

**Opening statement of Lt. Gen. Karl Eikenberry  
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Testimony before the House Armed Services Committee  
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Chairman Hunter, Representative Skelton, members of the Committee.

It is an honor to be here today representing the 23,000 Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines of the Combined Forces Command – Afghanistan.

When the United States and its Coalition partners began Operation Enduring Freedom in October 2001, we started with two missions: First, to defeat Al-Qaeda and their Taliban allies; and second, together with the Afghan people and the international community, to help create the conditions where international terrorism could never again find witting support and sanctuary.

Viewed from the baseline of October 2001, the progress made to date in Afghanistan is truly significant: A democratically-elected president, a sitting Parliament, a confirmed Cabinet, a functioning Constitution, Afghan National Security Forces that are steadily growing in strength and capability; and ongoing reconstruction projects across the country that are improving the lives of the Afghan people.

Against this progress, Afghanistan remains the target of terrorist groups, drug traffickers and a determined criminal element. Not all violence can be attributed to the Taliban or al-Qaeda, as narco-trafficking, tribal conflicts and land disputes also continue to challenge the overall security environment. The enemy we face is not particularly strong, but the institutions of the Afghan State remain relatively weak. This situation is enabling the enemy to operate in the absence of Government presence in some areas of the country. To be sure, the presence and strength of the Taliban has grown in some districts, primarily in the South. Since being removed as a regime, they have reconstituted elsewhere. We are seeing enemy forces now operate in formations of 40 – 50 fighters; they are demonstrating better command and control; and they are fighting hard.

Our current operation in Southern Afghanistan, Operation Mountain Thrust, seeks to deny the enemy safe havens, interdict his movement routes, and, most importantly, extend the authority of the central government. The combat phase of this operation is only the precursor to our longer-term goal of strengthening good governance, the rule of law, reconstruction and humanitarian assistance, and economic development. This emphasis on governance and development is indicative of our overall approach to the Afghan campaign.

Provincial Reconstruction Teams are actively engaging district and provincial leaders to facilitate good governance; medical assistance teams are treating thousands of Afghans who otherwise would not have access to medical care; and we are building hundreds of miles of roads. This latter effort is key to expanding the reach of the central government and jump starting the rural economy. I cannot overstate its importance.

I have touched on our current operations and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have in the discussion to follow, but now I would like to discuss the future. This summer, the NATO International Security Assistance Force, or NATO ISAF, will expand its areas of operations from Northern and Western Afghanistan, to Southern Afghanistan. We anticipate that NATO will assume responsibility for the overall security mission for all of Afghanistan at some point later this year. A key point to remember is that the United States' full commitment in Afghanistan will remain undiminished.

As a NATO member, the United States will remain by far the single largest contributor of troops and capability. We will maintain our strong national capability in support of our counterterrorism

mission to strike al-Qaeda and its associated movements wherever and whenever they are found. Moreover, our military will continue to play a central role in training and equipping the Afghan National Security Forces; and we will maintain our important contribution to Afghanistan's reconstruction.

In addition to the transition from the US-led Coalition to NATO ISAF international military leads, Afghanistan's continued development will be marked by three other transitions. The second transition underway is the increasing emphasis by the Government of Afghanistan and international community on the non-military aspects of our collective efforts. As I just explained how this effort relates to Operation Mountain Thrust, I need to emphasize that it is the heart of our long-term effort to make Afghanistan a viable, self-sustaining member of the international community free from international terror. In short, we seek to rebuild Afghanistan's "Middle Ground" – that is, its civil society ravaged by three decades of warfare, extremism, and terrorism.

Throughout Afghanistan's 34 provinces, rebuilding the "Middle Ground" remains the primary concern of the Afghan people. A recent poll of Afghans showed that 80% see economic reconstruction – not security – as their number one need. To further enhance security and stability, the Government of Afghanistan and international community must continue to work together to improve governance, the rule of law, economic infrastructure and social services. In a campaign such as this, the construction of roads and schools can be just as decisive as military actions. The international community must make greater efforts in this area.

The third transition is from international to Afghan lead in all dimensions of Afghan governance and security. The growth in size and capability of the Afghan National Security Forces – the National Army and Police – is one of the most visible and important aspects of this transition. Today, over 66,000 Army and police are trained, equipped and engaged in security operations. The Afghan National Security Forces, partnered with Coalition and NATO units, are expanding their reach and presence more widely within their country. They are increasingly playing a major role in ensuring the stability of their Nation, as evidenced by their successful participation in Operation Mountain Thrust. It is imperative that the international community maintain its support and commitment to this essential – but still emerging – institution of the Afghan State. We can anticipate emerging equipment requirements for the Afghan National Army and Police that NATO and the international community will need to address.

The fourth and final transition relates to the need to find cooperative approaches to the fight against international terrorism. Afghanistan, Pakistan and the international community are threatened by a common enemy. We have endeavored to adopt a coordinated military approach to address this threat, working to improve our combined operational effectiveness and build mutual confidence. For example, on June 6, I represented the United States at the 17<sup>th</sup> session of the Afghan-Pakistan-US Tripartite Commission at Rawalpindi, Pakistan. This session, like those before it, served to further cooperation between the Coalition, Afghanistan, NATO ISAF and Pakistan military forces. We aim to expand information sharing, communications, and personal interaction at all levels of command and we are making significant progress.

In my discussion of the progress in Afghanistan, I do not want to discount the enormous obstacles that remain. Much work needs to be done and the international community must remain patient and maintain an uncompromising long-term commitment to Afghanistan's success – if we are to prevail. Most pressing, the continuing assaults on Afghanistan by international terrorism, as well as narco-trafficking and related government corruption could threaten the viability of the Afghan State. However, we should not be daunted by these challenges. Instead, we should take stock of the tremendous progress that Afghanistan and the international community have made to date and apply that same commitment to the difficulties that lie ahead.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you again for this opportunity and I look forward to your questions.