afghanistan."

I welcome President Karzai's statement that he intends to refocus international assistance efforts "on a limited number of national programs and projects to transform the lives of (our) people, reinforce the social compact between state and citizens, and create mechanisms of mutual accountability between the state and (our) international partners." We look forward to learning the specifics of these programs and concentrating international efforts on achievable objectives. One such critical objective is the fair conduct of the Parliamentary elections scheduled for September. Success in this endeavor, and in others, is vital if the Afghanistan government is to gain the confidence and trust of Afghans, their partners, and potential reconcilables.

I look forward to our panel's discussion.

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