

**EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY**

STATEMENT OF

**MS. KELLY E. MAGSAMEN**

**ACTING ASSISTANT SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**

**ASIAN AND PACIFIC SECURITY AFFAIRS**

on

**U.S. POLICY IN AFGHANISTAN AND THE REGIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE 2014  
TRANSITION**

before the

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

**COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS**

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Chairman Menendez, Senator Corker, distinguished members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify on the U.S. mission in Afghanistan beyond 2014 and the regional security implications of our transition. It is also an honor to speak alongside Ambassador Dobbins.

First, I would like to thank the men and women of our armed forces who have fought and served in Afghanistan, as well as our incredibly capable diplomats and other civilians from across the interagency. We have not forgotten what brought us to Afghanistan more than a decade ago. Since 2001, our forces have placed constant pressure on al Qaeda and other terrorist networks operating in the region and have helped develop and enable the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) to provide security for their country. Our core objectives in Afghanistan are clear: disrupt threats posed by al Qaeda; support Afghan security forces; and give the Afghan people the opportunity to succeed as they stand on their own.

Since assuming the lead responsibility for security across the country one year ago, the ANSF – composed of 336,306 personnel – are now successfully providing security for the people of Afghanistan. Afghan forces plan and execute nearly all combat operations, and continue to improve their capacity to execute large, joint combat operations across the country with minimal coalition assistance. The ANSF have proven resilient and capable, demonstrating tactical superiority over the insurgents during the last fighting season and already during this fighting season.

The ANSF most recently demonstrated their ability to provide effective security for the Afghan people in the first and second rounds of their presidential elections. The Afghan government and its security forces have worked closely – on an unprecedented level – to prepare for the first democratic transfer of power in Afghanistan’s history. Twice this year, Afghans have defied the Taliban-led insurgency and turned out in large numbers to vote for their democratic future, including a turnout of nearly seven million voters in the first round. ANSF performance during these two rounds is a major milestone in our efforts to develop a capable force that is credible in the eyes of the Afghan people.

Although the drawdown of U.S. and NATO forces reflects the progress that the ANSF have made, there is still much work to do to develop ANSF capacity towards sustainment. Through the end of this year, our mission will continue to provide the time and space for the Afghan government and security forces to increase their capacity and assume full responsibility for Afghanistan’s security. Starting next year, Afghans will be fully responsible for securing their country and we will be in an advisory role.

The Department of Defense is committed to a responsible drawdown of U.S. forces and an appropriately resourced follow-on NATO mission in Afghanistan. As President Obama announced on May 27, the United States intends to maintain a military presence of 9,800 forces in Afghanistan in early 2015, and provide the bulk of forces for the follow-on NATO mission, known as Resolute Support. A continued U.S. and NATO military presence is conditioned upon the conclusion of the U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement and NATO-Afghanistan Status of Forces Agreement. The post-2014 NATO mission will advise the continued development of security activities to the Afghans as the international community seeks to normalize its relationship with Afghanistan. NATO is expected to approve the Resolute Support operational plan at the NATO Foreign Ministerial on June 24, and will convene a force generation conference later this summer to align national contributions with operational requirements.

As Secretary Hagel stated after President Obama’s force level announcement, our enduring presence “will help ensure that al Qaeda cannot reconstitute itself in Afghanistan, and it will help us sustain the significant progress we have made in training and equipping the Afghan National Security Forces.” To

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that end, the post-2014 U.S. military presence will have two objectives: training, advising, and assisting Afghan forces as part of the NATO-led Resolute Support mission and supporting counterterrorism operations against the remnants of al Qaeda.

The NATO-led train, advise, and assist mission will be directed at the corps-level and above. As part of this mission, the United States will complement Afghan security efforts by closing institutional capability gaps, sustaining major equipment, and ensuring effective use of future U.S. assistance to the ANSF. The advisory mission will continue to build ministerial capacity and fielded force capabilities as the ANSF mature to become a professional and sustainable security force. Advisors will assist the Afghan security ministries, army corps, and police zones with performing tasks such as planning, programming, budgeting, acquisition, and human resource management so they can provide the required support to tactical units. For the fielded force, advisors will address gaps in aviation, intelligence, and special operations, as well as logistics, medical, and counter-improvised explosive device (IED) capabilities.

By the end of 2015, the U.S. force presence should be reduced to roughly half the levels from the beginning of that year and consolidated in Kabul and at Bagram Airfield. In 2016, a continued advisory effort would be embedded at the ministerial/institutional level to address anticipated shortfalls in financial management, procurement, and contracting. By the end of 2016, the U.S. military would be limited to a Kabul-based presence, with a strong security assistance component to sustain the ANSF. Beyond 2016, a Security Cooperation Office in Afghanistan would serve as the basis for continued strategic cooperation with the Afghan government in areas of mutual interest, including advancing regional security and cooperation. It would also allow us to maintain an enduring relationship with the ANSF, build partner capacity, and preserve the access and influence necessary to help ensure stability in Afghanistan and the region. We will use the coming years to continue building a strong relationship with Afghanistan through security assistance-related activities, such as military education and training exercises.

Sustained ANSF and Coalition efforts have prevented al Qaeda's use of Afghanistan as a platform for terrorism. These efforts have forced al Qaeda to focus on survival rather than on operations against the West. Despite our success in degrading core al Qaeda, remnants remain in the border region and coordinate with other extremist organizations, such as the Haqqani Network, Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan, and Lashkar-e-Taiba. Beyond 2014, U.S. forces will remain focused on denying safe haven to al Qaeda and keeping pressure on the extremist network to limit the operational ability of transnational and foreign military groups inside Afghanistan.

The United States will continue to have national security interests in South and Central Asia beyond the drawdown of our forces in Afghanistan. These include preventing terrorist groups from threatening our homeland, U.S. interests, and citizens; addressing terrorism and extremism in Pakistan; and advancing a stable, secure, and independent Central Asia. To pursue these interests, we will continue to conduct security cooperation with countries in the region to help promote strategic stability on the subcontinent.

Security cooperation with Pakistan has helped facilitate counterinsurgency operations that constrain al Qaeda and militant groups like the Pakistani Taliban, which threaten the United States, Pakistan, and other countries in the region. For example, Coalition Support Funds have helped the Pakistan military maintain more than 125,000 troops in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), and security assistance – to include equipment such as night vision devices and radios – has improved Pakistan's counterinsurgency and counterterrorism capabilities. The delivery of upgraded F-16s to Pakistan led to

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the increased effectiveness of their air operations, especially in night strikes that limit militant freedom of movement.

U.S. support and engagement have also contributed to counterterrorism cooperation against al Qaeda and to Pakistan's efforts to disrupt IED networks responsible for attacks in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pakistan's counterinsurgency, counterterrorism, and counter-IED efforts will remain critical as we continue the drawdown in Afghanistan. U.S. support to Pakistan also supplements its efforts to improve internal stability, which is vital for improved stability in the region. It is therefore essential that we maintain defense cooperation with Pakistan at close to current levels through 2016.

The Central Asian states are also an important facet of the regional security landscape. In addition to the assistance these nations provide directly to Afghanistan through trade, building infrastructure, supplying electricity, and education resources, Central Asia has steadily supported U.S. efforts in Afghanistan by allowing the transit of military materiel and personnel through their territories as part of the Northern Distribution Network. Since the independence of Central Asian nations in 1991, the United States has supported the ability of these states to maintain their sovereignty and independence by building their capability to secure their borders, counter narco-traffickers and extremists, and better manage their defense and security institutions. The United States will continue to pursue these interests during and following the drawdown of U.S. forces in Afghanistan.

In addition to our bilateral security cooperation efforts, the United States will continue to play a mediation role in the region. Cross-border militant attacks remain a challenge to maintaining positive relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. In addition to attacks by Pakistan-based militants in Afghanistan, we are growing more concerned about Afghanistan-based militants launching attacks in Pakistan. These attacks have contributed to an uptick in border clashes between the two countries. In recent instances, Pakistan attempted to de-escalate clashes using the procedures put in place by Islamabad and Kabul, with facilitation from ISAF and the Office of Defense Representative – Pakistan. Maintaining a strong relationship with the Pakistan military and the ANSF will be necessary to mitigate future flare-ups. We intend to press both Islamabad and Kabul for greater cooperative measures after the new Afghan administration takes office. In addition, an improved relationship between Pakistan and India is essential to regional stability. The recent engagement between Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and newly elected Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi is cause for cautious optimism. Recognizing the important role the United States has to play in terms of regional engagement, we hold trilateral dialogues with Afghanistan and Pakistan, and with Afghanistan and India. These meetings are held in addition to formal and informal bilateral engagements with each of these countries on issues relating to regional security.

In sum, the steps that U.S. forces and our NATO partners have taken in Afghanistan, as well as efforts to build partner capacity in the region, will help set the conditions for regional security in the years ahead. Achieving improved regional stability will require sustained U.S. leadership and engagement in the region.

I would like to thank this Committee for its leadership and support of the U.S. military mission in Afghanistan, as well as for your continuing support of our men and women in uniform and of our diplomats and other civilians. I look forward to answering your questions.