Senate Foreign Relations Committee
NATO: Enlargement and Effectiveness

Testimony of Philip H. Gordon
Senior Fellow, The Brookings Institution

March 11, 2008

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to testify today on the critical issues facing NATO on the eve of the Bucharest summit in April. This will be the final NATO summit of the Bush administration. It comes at a time when there are serious questions about NATO's vital mission in Afghanistan, and serious internal debates within the Alliance about what to do about enlargement. Leaders in Bucharest will also have to address a number of other important issues, including Europe-based missile defense, the NATO Response Force, Kosovo, European Defense, and the NATO budget. But here I want to focus on the two that I believe are most essential to U.S. national security interests and the future of the Alliance: Afghanistan and enlargement. Mr. Chairman, I commend you, Senator Lugar, and the other members of the Committee for the leadership you have shown on both of these critical issues and hope my comments can contribute to your ongoing work.

NATO's Mission in Afghanistan.

Several prominent reports on Afghanistan have been published in recent weeks. All underscored the serious and growing challenges to the NATO mission posed by rising violence, weakening international resolve, expanding opium production, divisions among allies, and daunting regional challenges. I will address these serious challenges, but before focusing on them and what NATO needs to do to meet them, I think it is worth putting NATO's Afghanistan mission into some perspective.

Ten years ago, the idea that NATO would be running a major military operation half way around the world would have seemed preposterous. Even five years ago, just after the U.S.-led ouster of the Taliban, I can still remember officials in many allied countries questioning whether the Alliance should take on such a challenging task so far beyond its original mission. Today that theoretical debate about missions is over – every one of NATO's 26 members not only supports but has forces in Afghanistan. NATO has 42,000 troops in country, 28,000 of which are from countries other than the United States. NATO's mission began in 2003 with the provision of a single headquarters in Kabul alone, when no single country was willing to take on that task and it has gradually expanded to the north, west, south and east so that it now covers all of Afghanistan. Despite the perception that European allies are losing faith in the mission – indeed a serious concern – it is none the less the case that there are 5,000 more non-U.S. troops in Afghanistan this year than there were last year, and there are decent prospects that more

European (likely French and British) troops will be pledged at the Bucharest summit and deployed later this spring.

These facts in no way diminish the reality of the challenges NATO faces in Afghanistan today or the deficiencies in the Alliance's efforts to meet them. But they do remind us that the slow and difficult process of transforming NATO from a Europe-only defense alliance into an effective peace-keeping and global counter-terrorism alliance is not destined to fail. As we focus on the challenges and even failures of the NATO mission in Afghanistan we should not forget how much worse the situation would be were NATO not involved there at all and if the United States had to bear all the burdens there alone.

That said, no one can deny that NATO is at a crossroads in Afghanistan. The challenges it faces in 2008 – as serious as at any time since the mission was launched – include all the following:

Rising Suicide and IED Attacks. Prior to the overthrow of the Taliban, and despite the horrific violence that country experienced for decades, suicide bombings were virtually unheard of in Afghanistan. Even after the NATO mission began, the practice did not begin until 2005, when 17 suicide bombings took place. Since then, however, there have been 123 suicide bombings in 2006, 140 in 2007, and the number is rising further in 2008 – a sign that the Taliban and al Qaeda realize they cannot defeat NATO with conventional means and instead hope to undercut support for the mission in ways similar to those that were effective in Iraq. The use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs) has also proliferated over the past several years. In January 2008, the Taliban in Afghanistan crossed a new line with a suicide attack on the Serena hotel in Kabul, a luxury hotel frequented by Western diplomats and journalists, which killed eight people. Many fear that the Taliban have been regrouping and will continue to expand their attacks on Western forces and civilians as the weather improves this spring.

Weakening Allied Resolve, and Growing Internal Divisions. Another threat to the NATO mission is the growing resentment over the vastly diverging military missions of different national forces. While all NATO members have soldiers in the country, national "caveats" place strict geographical or functional limitations on what those forces can do and where they can do it. Thus, whereas U.S., British, Dutch, and Canadian forces often find themselves fighting and taking casualties in the more dangerous southern and eastern provinces, German, French, Italian, Spanish and other troops are limited to relatively less dangerous duty in the north and west. Defense Secretary Gates provoked controversy in Europe recently when he made this point and appealed to allies to lift some of their caveats, but his central point cannot be denied: Allied forces are not bearing equal risks or burdens in Afghanistan. The inequality is exacerbated by NATO's budgetary rules according to which the costs of any deployment are borne by the deploying country. The result is that a member state that agrees to deploy additional troops or airplanes not only bears disproportionate risk but also has to pay for the new deployment – a further disincentive to new and badly needed force contributions.

It is important to understand why most NATO allies are so reluctant to send more forces to Afghanistan and so determined to limit the mandates of those that are there. For fifty years, with the exception of Britain and France, NATO militaries focused almost exclusively on a territorial defense role, leaving global missions to the United States and others. Their publics are not accustomed to coping with the challenges and costs of global security missions – causing and taking casualties. Some key European leaders are in fragile government coalitions, which constrains their ability to take controversial actions abroad. In addition, the unpopularity of the Bush administration and the psychological link in many European minds between the war in Afghanistan and the war in Iraq makes it difficult for European leaders to stand up in parliament and make the case for supporting what is all too often (and wrongly) seen as an "American" war.

Growing Opium production. Opium production, a major source of funding for the Taliban and a cause of much of the corruption of the Afghan government, has also risen in each of the past several years. Today some 193,000 hectares are devoted to poppy cultivation (up from 165,000 in 2006), and Afghanistan is providing 90 percent of the illicit global opium trade. NATO officials on the ground in Afghanistan insist that counter-narcotics is the responsibility of the Afghan government and not Western soldiers. Regardless of whose formal responsibility it is, however, the reality is that Afghanistan will never have a stable, functioning government, and the Taliban will never be defeated, unless the profits stemming from drug production are significantly curbed.

A Struggling Afghan Government. President Hamid Karzai, long seen as a model of the moderate, pro-Western yet authentic and legitimate leader needed in a place like Afghanistan, is increasingly unpopular after struggling to bring peace and prosperity to the country after six years in power. Seeking to position himself in advance of likely presidential elections in 2009, he has alienated some key ethnic constituencies by trying to consolidate his Pushtun base. The Afghan police forces are riddled with corruption and despite real gains in well-being since the Taliban were overthrown (in areas like health care and education), many Afghans are becoming disenchanted with the lack of security and pace of social progress. NATO officials have challenged Director of National Intelligence Mike McConnell's recent estimate that the Afghan government only controls 30 percent of the country's territory, but what is certainly true is that Afghanistan's tribal, ethnic and regional divisions make it difficult for the central government to extend its writ outside of Kabul. This makes Afghanistan even more susceptible to regional leaders willing and able to cut separate deals with warlords, drug barons, or the Taliban.

Instability in Pakistan. NATO of course has no role in Pakistan, but those responsible for the NATO mission must understand that no strategy for Afghanistan can succeed without a Pakistan strategy to accompany it. Pakistan, after all, is where Osama bin Laden, Ayman al Zawahiri, and other al Qaeda leaders are likely hiding, where the Taliban and other insurgents receive financing, training and sanctuary, and where the majority of Pushtuns – the ethnic group from which the Taliban draws its recruits – live. Frankly, even if Afghanistan could somehow magically be "solved" (which of course it cannot), the United States and its allies would still face a major terrorism challenge from the

extremists based on the eastern side of the border. And Afghanistan certainly cannot be solved so long as Taliban and other insurgents can operate with impunity in the ungoverned Pakistani tribal areas, sadly the case today.

***

Despite these challenges and problems, and contrary to the impression given by much recent press reporting, Afghanistan is not "lost," and the NATO mission there has not "failed." It is not lost in the United States, where more than 65 percent of Americans believe that overthrowing the Taliban was the right thing to do, more than 60 percent believe we should keep our forces there, and leaders from across the political spectrum still see the mission as legitimate and necessary. It is not lost in Europe, where despite public apprehensions every single NATO government still supports the mission and is still contributing forces to it. And most importantly it is not lost in Afghanistan, where more than 75 percent of Afghans still say that the overthrow of the Taliban was a good thing and a majority says they are grateful for the presence of foreign soldiers – even if they are increasingly critical of the lack of a coherent international strategy for the country. Even amidst rising violence, the Afghan economy is growing and many Afghans remain hopeful. Succeeding in Afghanistan is not only essential to prevent it from again becoming the sort of failed state in which al Qaeda could thrive, but it is possible if the United States and its allies accept what is at stake and step up to the challenge. I believe NATO needs to do all of following to increase the prospects for success of the NATO mission:

Deploy Additional Troops. NATO needs at least 5,000-10,000 additional troops in Afghanistan, to provide adequate security for the population and to avoid relying so extensively on airpower, which causes the civilian casualties that put the entire mission at stake. If NATO had as many troops per capita in Afghanistan today as it did in Bosnia in 1995, it would have some 400,000 (instead of 42,000). Even the current NATO mission in Kosovo today (17,000) would be over 270,000 if scaled to the size of Afghanistan. The point is not that such troop levels are realistic for Afghanistan or even necessary, but simply to put in perspective the relative commitment we have made to Afghanistan given the importance of the mission. The new U.S. contribution of 3,200 Marines should give the United States the legitimacy to call on its European allies to make at least an equivalent new contribution and President Bush should challenge them to do so at the Bucharest summit. Collectively, the European NATO allies have several hundred thousand troops in their standing armed forces only a small percentage of which are deployed abroad, and they should be reminded not only that deploying them in Afghanistan is a common interest but that the American public's support for NATO is in many ways a function of European allies' willingness to bear a fair share of that burden.

Provide Increased and More Sustained Development Assistance. Improving the security and daily lives of the Afghan people is critical to defeating the Taliban – as former U.S. Commander General Karl Eikenberry used to say, "The Taliban begin where the roads end." Yet we have not been building enough roads. Again to make the Balkan comparison, U.S. and European financial assistance to Afghanistan has over the past six

years been less than one-tenth the level of funding provided to Bosnia and Kosovo. Ensuring stability in the Balkans is clearly in the U.S. and European national interest, but meeting the same goals in Afghanistan is arguably just as important. President Bush's February 2007 request for $11.8bn over two years was a belated but welcome step in right direction. It must be funded and sustained by Congress and matched by NATO allies.

Focus on Training and Resources for the Afghan National Army and Police. For many poor Afghans, the choice between supporting the Afghan government and joining the Taliban has nothing to do with ideology, but is simply a matter of who will better help make ends meet. None the less, many Afghan soldiers are still paid only around $100 per month, while admittedly imprecise reporting suggests that the Taliban pays many of its fighters around $300 per month. (This can be compared with costs for each NATO soldier in Afghanistan of around $4,000 per month.) At these rates, the monthly pay for all 57,000 members of the ANA could be doubled for $5.7 million – roughly the cost of six of the Tomahawk cruise missiles we used to overthrow the Taliban in 2001. Tripling their pay would come to some $137 million per year, a fraction of the $1.5 billion annual NATO budget for Afghan operations or the more than $15 billion in financial assistance we have provided since 2002. Strengthening the ANA is essential not only to build its capacity to fight alongside NATO, but to help NATO put an Afghan face on military operations, which is critical to their success.

Improving the effectiveness of the Afghan police forces will require more than just resources; it will also require a significant mentoring and monitoring effort. The Afghan police has reportedly reached 90 percent of its projected end strength of 82,000, but it is riddled with corruption and not trusted by the Afghan population. Police reform will have to be accompanied by greater efforts to establish the rule of law, including through greater training for Afghan judges and lawyers.

Crack Down on Drug Labs and Corrupt Officials. There is no easy solution to Afghanistan's drug problem, but NATO cannot ignore it either. Large-scale spraying and eradication efforts are counterproductive, because they tend to turn poor poppy farmers – who polls suggest would prefer to grow licit crops but simply cannot afford to – against NATO and the United States. Rather, NATO should focus its efforts on helping the Afghan government identify and punish corrupt officials who facilitate and benefit from the drug trade. This will require greater coordination between the international community's counter-insurgency efforts and its counter-narcotics efforts, which at present are disjointed. And while avoiding attacks on farmers, NATO forces should not hesitate to conduct operations against the labs that turn poppies into opium and the trade routes that carry opium to foreign markets, all of which generate profits that are used by the Taliban.

Adapt Our Strategy in Pakistan. The outcome of the recent election in Pakistan – where both President Musharraf's party and the religious parties suffered major setbacks – provides an opportunity to develop a new relationship with Pakistan that will serve our mutual interest. I applaud Senator Biden's proposals to triple our non-military assistance

to Pakistan and to sustain it for a decade and to provide a $1 billion "democracy dividend" to the new Pakistani government if it is formed and governs democratically. I spent a week in Pakistan last May and am going back there next week. My sense is that the Pakistani public is getting fed up with the growing al Qaeda attacks against them and they will support efforts to fight al Qaeda if we can demonstrate that we are prepared to help them do so. Pakistanis have long tended to view Americans as "fair-weather friends" and have resented seeing too much of our assistance end up in the hands of the Pakistani military (who use it to buy high-tech weaponry) rather than be put to use for schools and hospitals and jobs. Standing with the Pakistani people will make our counter-terrorism cooperation more palatable to the public and the government, and in the long run providing jobs and economic development in the tribal areas will make it easier to isolate and root out al Qaeda.

A Public Relations Campaign in Europe. The weakening of European resolve in Afghanistan stems less from a lack of official good will than from the fact that European publics doubt that NATO's mission can succeed and fail to see the mission's direct relevance to them. To combat this perception, the United States and its NATO allies should sponsor a public relations campaign to draw attention to the good NATO is doing in the country and the consequences of abandoning Afghanistan to its fate. Europeans need to be reminded that our adversaries in Afghanistan are the same ones not only who attacked the United States in 2001 but who killed 193 people on Spanish trains in Madrid in April 2004 and 54 London commuters in July 2005. U.S. and NATO governments should sponsor non-official speakers – from the United States, Europe, and Afghanistan – to talk to publics and the media about the situation in Afghanistan and the stakes. Europeans are often quick to dismiss the Afghan mission as an unnecessary part of President Bush's "war on terror," but I believe they can be persuaded that the mission is actually in Europe's own strategic and humanitarian interest.

Better International Coordination. As in many international nation-building efforts, our efforts to stabilize Afghanistan suffer from the lack of coordination among various international agencies. Unfortunately, the recent proposal to send Lord Ashdown as a strong UN Special Representative tasked with eliminating redundancies and maximizing international assistance was vetoed by the Karzai government. The new UN Special Representative, Norwegian diplomat Kai Eide, will need strong backing from the United States and other NATO members if he is to succeed in his mission to better coordinate what is a currently disparate and disjointed international effort.

***

I realize that even with the best of intentions, not all of these recommendations can or will be implemented immediately. The United States and other NATO member states have many competing priorities, and resources – both military and financial – are tight. The key to success, I believe, is to understand what is at stake and to do a better job of explaining those stakes to our own public and our NATO partners. While it would be nice to achieve all of these goals in the short term, what is truly essential is to commit to Afghanistan for the long-term, and to put our mission on a sustainable basis. The author

and former British diplomat Rory Stewart – who now lives in Kabul – likes to say that if everything goes almost perfectly well in Afghanistan for next 20 years, it will attain a level of development no higher than that of Pakistan. Afghanistan is a poor, arid, mountainous, and ethnically divided country that is emerging from 30 years of civil war and mismanagement. We should not expect to transform it overnight or lose faith when our efforts to help it run into inevitable setbacks. Nor, however, must we conclude that those efforts are simply too difficult or costly. We have already experienced the costs of abandoning Afghanistan, which exceed those required to satisfy its basic interests and keeping it from threatening ours.

Enlargement.

NATO's second major challenge at the summit is enlargement. At Bucharest, leaders must address two enlargement-related issues, a decision on current candidates (Albania, Croatia, and the Republic of Macedonia) and responses to requests to join the Membership Action Plan (MAP) by Georgia and Ukraine.

I believe that the process of NATO enlargement, begun in the early 1990s, has contributed to security and prosperity in Europe. The incentive of NATO membership has led aspiring countries to reform their political systems, liberalize their economies, root out corruption, resolve territorial disputes with neighbors, rationalize their military establishments, and improve minority rights. Once in the alliance new members have contributed troops for vital NATO missions in the Balkans and in Afghanistan and many sent forces to join the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq. In turn, NATO membership has reassured their populations of political and military solidarity with the United States and members of the European Union, enabling them to focus on improving the well-being of their citizens rather than worrying about the types of military threats they had lived with for centuries.

In this context, I support the entry into NATO of the current candidates, Albania, Croatia, and the Republic of Macedonia. Each has been part of NATO's MAP process for six or more years and has made significant progress in reforming their political systems, economies, and military establishments. All have contributed troops to the NATO mission in Afghanistan and made progress toward other goals like civilian control of the military and respect for minority rights. None is yet a model democracy – but all are moving in the right direction and have made at least as much progress as those that have preceded them in the accession process. In the wake of the turbulence surrounding Kosovo's declaration of independence, I believe that the extension of NATO membership to these neighboring countries will contribute to security in the Balkans and underscore NATO's commitment to it. Their accession after years of preparation will also demonstrate the sincerity of NATO's pledge that membership genuinely is open to those European democracies that meet its stringent criteria.

The question of MAP accession for Georgia and Ukraine is perhaps even more controversial. Russia is strongly opposed to their participation in the program, and both countries have in recent years experienced the sort of political instability that suggests

more progress must be made before membership should be considered. Despite these concerns, I believe NATO should respond positively to their requests to join the MAP. Those requests came to NATO from democratically elected governments which have pledged to seek to build consensus about NATO within their countries and to continue to work to meet NATO's rigorous standards. So long as NATO makes clear that a MAP is not a guarantee of future membership, which can only be granted when an aspirant meets all of NATO's criteria and a consensus exists among NATO members, there is no basis for rejecting their requests to participate in this program. The MAP is a logical extension of the Intensified Dialogues in which they already take part. Their reformist governments' desire to come closer to the West should be encouraged, not discouraged.

Despite its recent political problems, including the Saakashvili government's excessive use of force in response to street protests in November 2007, Georgia has made significant political progress since the "Rose Revolution" of November 2003. The elections that followed the November 2007 turbulence were seen to be free and fair, and were won easily by Saakashvili, who got 53 percent of the vote compared to 26 percent for his rival. In a referendum accompanying the presidential vote, 73 percent of Georgians came out in support of eventual NATO membership. The World Bank has recently given Georgia good marks on economic reform and anti-corruption efforts, even if the November 2007 protests were a warning shot that much of the population remains dissatisfied with perceived authoritarianism. A positive signal about the prospect of eventual NATO membership sent by MAP participation will help encourage positive political trends. It will also encourage Georgia to seek to resolve the "frozen conflicts" in Abkhazia and South Ossetia that continue to plague its efforts to achieve national unity – a Georgia with realistic aspirations to join NATO is more likely to work energetically to resolve these conflicts than a Georgia with no hope of joining the Alliance. Georgia has a long way to go – both in meeting NATO's democratic standards and in terms of resolving its internal conflicts – before it can seriously be seen as a near-term candidate for NATO membership. The question now is how best to keep it moving in the right direction.

Ukraine has also made significant political progress since its 2004 "Orange Revolution." Its parliamentary elections in March 2006 were judged to meet international standards and took place after free debate and without incident. While even eventual NATO membership is far from a matter of consensus among Ukrainians – indeed most are currently opposed to it – President Yushchenko and Prime Minister Tymoshenko have encouragingly pledged to work to foster national unity and to consult the Ukrainian people in a referendum prior to any move toward membership. The Ukrainian opposition itself once favored NATO membership and even sought to participate in the MAP but it now opposes NATO for apparent partisan political reasons. I believe that agreeing to allow Ukraine to participate in the MAP program at the Bucharest summit would encourage it to continue to move in the direction of democratic and peaceful reform.

Some would argue that giving a MAP to Georgia and Ukraine is premature because it would be a signal of imminent membership, for which they are not ready. But NATO's own literature on the MAP states that "participation in the MAP does not guarantee future

membership… Decisions to invite aspirants to start accession talks will be taken within NATO by consensus and on a case-by-case basis." NATO also emphasizes that "aspirant countries are expected to achieve certain goals… [including] settling any international, ethnic or external territorial disputes by peaceful means; demonstrating a commitment to the rule of law and human rights; establishing democratic control of their armed forces; and promoting stability and well-being through economic liberty, social justice and environmental responsibility." These statements make clear that the real bar to NATO membership is and should be between the MAP and membership, not between the Intensified Dialogue and the MAP. NATO leaders should reiterate this point at the summit.

Others will argue that MAP for Georgia should be opposed because it is opposed by Russia. However, while Russian concerns should obviously be taken into account in any discussions of European security, Moscow cannot have a veto on the choices of neighboring democratic governments. NATO enlargement is not and has never been a threat to Russia, which should understand that it can benefit from democracy, stability, and prosperity in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. President Putin's threat to target Ukraine with nuclear missiles if it seeks to join NATO has no place in 21st century diplomatic relations and should be taken more as a reason to increase Ukraine's ties to NATO than to cut them off. Russia's opposition, then, is perhaps a further reason to act on MAP for Georgia and Ukraine at Bucharest rather than waiting. With a new Russian president taking office in May and a new U.S. administration to take office in January 2009, it makes sense to get this controversial issue off the table now rather than to have to confront another MAP decision at NATO's planned 60th anniversary summit in spring 2009. That way the new U.S. administration could seek to make a fresh start in rebuilding relations with Russia, which should be one of its early priorities.

Mr. Chairman, I believe the Bucharest summit provides an important opportunity to advance U.S. interests by bolstering NATO's mission in Afghanistan and moving forward on enlargement. I commend your own leadership in both of these areas and thank the Committee for inviting me to testify before you.