PREPARED STATEMENT
TO THE SENATE FOREIGN RELATIONS COMMITTEE
BY

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The War in Afghanistan, The Regional Effects

Mr. Chairman, Senator Lugar, and Members of the Committee: I thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss U.S. strategy in Afghanistan and the possible effects on Pakistan of our future policies there.

U.S. Involvement, Eighth Year or 30th Year?

The search for a successful outcome in Afghanistan and neighboring Pakistan requires an understanding of how we arrived at this critical point in our Afghan undertaking, as well as new thinking on how we might proceed.

I have been involved in the region since the mid-1980s, when I was ordered to Pakistan by CIA director Bill Casey to manage America's covert assistance to the Afghan resistance in their war against the occupation forces of the Soviet Union. I have remained active in Afghan and Pakistan matters in the intervening years, assisting in 2008, on the negotiations on legislation concerning Reconstruction Opportunity Zones in Pakistan and Afghanistan. More recently, I have been active in support of the United States Government's efforts to stabilize Afghanistan through development and business stability operations.

As we discuss future policy options, we should bear in mind that America is not beginning its 9th year of involvement in Afghanistan; it is, rather, closing in on thirty years of intermittent association with a regional conflict that began with the Soviet Union's 1979, invasion of Afghanistan. It is a history of three decades of action, neglect, and reaction that have had profound effects on American security and on Afghanistan, Pakistan and the other important players in the region.

The Soviet Debacle

The Soviet invasion in 1979, was a gross miscalculation by the Soviet Politburo led by the ailing General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev. The Soviet leader concluded at the time that a limited contingent of Soviet forces would have the "Afghan affair" cleared up before the Americans might even take notice, weakened as America was, he believed, by its retreat from Southeast Asia and preoccupied by its hostage drama in Teheran. The initial Soviet foray was predictably and brutally efficient. The troublesome Afghan leader, Hafizullah Amin, was assassinated; Kabul was secured; and the Soviet's chosen "emir", Babrak Karmal, was installed at the helm. But then events reverted to the traditional Afghan rhythm, taking on a life of their own. By the fifth year of occupation, the Soviet 40th Army had grown from its original limited contingent to a country-wide occupation force of around 120,000. As the Soviet forces grew, so did the Afghan resistance. Though impossible to quantify accurately, by midpoint in the Soviet war there were probably about 250,000 full or part-time Afghan mujaheddin fighters. Soviet forces were constrained by the harsh terrain and infrastructural limitations to no more than about 150,000 troops before their supply lines would fray. They settled for about 120,000 over their ten year occupation, a number more than adequate to fuel a full-blown insurgency, but never enough to defeat it.

By late 1986, Soviet efforts began to falter, and the new leader in the Kremlin, the fourth in as many years, Mikhail Gorbachev, declared the war a "bleeding wound". He gave his commanders a year to "turn it around". They couldn't; and by the end of the fighting season of 1987, diplomatic activity intensified. On April 14, 1988, The Soviets signed the Geneva Accords ending their occupation; ten months later, they were out of Afghanistan.

And America turned its attention elsewhere.

In the nine years of their Afghan adventure, Soviet losses were at least fifteen thousand troops killed, tens of thousands more wounded and thousands dead from disease. The Afghan population suffered horrendous losses -- more than a million dead, about twice that number injured, and six million driven into internal and external exile. It is instructive to view these numbers against those of the current American effort. While Afghan civilian casualties caused by coalition forces today average somewhat less than 1,000 per year, civilian casualties during the Soviet occupation averaged around 100,000 per year.

Pakistan and the Pashtun Question

As it turned its attention away from Afghanistan, with civil war and chaos replacing hard fought victory, the United States would also adjust its relationship with Pakistan. No longer able to stave off congressionally mandated sanctions triggered by its nuclear weapons development program, Pakistan fell out of Washington's favor. In 1990, strict sanctions were imposed on Pakistan, and military-to-military contacts were cut. Those measures would remain in place for more than a decade, during which the U.S.-Pakistan alliance that dated back to the 1950s and the Baghdad Pact would change dramatically. The abrupt reversals in the bilateral relationship created an almost irreconcilable conviction within Pakistani military circles, and in particular the ISI, that the U.S. will always leave Pakistan in the lurch when it decides once again to retire from the region, views that officers in the Pakistan Army and the ISI have conveyed to me on many occasions in the past. That discussion is once again at heated levels in Pakistan today, as it is in the United States. The consequences, therefore, of any decision to increase or diminish the U.S. effort in Afghanistan will have far reaching effects in Pakistan.

Pakistan's role, led by Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) during the 1980s had been central to the defeat of Soviet forces in Afghanistan. Not only did Pakistan serve as the conduit for all U.S. and international aid to the Afghan resistance and the population, but its Pashtun North West Frontier Province provided both safe haven for the the Afghan mujaheddin and refuge for their families. The Pashtuns of Pakistan were also an endless source of recruits for the Afghan resistance. These tribals straddling the Durand Line recognize the British demarkation of their lands only when it is to their rare advantage; otherwise "zero line", as they call it, is largely ignored. Any outside force fighting Pashtuns in Afghanistan, therefore, will also have to deal with the Pashtuns in Pakistan.

Every foreign occupation of Afghanistan eventually ends up as a fight with the Pashtun tribals. That was true during the 19th century British era and the Soviet era that followed a century later. It is true today. It is part of the Afghan playbook, as written by the Afghans themselves, and followed by each consecutive outside power that ventures in. The Pashtun population confronting those outside forces who march into Afghanistan includes not only the roughly 15 million in Afghanistan, but the 25 million or so in Pakistan, as well. Pashtuns will always rise to the fight, but they can also quiet down once a threat subsides, or if a proper deal is offered.

The Indian Question

Any oral history of Pakistan invariably begins with the line, “in the beginning, there was India”. As the current phase of American operations in Afghanistan enters its ninth year, India has become firmly entrenched in what has always been viewed by Pakistan as it’s rear area. After the United States, India is the second largest contributor to Afghan development projects. Working with Iran, India is developing the Iranian port of Chabahar on the Arabian Sea coast near the Gulf of Oman. Chabahar will provide India access to oil and gas resources in Iran and the Central Asian states. Plans for road and rail construction linking Afghanistan and Chabahar port by the Indian government are also ambitious, as are burgeoning contacts at all levels between the Indian and Afghan governments. Afghan President Karzai, was educated in India, and is viewed by most Pakistanis as beholden to New Delhi. Never, in the past thirty years, has Afghanistan appeared so potentially hostile to Pakistan and friendly to India.

Though Pakistani concerns over Indian involvement in Afghanistan have in the past been dismissed by American officials as overwrought, they are nonetheless real; and it is correct that these concerns are being taken more seriously now by the United States. Pakistan Army and ISI officers I have known over the years have been realistic in conveying to me their deep concerns regarding India, a country with which they have fought three costly wars. Indeed, General McChrystal, in his Commander’s Initial Assessment dated August 30, 2009, correctly acknowledges the delicacy of Indian involvement in Afghanistan as it impacts in Pakistan. McChrystal writes, “Indian political and economic influence is increasing in Afghanistan, including significant development efforts and financial investment. In addition, the current Afghan government is perceived by Islamabad to be pro-Indian.” McChrystal also points out that increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan is likely to exacerbate regional tensions and encourage Pakistani countermeasures in Afghanistan or India.

If there were a precipitous reduction of American force in Afghanistan, or an outright withdrawal, we should expect the Pakistani government and its military, including a very capable ISI, to take whatever measures they thought necessary counter Indian influence in Afghanistan. Such an escalation could rapidly increase and amplify the regional tensions, with perhaps disastrous consequences. The Pakistan Army has had the vision of creating what it called a Strategic Regional Consensus, a

loose nexus between Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, and Turkey as a massive and secure rear area for its 60 year confrontation with India. Those dreams, first explained to me by the late President Muhammad Zia ul-Haq, were never realized, and their time may have passed; but were the United States to retire from the field in Afghanistan, a new, and more risky jockeying between nuclear-armed Pakistan and India would most surely ensue. This would prompt even greater Afghan-Indian collaboration, which would only fuel Pakistani conviction that Afghanistan is becoming an "Indian garrison". The prospects for miscalculation in such an atmosphere are grave.

The Regional Players

Below the noise level of military operations is the involvement of other regional players in what is developing into a modern version of a Central Asian Great Game. China, viewed by Pakistan as its most reliable ally, is jockeying for position in Afghanistan, partly as a counterweight to growing Indian influence and partly to advance its own long-term economic goals in the region -- the quest for natural resources. China has also built a new, turnkey Pakistani port at Gwadar on the Arabian Sea, in Pakistan's Baluchistan Province, a project China acknowledges as having strategic value matching that of the Karakoram Highway, completed by the Chinese in 1986, and linking Pakistan with Xinjiang. In addition to Gwadar serving as a potential Chinese naval anchor, Beijing is also interested in turning it into an energy-transport hub by building an oil pipeline from Gwadar into China's Xinjiang. The planned pipeline will carry crude oil from Arab and African sources. Inside Afghanistan, China has secured an interest in the the huge (estimated $88 billion) copper deposits in Aynak, in Logar Province south of Kabul. China is also interested in in the massive iron deposits in Hajigak, west of Kabul.

Hydrocarbon and mineral deposits in the arc from Herat in the west, across northern Afghanistan are in play with Iran, China and Russia. In effect, the other regional players are busily setting the stage for exploitation of Afghanistan's natural resources, while the United States remains bogged down with the war. This should change.

The Future of U.S. Military Operations in Afghanistan

The default position on whether a foreign power should or should not venture into Afghanistan with large scale forces is usually a simple, "don't go." But America is eight long and troubled years beyond any reconsideration of that default position. We're in, and we have to see it through, if only with a greatly redirected strategy. Though the

initial American contingent that toppled the Taliban regime and set Al Qaeda on the run involved less than 300 American special operations forces and CIA officers, U.S. and international forces now number around 100,000, with a mission that seems unclear to both its critics and its supporters. Some Afghans see the American role as simply protecting a corrupt government and the status quo; many more Pashtuns see the U.S. as the protectors of a Tajik Panjshiri-controlled government.

The current debate seems to center on whether or not to increase U.S. forces by as many as 40,000 additional troops. If the troop increases are intended to advance a new strategy designed to to allow a modicum of security and justice to develop, perhaps guided by the Afghans themselves, and to create an economic stake that would become available to more Afghans, such increases could be a good idea. If, however, the increases are considered a 'surge' to feed greater levels of kinetic operations, such a strategy will likely fail as the war escalates. Thoughtful Soviet post war assessments of their Afghan debacle have concluded that with anything less than half a million troops on the ground, no outside force could expect to "pacify" Afghanistan. In reaching that conclusion, Soviet analysts were also aware of the sheer impossibility of supporting a force of that size, even with Afghanistan being contiguous to the USSR. That analysis, and the constraints included in it, apply to the American intervention today. A marginal surge in support of a military solution will accomplish little, absent a new, broader strategy.

A Way Forward

In addition to creating the conditions for greater security and justice for the Afghan people, the United States might use its stewardship in Afghanistan to work toward an orderly marshaling of the regional players in developing that country's natural resources, deriving, in the process, the maximum possible benefit to the Afghan people themselves. Instead of a free for all race for Afghanistan's resources, the United States could provide the leadership to ensure that the regional players contribute to Afghan stability as they pursue their own valid and vital economic interests, rather than revive the zero sum game that has characterized competition in Afghanistan over the last eight years. Any outside investment in Afghanistan should have the positive effect of providing alternatives to endless conflict for Afghans, most of whom would make the right choices if offered security, justice and a stake in an economy. Only the United States can make that happen.

Indeed, rather than contemplate withdrawing from Afghanistan, the United States will have little choice but to redirect its forces to provide greater security in selected regions, and make a virtue of necessity by taking the lead in working with the regional players in the major investment and development schemes already underway.

Once again, thank you for this opportunity to appear before this committee. I look forward to your questions.