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STATEMENT OF

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BEFORE THE

**UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NEAR EASTERN AND SOUTH AND CENTRAL
ASIAN AFFAIRS**

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Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Risch, members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to provide the Department of Defense perspective on the current outlook for the Afghan presidential and provincial council elections in 2014.

Today, I plan to review the current state of security-related planning for a successful political transition next year. But first, I want to place the discussion in the context of our overall effort in Afghanistan and recognize the truly historic transition that is underway. Over 11 years ago, in response to one of the worst attacks on our homeland, the United States, together with our Allies and partners, initiated a campaign in Afghanistan to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and its affiliates, with the mission to ensure that it would never again become a safe haven from which terrorists could launch attacks on the United States and to ensure the Taliban did not regain power through force. In 2008, after years of underinvestment in Afghanistan, the Taliban had resurged and were at the gates of Kabul and Kandahar. Failure stared us in the face. In 2009, after reviewing our Afghan policy, President Obama ordered a surge of U.S. troops and civilians to give us the chance to reverse the insurgency's momentum while, for the first time, effectively building an Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) capable of defeating the Taliban. The President's message drew strong response from our Coalition partners and new commitments from many countries that had previously stood aside from the Afghan effort as they saw it as too little and too late. Ever more importantly, Afghans also saw new hope and began flooding in to join the Afghan security forces in unprecedented numbers. These forces grew from roughly 170,000 in May 2009 to over 335,000 today currently fielded or in training, and we went from too few recruits to turning away tens of thousands. As a result of the concerted effort by the Afghans, U.S. and Coalition partners along multiple lines of effort – military, diplomatic, reconstruction, governance, and economic development – we have seen a remarkable turnaround in Afghanistan, most dramatically in the security area. The ANSF grew from a static force with severely

limited combat capability to a force conducting corps-level combined army and police operations, as well as border security enforcement.

Over the past twelve months the ANSF, particularly the Afghan National Army (ANA), have made remarkable progress – now leading over 80 percent of operations and carrying out many unilaterally. They have succeeded well beyond expectations and when they have encountered tactical failure – the loss of territory or a battlefield setback – they have re-attacked, retaken territory, and pushed the Taliban back. The Afghan government will soon announce Milestone 2013, at which point the Afghans will assume the security lead for 100 percent of the Afghan population and the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) will shift to a support-role. The Afghans are entering a fundamentally new phase as they assume the sovereign responsibilities that will put them on a path towards self-reliance. Holding a legitimate election process that enables a peaceful transition of power will be a milestone in Afghanistan’s path forward.

The presidential and provincial council elections, set for April 5, 2014, hold promise to be the first constitutional transfer of power from one President to another in Afghanistan’s history. For the first time, Afghans will be solely responsible for administering the process and providing security with international forces in support only. A credible process with the fullest possible voter participation is critical. The challenge for Afghans will be to demonstrate that elections have qualitatively improved since 2009-2010 with the implementation of better fraud-mitigation procedures and more polling stations accessible to eligible voters. Helping Afghans achieve a peaceful transfer of authority in 2014 is one of the Administration’s highest priorities in Afghanistan, with DoD focused on the security front. However, I want to highlight that this will be an Afghan-led process. In accordance with the overall security transition and respect for Afghan sovereignty, ISAF, including U.S. forces, will maintain a support role during the elections process: ISAF will be prepared to take action only when – and only if –

requested by the Afghan Government. Support will likely be in logistics, intelligence, route clearance, and *in extremis* support. As a contingency, ISAF will be prepared to deploy quick reaction forces in the event the ANSF are not able to provide for the safety of members of the international community, such as election observers. Together with their Afghan counterparts, Coalition forces will have the ability to provide a rapid response in the event security deteriorates beyond the ANSF's ability to control.

There are several Afghan entities that play a role in security planning for the upcoming election. While the Independent Election Commission (IEC) has the lead in election administration and supervision, the Ministry of Interior (MoI) has an overall coordinating role for security of the electoral process, with support from the Ministry of Defense (MoD) and the National Directorate of Security (NDS). Similar to the 2009-2010 election security model, a three-tier approach will be employed to secure the polling centers, with MoI, MoD, and NDS responsible for providing security around the polling stations. It is important to note that the ANSF conducted security for earlier elections, and their planning and logistics capabilities have improved considerably since then. Planning has benefited from lessons learned in previous elections. Furthermore, the Afghan forces providing security for this election has almost doubled in number since 2009.

Following lessons learned from the 2009 and 2010 elections, the U.S. government has encouraged early and close liaison among the IEC and the security ministries. The IEC has already started coordinating with the MoI and MoD on security planning. At the end of February 2013, the IEC provided the MoI with a list of almost 7,000 polling centers to allow the MoI ample time to conduct security assessments for each site, take measures to open stations that had not been accessible previously, and provide adequate time for the delivery of election materials. The security ministries are scheduled to complete security assessments before candidate registration begins in mid-September 2013. In March

2013, the IEC, together with the security ministries, released a comprehensive operational plan a year ahead of the elections – something that we did not achieve in the run up to the 2009 and 2010 elections. The IEC operational plan is a comprehensive document detailing voter registration and voting procedures, training and fielding of observers, fraud mitigation, and public messaging, both to encourage participation and to explain procedures. While not a security plan, it does include some discussion of security considerations for the main components of the electoral process, the general concept of security operations, and processes that support the IEC Security Operations mission.

Although election preparations are progressing, challenges remain. Afghan security institutions have yet to turn their full attention to security planning, having focused resources on the current fight and its challenges while also helping support voter registration and roll-out of the *e-tazkera*, the biometrically-linked electronic national identity card. The MoI began an *e-tazkera* pilot program in Kabul in mid-April, which will expand nationwide once voter registration begins; however, progress on the issuance of *e-tazkeras* has been slow. Public demand for the *e-tazkera* has increased as public awareness of the program has become more widespread. This places the MoI under considerable pressure to meet demand and will continue to present a challenge for the MoI, as they work to meet their very aggressive goal of enrolling 14 million Afghans by March 31, 2014. Despite earlier and closer coordination between the IEC and security ministries, communication between these institutions has been poor and still needs improvement. ISAF will continue to support MoI and MoD to prepare effective security plans and facilitate closer coordination between the two ministries and with the IEC. While security planning for the 2014 election is ahead of the 2009 election, levels of violence are much higher in 2013 than in 2008. With the anticipated drawdown of U.S. and Coalition forces by the end of 2014, the stakes are much higher, and the political complexity of an election without an incumbent makes the risk greater than in the past.

The 2014 presidential election presents an opportunity for the Afghan government to demonstrate its ability to conduct a peaceful democratic transition of political power; however, the election will also challenge the government to conduct an election that is viewed by the Afghan people and international community to be legitimate. The United States continues to urge consultation in these efforts among President Karzai, Parliament, the IEC, the political opposition, and civil society organizations to help ensure that decisions ultimately have buy-in from the Afghan population. Secure, transparent and orderly elections in 2014 will be important to a peaceful transfer of power and, ultimately, the recognition by the Afghan people that the government is both legitimate and representative of Afghanistan.