

SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
WRITTEN STATEMENT
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UNITED KINGDOM

The London Conference on Afghanistan will bring together over 70 countries and international organisations to discuss the partnership between the international community and the Afghan Government and people. I am immensely grateful to the Committee for the opportunity to hear its views on the aims and objectives.

The United Kingdom has been part of the international effort in Afghanistan since the passage of UNSCR 1368 after 9/11. Over 10,000 UK troops are deployed predominantly in Helmand Province in the South of the country - the second largest military contribution in Afghanistan. Our aid programme for the next three years exceeds \$830 million, making us the third largest contributor financially – after the US and Japan.

It is right to pay tribute to the skill, dedication and bravery of all armed forces and civilians serving in Afghanistan. We owe them - and their families - a debt of gratitude. I would also like to honour those who have fallen in Afghanistan - from the British, American and other international soldiers, and the civilians that work alongside them, to the members of the Afghan National Army and Afghan civilians caught in the crossfire.

The war in Afghanistan, and the related challenges in Pakistan, are the number one foreign policy priority for the British Government. Progress is vital for our national security. The election of a new Afghan government and the increased US resources in support of a refreshed counter insurgency strategy, make the next 12-18 months a decisive period. That is why the British Prime Minister has convened the London Conference on Afghanistan on January 28.

As co-Chair of the Conference, I set out in this note British thinking in three areas. First, the rationale and objectives of the international mission in Afghanistan. Second, how military and civilian resources can support a political strategy in Afghanistan. Third, our vision for the London Conference on Afghanistan and how it will drive forward progress on a) security, b) governance and development, and c) regional cooperation.

Rationale and objectives

With Al Qaeda pushed out into Pakistan's tribal areas, the original rationale for the war in Afghanistan – to ensure the country is not a safe haven again for Al Qaeda and global terrorism – has come under scrutiny.

We do not conflate or confuse Al Qaeda and the Taliban. The Taliban government in Afghanistan in the 1990s provided a supportive environment for the Al Qaeda senior leadership. But the Taliban leadership do not have as their principal aim Al Qaeda's

violent global jihadist agenda. The vast majority of its low and mid level fighters are certainly not motivated by it. Their aim is the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan and the re-establishment of an Islamic Emirate based on shari'a law. But the symbiosis of the Taliban and Al Qaeda senior leadership, and the history of Al Qaeda organisation in Afghanistan, explain why we continue to see the war in Afghanistan as critical to the fight against Al Qaeda. The 1,600 mile Afghan border with Pakistan, the presence of Al Qaeda's senior leadership in Pakistan's border areas, and the links between the two countries, means that their stability needs to be addressed together.

The definition of success is clear: it is not to kill or capture every member of the Taliban. It is to ensure the Government of Afghanistan is able to secure its territory against a weakened insurgency, and deny Al Qaeda the space to operate.

The alternatives to a comprehensive counter insurgency strategy are not attractive. Retreat now would invite danger for the region and for our own countries. But the challenges of counter insurgency are immense – it requires realistic objectives aligned with substantial international and Afghan resource and effort. It is this alignment which this note addresses.

Political Strategy

The British government believes that military and civilian resources need to be marshalled behind a clear political strategy: political, because it involves shifting the motivations, relationships and behaviours of critical stakeholders and powerbrokers. There are three dimensions to this.

First, the aspirations and loyalties of ordinary Afghans need to be engaged in defence of their country against the Taliban. Second, the insurgency needs to be divided, separating those insurgents motivated by narrow national and local objectives, and whose aims could be accommodated within the Afghan political system, from those unwilling to break with Al Qaeda. Third, with the leaders of the Afghan Taliban in Pakistan, the international community needs to engage with Pakistan and Afghanistan's other neighbours to promote enduring stability.

A political strategy is not separate from a military strategy. Indeed, military and civilian resources are critical contributors to it. Reassuring citizens that the Taliban will not return requires security, but also governance that responds to their most pressing needs. Dividing the insurgency requires military pressure, but also economic and political opportunities. Regional dynamics are affected both by our military presence and by diplomatic outreach. A political reconfiguration, however, is the lens through which our military and civilian surge must be seen.

Reassurance through Security

Our greatest resource in Afghanistan is the determination of the Afghan people not to return to Taliban rule. In a recent poll only 6% of those asked wanted the Taliban back in power. Despite this, many civilians turn a blind eye when they see IEDs being laid, or refuse to inform on the insurgents in their midst. The reason is simple: they fear Taliban retribution if they are caught.

Building a sense of security and confidence that the Taliban will never again be able to return is therefore critical to mobilising Afghan citizens to resist them. This also must have three dimensions: the security provided by international troops; the protection offered by the Afghan National Security Forces; and the defence provided at the local level by community security initiatives.

President Obama's counter insurgency strategy, combined with the increased coalition troop numbers (which means that since the start of 2009 there will be 51,000 more US troops, and 7,800 more from other countries, including the UK) is allowing ISAF to reconfigure its laydown and increase the tempo of its operations.

The impact in Helmand – where 8,000 British troops are based– is already being felt. Helmand is the only southern province which provides a potential strategic platform for the Taliban to dominate Kandahar. It has accounted for over a third of all attacks in Afghanistan, yet a year ago there were only 5,000 ISAF troops in Helmand with very few Afghan National Security Forces alongside.

With the deployment of the US Marine Expeditionary Brigade to Helmand in April 2009 and President Karzai's commitment to increase significantly the Afghan National Army and Police numbers in the province, by next summer these figures will have risen to around 30,000 and 10,000 respectively. This means that ISAF is increasingly able to help the Afghan Government extend its authority into critical population centres in the central Helmand belt – including districts surrounding the provincial capital in Lashkar Gah, such as Babaji and Nad-e-Ali. And it means that international forces can both "clear" an area and train and mentor the Afghan national security forces to "hold" it.

Since 2007, the international community has invested heavily in building up indigenous security forces. The Army now numbers over 100,000 and the police, 96,000. Increasing them to 134,000 and 109,000 by the end of 2010 is necessary. But quality and conduct matter as much as size. That is why the focus on partnering with the Afghan National Army – working side-by-side on operations - is essential.

However much national security forces are built up, they will not have a monopoly of force in a country like Afghanistan. In such an underdeveloped country, where tribal allegiances are often stronger than national affiliations, local community-based security initiatives are inevitable. In many cases, Afghan tribes have the desire to resist the Taliban. The international community cannot ignore or decry this effort, and in some circumstances will need to consider support for it.

Reassurance through Governance

Establishing security is necessary, but not enough if Afghan civilians are to turn their backs on the insurgency. They need to believe that the fragile improvements will endure and strengthen.

In areas recaptured from the insurgents, this must start with immediate post-intervention stabilisation. Over the last decade, both our countries have learned important lessons in this area. Together, we have been putting these lessons into practice in Helmand. From the emphasis on local capacity (without which no amount

of quick impact projects or infrastructure development can survive), through to community engagement at the grassroots level (with District Governors and District Community Shuras supported by District Stabilisation Teams), or integrated civ-mil planning (so that stabilisation experts can be on the ground within 24-48 hours of a military campaign), many aspects of our collective approach are now being rolled out elsewhere in Afghanistan.

It is no surprise that in a recent BBC-ABC-ARD poll, Afghans identified security as the biggest problem their country faced. But the economy was not far behind, and corruption and weak governance came third. The Taliban need to be out governed not just out-gunned.

42 per cent of Afghans live on less than a dollar a day. In some parts of the country, there are few credible alternatives to the drugs trade or mercenary activity. Helping the Afghans build schools, provide clean water, electricity and roads is worthwhile in its own right, but will also help to draw people away from the insurgency. That is why over the next four years the UK will spend over \$800 million on development assistance. And it is why the UK has pushed so hard for the European Commission and EU member states to increase their aid – which now stands at over \$1.3 billion a year.

However it is not just about the quantity of assistance, it is also about how it is spent. If such services are to outlast the international presence, they need to be administered by the Afghan Government. Yet in large parts of the country, district governance is almost non-existent; half of the governors do not have an office, less than a quarter have electricity, and some receive only six dollars a month in expenses. In such circumstances, the Taliban gain traction, with shadow governors allocated to all provinces except Kabul and a substantial district level network in place.

There are already a number of effective schemes to support sub-national government under the supervision of the Independent Directorate of Local Governance, including the Afghan Social Outreach Programme (delivering District Community Shuras) and the District Delivery Working Group (which supports immediate capacity to deliver basic services in insecure districts). But so far these schemes have been patchy, and inadequately funded.

So, in the coming months and years, a more coherent strategy needs to be developed. The focus should be on selecting and training, empowering and equipping, and mentoring and monitoring the 34 Provincial Governors and the 364 District Governors, just as it is with the Army and the Police. The international community needs to help Afghans create truly representative local *shuras*, that can help distribute development funds and provide the collective dispute resolution that the Afghans want when they talk about the rule of law. This will require significantly more funding for local government - in 2008 each province had less than \$1m to spend on local administration.

There is a unanimous message from the people of Afghanistan and the international community that the Afghan Government needs to turn its words on tackling corruption into deeds. According to the recent BBC-ABC-ARD poll, 95% of Afghans see corruption as a problem in their local area. Such widespread abuse has deep roots

and cannot be cured overnight. But it is vital that President Karzai follows through his promise to tackle the culture of impunity with serious steps. The new anti-corruption unit needs real powers both to investigate and to prosecute.

Reintegration

Just as the insurgents can be split from the ordinary Afghans who offer them tacit support, so too can the insurgency itself be divided, with foot soldiers, low and mid-level commanders reintegrated back into society and separated from insurgent leaders.

As President Obama said at the end of March, *“in a country with extreme poverty that's been at war for decades, there will also be no peace without reconciliation among former enemies...There is an uncompromising core of the Taliban. They must be met with force, and they must be defeated. But there are also those who've taken up arms because of coercion, or simply for a price. These Afghans must have the option to choose a different course.”*

The prospects for reintegration are significant because the insurgency is not a monolith. It is a broad but shallow coalition, constantly evolving, with shifting relationships, geographical bases, and tactics.

The Afghan Taliban leadership is based primarily in Pakistan. Senior commanders there, under the leadership of Mullah Omar, provide strategic direction to insurgents over the border, if not operational command, directed at retaking territory and power in Afghanistan. The so-called Pakistan Taliban, a loose collection of insurgent leaders mainly in Waziristan, are primarily focused eastwards against the authority of the Pakistani state. Al Qaeda coordinates tactically with both branches of the Taliban, but has a separate mission and religious ideology, focused on mounting terrorist attacks outside the Pashtun tribal belt. The Haqqani network is linked to all the insurgent groups, and is based in Waziristan, but able directly to command and mount attacks in Afghanistan.

Within these insurgent groups, there is also heterogeneity. In the Afghan Taliban, trained full-time fighters, often drawn from several tribes and reinforced by foreign fighters, have more ideological motivations than local part-time fighters, drawn from a particular village or tribe, operating often in pursuit of their own profit or power, or driven by local loyalties and ethnic affiliations. Alongside the fighters, there are shadow governors who provide intelligence, or intimidate those who support the government; warlords and aspirant power-brokers who believe that the Taliban will win, and so position themselves for their own political advantage; narco-traffickers who rely on the Taliban for protection and the safe passage of drugs; poppy farmers who ally with the Taliban because they protect them from eradication efforts; and the foot soldiers whom the Taliban pay \$10 a day – more than a local policeman.

Repeated, intelligence-led strikes against particular key positions in the insurgent hierarchy can force low and mid-level commanders to reassess their interests. This requires careful work. For example, Ghulam Yahya, a Taliban commander in Herat leading 600 fighters, was killed last October in an ISAF strike and his deputy was arrested by the Afghan National Police. Leaderless, the structure of the group started

to disintegrate, and former fighters returned to their villages, leaving an opportunity for reintegration.

Pressure can be applied by international and Afghan forces, but it can also be applied through local communities resisting the Taliban, thereby creating the conditions for insurgents to switch sides. For example, in Acheen, a small district in Eastern Afghanistan, when the Taliban demanded that a tribal leader's son be handed over for joining the Afghan National Army, the Shinwari tribe drove out the Taliban, and conducted a local peace jirga with the Afridi tribe over the border in Pakistan. The area has now been free from the Taliban for six months.

In Acheen, the role of ISAF was minimal, providing boots and warm jackets so that the local people could patrol the outlying areas, and a promise that they would provide backup if the Taliban launched a major offensive. Across Helmand, however, the model has been different, involving much more intensive military engagement. Last summer, the US Marine Expeditionary Brigade was deployed in South Helmand with such force density that it was able to have an immediate impact on security and the calculations of ordinary Afghans and low-level insurgents.

Alongside military force and community mobilisation to apply pressure, reintegration requires incentives: the offer of protection from retaliation by former allies and alternative employment. This demands a structured programme that targets the right people, and ensures that the support continues over time. In some cases, reintegration may involve relocation and deradicalisation programmes. The international community can provide valuable support - for example, through the creation of the Afghan Reintegration Fund – but ultimately this must be a process led by the Afghan Government. An immediate priority is therefore to develop a strategic framework with President Karzai for reintegration. This will need to assign clear lead responsibility for reintegration within his government, with a dedicated organisation geared to reaching out to insurgents.

Reintegration refers specifically to the co-option of foot soldiers, low and mid-level commanders. Done successfully and at scale it can weaken the insurgency and lay the ground for more senior members to switch sides. When it comes to higher level commanders, the Afghan government needs to separate the hard-line ideologues, who are unwilling to break their links with Al Qaeda, and who must be pursued relentlessly, from those who can be drawn into domestic political processes. President Karzai committed himself to this in his inauguration speech, *“the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has placed national reconciliation at the top of its peace-building policy. We welcome and will provide necessary help to all disenfranchised compatriots who are willing to return to their homes, live peacefully and accept the Constitution.”*

Reconciliation involves difficult decisions about motivation and justice. But the evidence of successful counter-insurgency is that it is necessary for political stabilisation. In Afghanistan, it will need to be led by Afghans and supported by the international community.

Regional Cooperation

The third element in weakening the insurgency is a new relationship between Afghanistan and its neighbours.

The fighters within Afghanistan draw on external funding, support and shelter. Militants move freely across the border with Pakistan. The insurgencies in the South and East of Afghanistan are directed partly from across the border in Quetta, Peshawar, and Waziristan.

The Pakistani offensives over the last year in Swat, Dir, Buner and more recently in Waziristan are therefore a significant development. For the first time, elements of the insurgency are being squeezed from both sides of the border. With more than 3,000 Pakistanis killed over the last year, the focus of the military operations has been terrorists who attack Pakistan. Over time, however, Pakistan's leaders will need to broaden its fight to address Al Qaeda's leadership and the full range of other militant groups, not just those who pose the most direct threat to Pakistan. And as well as security in the border regions, the international community will need to help Pakistan create the political and economic conditions that will ensure lasting stability.

The UK has longstanding links with Pakistan. 800,000 Britons are of Pakistani origin. Pakistan will soon receive our second largest aid programme. We have strongly supported the restoration of civilian government in Pakistan.

Britain welcomes developments in US policy towards Pakistan. The US has made clear its intent to build a long-term trust-based partnership with Pakistan - and the Kerry Lugar Act is a major step towards that goal. Last year, we held the first EU-Pakistan Summit, which I hope will be the start of a much deeper engagement on security, trade, development and more. And the Friends of Democratic Pakistan group provides us with a wider political forum for aligning international support behind Pakistan.

Perhaps the most significant shift required though is to develop a new consensus within the region that Afghanistan's future lies in being an independent, sovereign state - a client of none and a friend to all. Pakistan, Iran, and others within the region, are affected by the crime, drugs, terrorism and migration that spills over Afghanistan's borders. A stable Afghanistan that once again becomes the commercial and cultural cross-roads for South West Asia is a shared interest. However, the trust deficit within the region means that neighbouring countries fear Afghanistan will one day return to being a chessboard on which the geopolitical struggles of others are played out by proxy. As a result, they continue to hedge their bets, maintaining former relationships and not taking the steps needed to stabilise the country.

Encouraging each of the regional stakeholders, Afghanistan's neighbours and near-neighbours, to accept that the conflict in Afghanistan is a regional problem, and thus a regional responsibility, will require much more focus on the regional dimension than has been given so far. It will demand a new hard-headed attention to what reassurances both Afghanistan and other players in the region need about each other's behaviour and intentions. It will also call for consistency and clarity about the presence, activities and intentions of the international forces in Afghanistan, so that these too are properly understood to be a force for stabilisation and not a threat. A sense of regional ownership must be built through a process of systematic and

serious regional engagement, in which the regional players, instead of confronting each other face to face, or by proxy, acquire the habit of working side by side to focus on a problem from whose solution all will benefit. Only the countries of the region can decide whether they want to build on the multitude of existing regional bodies, or create something new and Afghanistan-specific.

London Conference

The aim of the London Conference, which will take place on January 28, is, as Prime Minister Gordon Brown said when he announced it on November 28: *“to match the increase in military forces with an increased political momentum, to focus the international community on a clear set of priorities across the 43-nation coalition and marshal the maximum international effort to help the Afghan government deliver.”*

London is the venue, but the conference is a joint effort between the British Government, the Government of Afghanistan and the United Nations. I will chair it alongside Foreign Minister Spanta and the UNSG’s Special Representative Kai Eide.

Together, we have invited the Foreign Ministers of all ISAF partner countries, Afghanistan’s immediate neighbours and the key regional players, as well as representatives of NATO, the UN, the EU and other international organisations such as the World Bank.

Discussions will focus on three areas: security, governance and development, and regional relations.

With respect to security, the Conference will consider how the respective roles of the international and Afghan forces should evolve over time. Because as the Afghan National Security Forces develop, they will need gradually to assume - district by district and province by province, as the necessary conditions are met - lead responsibility for security. The Conference will also address how to support Afghan-led reintegration efforts.

Although London is not a force generation conference it will be an opportunity to encourage Allies to increase their commitments in critical areas, particularly with respect to the training of the Afghan National Army and Afghan National Police. The NATO Training Mission - Afghanistan still has a shortfall of 1,600 trainers, and despite EU promises to increase the size of its Police Mission (EUPOL) to 400 trainers, the total staffing remains at only 267.

With respect to governance and development, the London Conference aims to lead to concrete steps by the Afghan authorities to tackle corruption and improve its financial management. But it is also the opportunity for the international community to consider how its development assistance is supporting Afghan leadership, and in particular to ensure it is effectively aligned behind the Afghan Government’s Economic Plan.

In terms of regional relations, by bringing together Afghanistan’s neighbours and the key regional powers, the London Conference aims to promote progress towards more systematic and cooperative engagement by and between all of the regional

stakeholders, building on the range of existing structures. I have been in close contact with my Turkish counterpart on this in recent weeks, and am pleased that in the few days before London he will hold a meeting with Afghanistan's neighbours to develop ideas for improving regional co-operation.

Conclusion

Amidst the losses of 2009 – keenly felt on both sides of the Atlantic – and the drawn-out Afghan Presidential election process, I believe that we have begun to address the issues crucial to any future success. Under US leadership, the International Security Assistance Force has reinvigorated the military strategy and redoubled its military commitments.

But while necessary, military reinforcements alone will not be enough to achieve success. In 2010, the international community needs to fully align military and civilian resources behind a political strategy that engages the Afghan people in defence of their country, divides the insurgency and builds regional cooperation. This strategy needs to be led by the Afghans, but it requires international support. That is the task ahead of us in London next week. I look forward to discussing it with you.