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TRANSITION IN AFGHANISTAN

Mr Chairman, members of the committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about this important national and international issue. I intend to keep my opening remarks brief in order to allow maximum time for discussion, and in order to do so I would like to focus narrowly on the question of what, specifically, needs to happen on the ground in Afghanistan in order to enable a transition in 2014.

Nature of the Problem

The answer to this question depends on whether you believe the insurgency in Afghanistan *is* the problem, or is a *symptom* of a wider set of problems. My work in and on Afghanistan over the past seven years suggests the latter – that is, the insurgency arises from a wider set of causes, and just dealing with active fighters will be insufficient for effective transition.

In particular, I see the war as arising from a four-part cycle of instability:

- **Corruption and criminality**, arising in part from the drug economy and in part from the international presence and the contracting bonanza associated with it, creates a flood of illicit cash into the hands of elites, power brokers, local warlords and certain corrupt officials;
- This corruption enables and incentivizes **abuse**, in the form of expropriation of resources, denial of justice, physical abuse and violence, against ordinary members of the Afghan population;

- These abuses create **popular rage, cynicism and disillusionment** with the Afghan government, but also with the international community, whom many Afghans hold responsible for the behavior of abusive officials and elites;
- This empowers and enables the **insurgents**, who are able to pose as clean, just, incorruptible, and the defenders of the people, and can exploit popular rage to build support; and the insurgency in turn creates the conditions of instability, violence and lack of accountability that drive the cycle onward.

As I have previously testified, we have seen this cycle deepen and worsen over the past decade of the war, and our focus (at various times) solely on destroying the main forces of the enemy has been ineffective in addressing the wider drivers of the conflict, or has even made things worse.

To address this overall instability dynamic, we need four things: an anti-corruption campaign, a governance reform campaign, a process of political reconciliation at the district and local level, and a robust security campaign to suppress the insurgency while these other elements have time to take effect.

All these elements are present in our campaign today, and we have seen some very real security progress in Afghanistan in the past year, as well as limited progress on governance and rule of law. Yet progress on corruption, abuses, and political reconciliation is lagging, and we have heavily emphasized fighting the insurgents, while investing far less in addressing the other elements of the problem. This means that progress in the campaign is not only mixed, but that we are somewhat unbalanced.

Pathways to Transition

Based on all of this, and on recent developments in the campaign, I see three pathways to transition, which we might shorthand as suppression, stabilization and reconciliation. These are not mutually exclusive, and in fact we need to integrate all three for transition to succeed.

The first pathway is what we might call the Suppression Path. This is a counter-network approach, focused on destroying the insurgents' ability to threaten the transition and reducing their military capacity as a threat to the Afghan state. This requires a high concentration of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance effort, combined with a network of forward-deployed strike assets that can respond quickly to target the insurgents' leadership and specialist cadres, and can support and enable stabilization activities at the district level.

Ideally, in a transition process, counter-network operations would be transferred to Afghan special operations forces, the National Directorate of Security, and specialized law enforcement and military organizations of the Afghan government, and would continue with assistance, advice and enablers from the international community after the transition to Afghan lead has occurred. This of course depends on the outcome of discussions with the Afghan government about the status of international forces and security assistance after 2014. The Suppression path is already in place in Afghanistan, and in fact is one area of the campaign in which ISAF is performing extremely effectively.

The second pathway is the Stabilization Path. This is a counter-insurgency approach, focused on stabilizing districts most heavily affected by the insurgency, reducing the insurgency's spread, and inoculating areas that have been stabilized in order to prevent the insurgents' return. This approach requires security operations and governance reform at the district level, and targets the three basic insurgent elements at the district level – the main force insurgent column, the part-time local guerrilla group, and the village-level underground or shadow district administration. In addition to destroying the effectiveness of the insurgency at the district level through targeted military and intelligence activity, the main tasks within the Stabilization approach are to protect the population from insurgent intimidation, rebuild district and community level political systems, and create self-defending communities that are resistant to re-infiltration by insurgents once our forces are no longer present. This process is often short-handed as "clear-hold-build-transition".

I think we all recognize, however, that it is an extremely time-consuming and resource-intensive process, and that it requires a high degree of international civilian

and military engagement at the district level. It also requires an Afghan partner, in the form of the Government of Afghanistan, that is willing to actually undertake the hard work of governance reform and anti-corruption at the local level, to help stand up responsive government, and put in place responsive and effective administrative structures.

ISAF has made enormous progress in the last year, particularly in the south, in improving security at the district and village level. But the hard fact is that the other aspects of stabilization – countering abuse, governance reform, standing up viable local political institutions – are lagging significantly. Village Stability Operations (VSO) are one particularly promising program, but if we consider the work remaining, the lack of appetite for reform on the part of some local partners, the lack of appetite in this country and others for the expense and effort of nation-building, and – most importantly – the *lack of time* given the 2014 transition timeline, it is extremely hard to see how we can “get there from here” using a stabilization approach alone. There simply isn’t the time, will, or resources for classical counter-insurgency to work in Afghanistan by 2014.

The final pathway is Reconciliation. This is a peace-building model, which recognizes that apart from a small committed hard core of full-time insurgents, the majority of people in the insurgency are local part-time guerrillas motivated in part by local abuses, in part by the presence of international forces in their area, and in part by community, ethnic and tribal affiliations and by ties of loyalty forged with members of various insurgent groups over decades of war. Much of the violence in Afghanistan is unconnected to the Quetta Shura, to Mullah Omar, let alone to Al Qaeda. Local peace deals, complemented by a reintegration program to bring less committed members of the insurgency back to their communities, and by a national-level reconciliation program to make peace with higher-level leaders of insurgent groups, are already in place. Again, the VSO program also plays a valuable role here, as do security operations that make people feel safe enough to reconcile, and reform and governance programs that address key grievances.

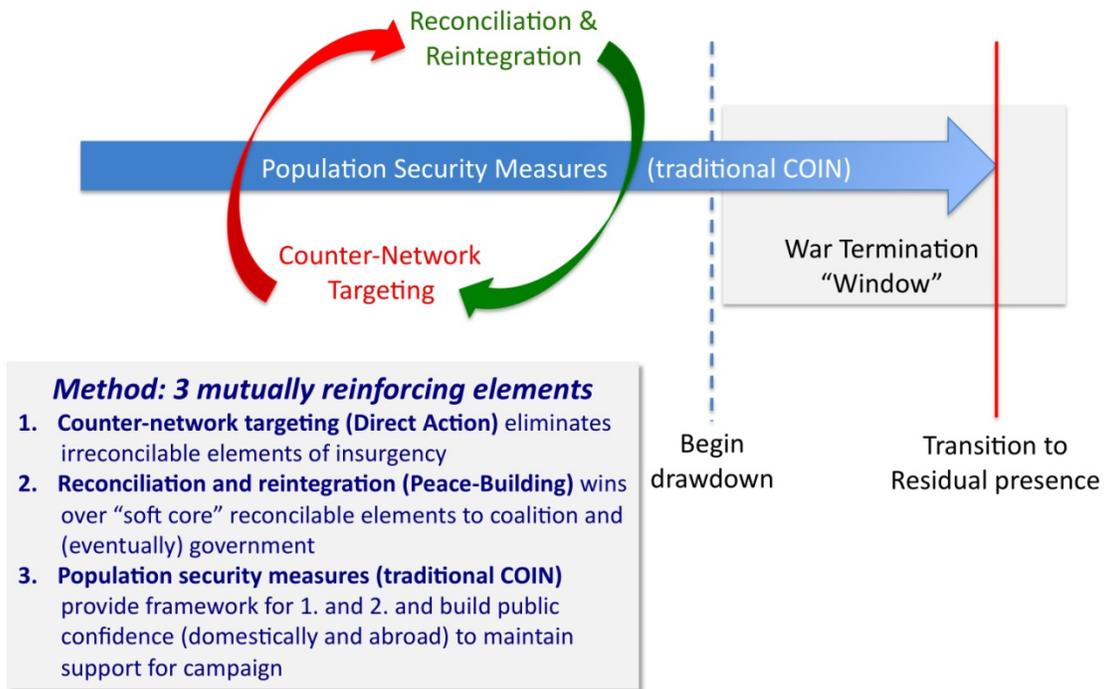
In order for transition in 2014 to succeed, we need to make progress along all three pathways, so it is important to understand how they intersect. Strategically, the

critical pathway that underpins everything else is stabilization. Stability operations at district and province level provide a basis for everything else we do, enable strike assets to be based far enough forward for counter-network operations, and help the population feel safe enough to reconcile. Layered on top of stabilization, counter-network strike reduces the insurgents' effectiveness and, by killing or capturing irreconcilables, makes it more likely that others will reconcile or reintegrate. Finally, reconciliation brings those who are willing to reconcile into a peace-building process, further reduces the strength of the insurgency, and improves district stability by reducing conflict.

These three approaches are mutually reinforcing – stabilization provides the firm base, and the better we do at counter-network operations, the easier it becomes to reconcile with less committed insurgents, while the better we do at reconciliation, the fewer hard-core insurgents we need to target. Ultimately this can create a virtuous circle that leads to rapid and sustainable improvements in security, as we saw in Iraq in 2007, and this can accelerate the process of stabilization.

Thus, we could depict a workable transition strategy in Afghanistan as a process of "Accelerated COIN", which can be represented graphically as follows:

“Accelerated COIN” – Afghanistan & Iraq 2007-2011



Beyond these three aspects, two other elements are critically important to transition. These are the buildup of Afghan government capacity (especially, the creation of robust and representative security forces), and the reduction of the insurgents’ safe havens in Pakistan. In the interests of time, I will discuss these issues in response to members’ questions rather than in formal remarks, however I would like to note one other key element today, and that is the coming transition crisis associated with President Karzai’s term of office.

The Coming Presidential Succession Crisis

The Afghan constitution limits the President to two five-year terms; President Karzai is currently in his second term, which commenced in November 2009. His previous term expired in April 2009. Depending on whether you date the term from its commencement, or from the expiration of the previous term, this means that President Karzai needs to leave office as early as April 2014, or as late as November

2014. There is very little prospect that the Afghan parliament will agree to extend his term or to grant him a third term, and even though there are a number of Supreme Court judges favorable to the President, three of these have overstayed their terms and would need to leave by 2014. So we are confronting a coming succession crisis, right at the critical time in a transition to Afghan control in mid-2014. One of the critical issues in transition at the political level is to ensure an effective Presidential succession, or at least a peaceful and stable resolution of the coming crisis. It will be too late to start thinking about this in 2014 – it needs to be a topic of thought, discussion and deliberation right now, or we run the risk of undermining any political and security gains that we may make in the next few years.

Thank you again for the opportunity to discuss this important topic with you today; I look forward to your questions and comments.