

January 16, 2007

The Honorable Ike Skelton  
Chairman  
House Committee on Armed Services  
Washington, DC 20515-6035

Dear Mr. Chairman,

I would like to thank you, the ranking member, and the members of the Committee for the opportunity to testify before you on the war in Afghanistan. I regret that the rescheduling of the hearing means I will not be able to appear before you. I will be visiting our forces in Afghanistan when the hearing takes place.

There are, however, several points that I believe should be raised before the Committee and to every member of Congress. Hopefully, my colleagues will raise many of these same points in their testimony, but I hope that this open letter to you, the Committee, and other members of Congress will still be of value.

### **Facing the Real Levels of Risk**

The US and NATO/ISAF are not winning in Afghanistan. Making detailed assessments is necessarily uncertain because of the lack of meaningful unclassified official data and metrics. US, NATO/ISAF, and most allied government reporting on the Afghan War are often little more than political posturing, even in comparison with the level of official reporting on the Iraq War. Nevertheless, enough data are available—from interviews, UN sources, and background briefings—to make some key realities clear. (A summary of these data in map and chart form are available at [http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/071203\\_afghanchallrev.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/csis/pubs/071203_afghanchallrev.pdf) on the CSIS web site.)

The US and NATO/ISAF are able to defeat the Taliban and other Islamist extremist movements at the tactical level, and have won important victories in 2007. However, the Taliban still seem to be winning the battle for political and economic space. US,

NATO/ISAF, and Afghan forces are not strong enough to “hold” large areas after they “win.” There are only limited aid resources and personnel to “build” even in the more secure areas, and the Afghan central government cannot provide effective governance, services, and anything approaching the rule of law in most of the country, and particularly in high threat areas.

The rate of increase in Taliban control and influence in Afghanistan seems to have slowed sharply in 2007. It is clear, however, that the Taliban continues to score gains in controlling or threatening parts of Afghanistan. Moreover, the problems in Afghanistan are greatly compounded by Taliban and Al Qa’ida influence in Pakistan, and the area of direct day-to-day Taliban influence in that country continues to increase.

It is all too clear that this war is not simply an Afghan struggle, but rather an Afghan-Pakistan struggle that is centered on Pashtuni areas, spreading into other ethnic areas, and linked to growing Sunni-Shi’ite tensions. This war cannot be understood or won unless it is seen as a struggle for the future of both Afghanistan and Pakistan.

It also cannot be understood or won unless it is seen as having both a heavily ethnic and religious character. As in Iraq and much of the Islamic world, the ideological battle is largely a battle for the future of Islam and perceptions of legitimacy based on local perceptions and values. It will be won or lost by Afghans and Pakistanis, not by US or NATO/ISAF efforts.

The issue of religion is closely linked to culture and ethnic identity. It is critical to understand that US and other Western efforts to create “democracy,” and introduce Western values in terms of law and human rights, cannot win this critical aspect of the war for hearts and minds. Like Iraq, Afghanistan may evolve towards Western values and concepts of pluralism and the rule of law over time. Important progress is already being made towards these ends, but it will take at least a decade to create effective political parties, create a stable pattern of governance, and determine how the country will actually implement human rights and the rule of law if the Afghans can win the battle of religion and culture.

Like Al Qa’ida, the Taliban is not winning this aspect of the war. A series of different polls show that the Taliban and other Neo-Salafi extremists are not popular even in many Pashtun areas. The Taliban however, is gaining in popularity in the areas where it is active, has persuaded many Afghans that they can only be secure if it comes to play a role in the Afghan government, and is making gains by default. The Afghan government, the US, and NATO/ISAF lack the resources and capability to check its progress at the current time.

It is all too clear that the Afghan Army is years from being ready to “hold,” that the Afghan police development effort is still making slow and tenuous progress, and that Afghan governance and services are largely absent in much of the country, and in almost

all of the high threat areas. A past focus on the central government has left provincial and local governments weak and without legitimacy in much of the country, and displaced much of the previous leadership without replacing it. Counternarcotics efforts have been ineffective, corrupt, and have done more to alienate Afghans than reduce opium output. They have also pushed opium growing into Taliban dominated efforts and helped to finance the enemy.

At the same time, the war in Afghanistan remains eminently winnable. The Taliban is not strong. Its core forces probably number between 10,000 and 15,000, and its gains occur largely because of problems in resources and US and NATO/ISAF strategy for aiding the Afghan government. Some of these problems have already been eased by the increases in NATO/ISAF forces and US aid in 2007. The others can be solved by time, patience, and added resources – *if* the Afghan and Pakistani governments also move forward.

There also are convincing reasons why the US and its allies should provide the forces and resources necessary to win. The risk in losing this war must be addressed as honestly as the risk of continuing the fight. The choice is not one of staying or leaving. If the US and its NATO/ISAF allies lose in Afghanistan, even to the extent of losing effective control of the Pashtun areas, they will create a new sanctuary for both the Taliban and Al Qa'ida and make it extremely difficult for a divided and troubled Pakistan to ever secure its own Western tribal areas.

Virtually every country on Afghanistan's borders will be forced into some form of at least covert intervention, and Al Qa'ida's reputation and influence will be vastly strengthened throughout the Islamic world and wherever Islamist radicals are present. Afghanistan and Pakistan are a far more serious center of terrorism than Iraq, and the risk of having to fight the same ideological and terrorist threat at home and in friendly and allied countries is at least as great, if not greater.

### **Time and Patience**

If we are to win, we need a strategy, plan, and resources that can correct the problems we now face. We need to recognize that success in Afghanistan, like success in Iraq, will require far more time and patience than I have seen the US admit in its policy statements to date, or in the plans of our NATO/ISAF allies and the international community.

Failure can be quick. Success will almost certainly require a sustained effort through the life of the next Administration. This does not mean the same level of forces, aid, or combat. It does mean a commitment to a long effort to bring security and stability to Afghanistan, and help it move towards effective governance and economic development.

The kind of plans and budgets that attempt to rush towards success in the coming year are a recipe for failure and defeat. The same is true of the Afghan Compact. We cannot hope to succeed by February 2009. We must plan to be in Afghanistan for at least the next five

years, and that takes us to 2013. If success happens to come earlier, then it will be so much the better. It is, however, a dangerous illusion to push for unattainable levels of “instant” progress, to promise what cannot be delivered, and to pretend to the American public that success can come quickly.

As in Iraq, we also are dealing with long wars where the most immediate enemy is only part of the problem. Even if we could quickly defeat the Taliban and other Islamic extremist movements, we would still have to deal with ethnic and sectarian tensions, pressures from neighboring states, and the difficulties in creating effective governance, political structures, and economic progress at the national, regional, and political level.

The Iraqi Minister of Defense recently illustrated the realities involved in the timelines for this kind of war when he stated that Iraqi forces would not be ready to assume the internal security burden without US aid until 2015, and would take until 2018 to build up the capability to defend Iraq against its neighbors. Iraq’s security forces, however, have had vastly more aid than Afghan forces and face much less demanding pressures from the outside than Afghanistan does in dealing with the Taliban and Al Qa’ida sanctuary in Pakistan.

Afghan forces are making progress, but will not be ready in 2008 or 2009. Creating an effective police force, criminal justice system, and government presence and mix of services that can sustain itself with only minimal aid will almost certainly take until 2012-2014 at the earliest.

### **Military Resources**

Secretary Gates and senior US and NATO/ISAF commanders have already made it clear that we lack enough military forces to both “win and hold,” defeat the Taliban, and create the conditions where Afghan forces can eventually replace US and NATO/ISAF units. It is not clear just how many additional forces are needed.

Senior commanders have, however, stated in background briefings that they need three key elements: At least four more battalions – some 3,000-7,200 troops; an end to national caveats that divide and limit the operations of many NATO/ISAF forces and relegate French, German, Italian, and Spanish forces to “stand aside” roles; and a far more active and effective Pakistani military effort on the Pakistani side of the border. They have also repeatedly stated that they need more helicopters, and some have made it clear they need additional armor.

These are scarcely demanding requirements by the standards of past wars, or Iraq. They do, however, raise real questions about the role our allies are willing to play. Reports that the US will provide some 3,200 more Marines to aid British and Canadian forces in Helmand and Khandahar are a start, but only a start. It is clear that this new US deployment will not be a “surge” large enough to allow major changes in tactics or cover

all of the areas where more troops are needed, and there is a serious risk that Canada may not continue its presence beyond the end of the Afghan compact in February 2009.

It is important to note that this lack of troops is not a test of NATO. NATO as an organization seems perfectly capable of functioning in Afghanistan *if* member countries would allow it to do so. The test is actually one of member nations. It is a test of whether they will allow NATO to function, to commit their forces fully to missions outside Europe, and see the seriousness of this war for what it is.

It is all too easy to give way to the priorities of domestic politics, and to claim to be seizing the high moral ground and then hide there in safety. The end result, however, is that the primary threat to NATO/ISAF is not the Taliban, but the national leaders of the “stand aside” and “caveat” countries.

Given today’s political realities, this situation cannot be corrected in 2008. Secretary Gates and the Bush Administration have done what they can. Further diplomacy and non-binding Congressional resolutions might help, but the fact is that the next Administration will face the challenge of sustaining today’s NATO/ISAF force levels and getting added contributions. This is a reality that no candidate of either party has yet chosen to address in a substantive manner. The winner in the November election will have no choice.

As for Pakistan, the US will have little choice but to take action during the course of 2008, and here the Congress needs to face the reality that finding ways to aid and encourage the Pakistani Army in taking aggressive action against the Taliban and Al Qa’ida threat in Pakistan must have priority over using aid as a political lever to try to move Pakistan towards democracy.

This does not mean the US should write a blank check towards all forms of military aid to Pakistan. It does mean that as long as NATO/ISAF forces are too weak in Afghanistan, and Afghan forces are years away from being ready, the US cannot afford to leave the security situation in Western Pakistan and along the southern border of Afghanistan the way it is if there is anything that aid and diplomacy can do to get the Pakistani government to take effective action. It also means that major increases in aid are needed to encourage democracy and the rule of law in Pakistan.

### **Military Aid to Afghan Forces**

It is difficult at a distance to know how much progress is really being made in creating effective Afghan forces. The unclassified reporting does not provide anything like the detail available on Iraq forces. In general, the Afghan National Army seems to be making real progress, but at a far slower rate than NATO/ISAF claims. Senior NATO commanders state on a background basis that the goals set for 2008 will at best be achieved in 2009.

It seems likely that the Afghan forces will not really be able to start reducing the current need for NATO forces until after 2010, and will require substantial aid and US/NATO/ISAF military advice, fire support, and enablers through 2012 at a minimum. Success requires a sustained aid program over a five-year period, not annual surges of money and effort that are not part of a coherent and sustained strategy.

It does seem clear that similar progress is not being made in creating effective police or local security forces, or in supporting Afghan forces with effective governance, services, and a criminal justice system. Like Iraq and many similar cases, creating an effective police cannot be done by training and organizing a force at the central government or national level. Just like the Army, the police can only succeed if it has effective facilities, equipment, pay and services in the field, and embedded advisors. These capabilities are just beginning to be available for the Army. Report after report indicates that they are not available for the police, and that the police remain corrupt, ineffective, and unable to “hold” the areas the military “wins.”

There are strong indications that the police effort needs to be zero-based as part of a five year plan that deals with reality rather than slogans and hopes. Such a plan must address the problems and opportunities in using local auxiliary and tribal forces. So far, there has been little meaningful public analysis of such options and their risks, although US and British experts seem deeply divided (the US con and the British pro) and Afghan officials privately express the same divisions as to what should be done.

Moreover, one of the consistent lessons of counterinsurgency and nation building is that going from “win” to “hold and build” requires the simultaneous creation of a criminal justice system and a government presence and services. Wars are won where they are fought, and this means Afghan military forces must be replaced in high threat and Taliban controlled areas by a combination of police, local security, courts, and government presence and services at the local level.

US and NATO/ISAF forces may be able to provide local security for a while – and give Afghans the opportunity to develop such a local presence – but there is no way to “hold and build” unless the Afghans get the training, aid, and sustained advice to take over these roles. Unless they do, the US and NATO/ISAF can win every battle and still lose.

### **Dollars for Bullets: The Broader Need for Aid**

This raises the issue of economic aid. One of the clear lessons of the Afghan War -- as in the Iraq War and every similar war before them -- is that dollars are at least as important as bullets. The US and international community, however, have been slow to raise aid levels to anything like the levels required, still fall badly short of the levels needed, and act as if annual budgets and a compact that only extends to February 2009 are adequate.

The US and international aid efforts to date have already had considerable benefits to Afghanistan at the national level, but this is not how wars are won. War fighting requires aid efforts focused on bringing stability to combat zones and high-risk areas, and that this requires a partnership between the military and aid personnel. The EPRT system is the key approach. PRTs without military security and transport, and pursuing separate priorities, may do good in the more secure local areas, but those areas are not the priority. Moreover, dealing with unemployment, reintegrating young fighters, and providing immediate services is the key to creating the mix of short term security and stability upon which longer term development efforts can be built.

The aid community cannot be allowed to do its thing, and focus on development as if the nation was not at war, or as if creating governances, services, and a rule of law were not as important as the economy and infrastructure. The military cannot be allowed to do its thing, simply buy temporary support to ease its tactical burden, and ignore the aid community. Unless both act together to win, hold, and build at the local level, both are likely to be ineffective and lose. Moreover, longer-term aid efforts will become pointless because the present Afghan government will not survive.

Similarly, the Congress does not need to appropriate for future years, but it must carry out its functions in ways that recognize the need for long-term, consistent efforts. Furthermore, the Congress must recognize the fact that it cannot micromanage victory, but it can micromanage defeat. Aid efforts in a war zone will involve waste and major flaws in accountability. Third world nations must learn to use money efficiently by doing, and there will be substantial corruption if anything is to be done.

The US will not need a foreign enemy, if the Administration and the Congress do not accept these facts. It also will not need a foreign enemy if the Congress attempts to indirectly control military strategy and the nation's foreign policy by placing excessive limits on the use of aid money. It is not clear that this is happening in the case of Afghanistan, but it may be happening in the case of Iraq.

Congress has not been willing to fund additional assistance for 2008. The Omnibus Appropriation the President signed prohibited use of the funds for Iraq with four exceptions: \$200 million for refugees from Iraq (and Palestinians), \$10 million for an Iraqi scholar rescue fund, \$5 million for the Marla Ruzicka victims fund, and use of demining funds in Iraq. The appropriators' logic was that there is a large backlog of ESF funds from the 2007 supplemental.

The end result is that capacity building and short-term employment programs funded with ESF will be out of money by the end of the fiscal year and many of them will be in shutdown mode (notices to staff etc.). The exceptions are the Provincial Reconstruction Development Council (PRDC) program and our Infrastructure Security Program (ISP).

The PRDC is the showcase program of the US provincial government strategy. Out of the \$600 million appropriated in the FY 07 supplemental, the country team took \$25

million to fund QRF grants by PRTs (approximately \$6 million expended so far), and \$100 million to do larger QRF-like projects at the direction of the PRT's (by AID contractor DAI which only started in November; only \$5 million spent so far but ramping up). That left \$475 million.

As part of the mission's program for building local government capacity, we gave provincial authorities notional budgets to ask for US assistance in building small scale projects. This initiative has given the PRTs access and helps build their relationships. The US has already obligated \$100 million to the Army Corps of Engineers to contract to build such projects. There are another \$306 million in projects in the pipeline (submitted by provinces) and there are some provinces that haven't been heard from. The unobligated funds in the original appropriation are sufficient to cover this work. If funded, work on these individually small-sized projects (including schools, parks, and little water supply units) will continue through 2009.

The ISP program is working with a FY 06 appropriation of \$227 million. \$110 million is contracted, and \$117 million has been earmarked for specific projects including \$60 million for the strategically important pipeline exclusion zone between Bayji and Baghdad. Because of long lead times for such construction projects in unstable parts of the country, work using existing appropriations will continue into mid 2009. (The US recently allowed \$20 million to be reallocated from the unobligated funds on this project to help refugees in Syria.) But otherwise this effort is directed at helping the oil ministry increase export revenues in a sustainable fashion.

Aside from these two infrastructure programs, other efforts, including short term jobs for military-aged males (Community Stabilization Program, going through \$30 million monthly), our microcredit and small business support program (Izdihar and follow-on), Community Action Program (local level NGO's), agribusiness (INMA), ministerial capacity support (Tatweer), and economic governance (WTO membership, pension reform) will run out of money in fiscal or calendar 2008.

Democracy programs are in a similar state, and even CERP funds are tighter this year than before. The mission would like to have new funds to catalyze more activity in private investment (Congress has declined thus far to support a request for an "Enterprise Fund" as contained in Ambassador Crocker's September testimony), banking sector revitalization, and housing (for returnees and in general).

Victory requires aid efforts to be planned, managed, implemented, and funded over years, not months. It requires flexibility, and the mission of Congress should be to hold the implementers accountable for their results, not plan their aid efforts for them.

### **The Need for Transparency and Effective Plans and Budgets**

This brings me to my final point. It will probably be June 2009 at the earliest before a new President is in office with his or her team in place. A whole new campaign season

will have taken place in 2008, and the offensive of 2009 will have begun before a new President and a new Congress will be ready to act.

The coming year will not be “decisive.” No one can predict the ultimate turning point in this war. It will, however, be critical, and the program put in place in 2008 and in the FY2009 budget request will shape real-world policy for the new President’s first year in office. But, if we are to make progress in 2008 -- and move forward towards a coherent strategy, plan, program, and budget that can achieve real victory over time – we need the kind of transparency that can build trust in the American people, in the Congress, in the media, and show our allies they can trust in our judgments and commitment.

Having examined the unclassified official reporting on Iraq, I see no effort to provide such transparency or build such trust. My analysis of such reporting is available at [http://www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/071129\\_afghan-pakconfl.pdf](http://www.csis.org/media/isis/pubs/071129_afghan-pakconfl.pdf) on the CSIS web site, and I believe that providing broad accountability as to the effectiveness of the overall US, NATO/ISAF and Afghan government efforts is absolutely vital.

A report similar to the quarterly report on security and stability in Iraq would be a first step. There is a clear need for a coherent overview and basic metrics on the threat, military progress, and the efforts of the US, NATO/ISAF and Afghan government to date. The key need, however, is for a realistic plan, program, and budget for the future that looks at least through the life of the next presidency.

Afghanistan will need US and allied combat forces well into the first four years of the next Administration and will need aid dollars even longer than it will need bullets. Force plans and aid levels should be based on a frank assessment of long-term requirements and not structured on the basis of what can be obtained in a given year.

If we are to win in Afghanistan, both the executive branch and the Congress must recognize this fact. The executive branch must develop the plans and aid requests for a coherent program extending over at least five years. Like all plans, this will require constant change and adjustment, but there must be a clear set of goals and resource requirements.

As is virtually every other aspect of national security, the word “strategy” is little more than well-intentioned rubbish unless it is directly linked to a clear plan, program, and long-term budget. This is equally true for US/NATO/ISF force levels, Afghan force development efforts, economic aid, and plans to improve governance and the rule of law. It is also this combination of a plan, program, and long-term budget—not line items in annual budgets or problems in past spending—that should be the basis by which the Congress, the American people, and our allies determine whether we are on a credible path towards victory and accountability in the meaningful sense of the term.

Finally, such a plan, program, and long-term budget must take full account of the risks in providing too little, too late; and in making political accommodation, rather than success, the key priority. Much of the problem in Afghanistan today comes from past failures to provide adequate levels of resources and forces, and from trying to implement plans and goals that attempted to rush towards success because of artificial deadlines.

The end result has been to open up windows of opportunity for the Taliban and Al Qa'ida, to make real progress far more difficult, and to steadily raise the cost of success in future years because too few forces and resources are provided in the present. The result has been to increase US, allied, and Afghan casualties, and to push the military and aid teams in country into asking too little and promising too much. In short, the price of "nickel and diming" Afghanistan in any given year is to raise the cost of the war in future years and make success more difficult.

Sincerely

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