

Testimony of Ryan C. Crocker
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Nomination Hearing for Afghanistan
June 8, 2011

Mr. Chairman, Senator Lugar, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to become U.S. Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. I am grateful to the President and to Secretary Clinton for placing their trust in me. If confirmed, I look forward to working closely with you to advance America's interests in Afghanistan.

I had the privilege of opening the Embassy in Kabul in January 2002. I worked closely with President Karzai in those early days and developed a great deal of respect for his commitment to a stable, unified Afghanistan. If confirmed, I look forward to renewing our relationship and working together to help the Afghans realize our shared vision for the future of their country, one that is free, secure, democratic, and can stand on its own feet, and plot its own course toward its destiny. I also had the honor of serving as the U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan from 2004-2007, which developed my understanding of the region and, which, if confirmed, I hope will be a useful asset as we work with our regional and international partners towards a stable Afghanistan.

As you know, our core goal in Afghanistan, and Pakistan, is to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al-Qa'ida, and to deny it safe haven in those countries. Our efforts to pursue this goal are focused on three mutually reinforcing surges – military, civilian, and diplomatic. Osama bin Laden's death is an important step towards achieving this objective, but much work remains to be done to ensure that al-Qa'ida can never again threaten us from Afghanistan with the Taliban providing safe haven.

The military and civilian surges that President Obama announced in 2009 have stolen momentum from the Taliban-led insurgency. Today, more than 1,100 U.S. civilian experts are serving alongside our troops to help establish the conditions for a sustainable and irreversible transition of security responsibility to the Afghan government.

Working together with the Government of Afghanistan and our coalition partners, including many Muslim majority nations, we have made significant progress, but this progress is still fragile and reversible. Enormous challenges remain: governance; rule of law, including corruption, which undermines economic growth and the credibility of the Afghan state; narcotics; sustainable economic development, including adequate employment opportunities, increased revenues along with the capacity for the government to provide basic services, such as

education and health care. Failure in some of these areas can mean failure of the state and the creation of an environment in which our strategic enemies can regroup. Making progress on these issues has been hard, and it will go on being hard. But hard does not mean hopeless. As Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has noted, we walked away from Afghanistan once in 1989 with disastrous consequences. We cannot afford to do so again.

Ultimately, all of this will be an Afghan responsibility, realized through a responsible transition. A key U.S. priority in Afghanistan is supporting the Afghan-led transition process that was agreed upon by the Afghans and NATO-ISAF partners at the November 2010 NATO Summit at Lisbon. This process will enable Afghans to systematically resume full responsibility for their security across Afghanistan by the end of 2014. President Karzai has repeatedly, and understandably, requested that the U.S. and our partners and allies phase out parallel structures and move to less intrusive forms of assistance that enable the Afghans take control of their own future. We support that goal and appreciate President Karzai's March 22 speech announcing the start of transition.

This transition process will begin this July with the transfer of lead security responsibility to the Afghan National Security Forces in seven

provinces and municipalities, which contain roughly 25 percent of the Afghan population. If confirmed, I will work hand in hand with our military partners, as I did as the U.S. Ambassador in Iraq, to continue this responsible, conditions-based transition to Afghan security lead, which is a major priority for President Karzai.

Alongside this transition process, the Afghan government has launched a peace effort to reconcile insurgents. President Karzai made a good start by convening a broad-based Peace Jirga last June that set out a framework for national reconciliation. He then formed a High Peace Council that includes representatives from across Afghanistan. Council leaders are holding meetings in key provinces throughout the country with tribal leaders, civil society, women, and villagers to hear their hopes and concerns for a reconciliation process. They are working to form local councils to begin engaging the insurgents and the broader community.

The United States supports this Afghan effort. Over the past two years, we both have laid out our unambiguous red lines for reconciliation with the insurgents: renounce violence; abandon their alliance with al-Qa'ida; and abide by the constitution of Afghanistan and its protections for all Afghans, including women. Those are necessary outcomes of any negotiation. This is the price for reaching a political resolution and

bringing an end to the military actions that are targeting the insurgency's leadership and decimating its ranks. If former militants are willing to meet these red lines, they would then be able to participate in the political life of the country under their constitution.

As transition proceeds and Afghan leadership strengthens across the country, a process of political reconciliation will become increasingly viable. In turn, successful reconciliation will reduce the threat to the Afghan government, making transition more sustainable. If confirmed, I will work closely with Ambassador Grossman, our Special Representative to Afghanistan and Pakistan, and Ambassador Munter in Pakistan among others, to continue our efforts to build support for an Afghan-led reconciliation process. I will maintain our efforts to support Afghanistan's long-term reconstruction, sustainable economic development, and strengthening of key Afghan institutions critical to ensuring that transition is sustainable and irreversible.

The United States and our partners will continue to support the Afghan government and a durable responsible political settlement. Towards that end, we initiated negotiations on a long-term Strategic Partnership Declaration with the Afghan government in March 2011. This political framework document will help normalize our relationship with the Afghan government, and provide a roadmap for our long-term political,

economic, and security cooperation. In no way should our enduring commitment be misunderstood as a desire by America or our allies to occupy Afghanistan against the will of its people. We respect Afghans' proud history of independence, and we do not seek any permanent American military bases in their country – or a presence that would be a threat to any of Afghanistan's neighbors.

In closing, I want to thank this committee for the support it has provided and continues to provide for the vital work of the U.S. Mission in Afghanistan. You have held a series of useful hearings over the past month to examine our policy in Afghanistan and Pakistan and, if confirmed, I will listen to your guidance and continue a discussion with Congress on our progress on the ground. I will also ensure that the precious U.S. taxpayer resources being used in Afghanistan are applied effectively, transparently, and with an eye toward the long-term sustainability of these efforts by the Afghans themselves.

As the Secretary said in her February 18 speech at the Asia Society, “The United States is not walking away from the region. We will not repeat the mistakes of the past. Our commitment is real and it is enduring.” As we approach the 10th anniversary of the heinous attacks of September 11, it is a time to remember those who died that day and to honor the sacrifices that so many Americans have made, military and

civilian, to ensure that Afghanistan never becomes a safe haven for terrorists from which they can attack America.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I look forward to your questions.