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TESTIMONY OF

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BEFORE THE

**UNITED STATES SENATE
COMMITTEE ON FOREIGN RELATIONS**

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Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Corker and members of the Committee, thank you for inviting me to testify before you today to discuss the present status and future course of our military engagement in Afghanistan. It's an honor to be here with Ambassador Dobbins to discuss both the progress we are making and the challenges we continue to face.

Our fundamental objectives in Afghanistan have not changed. Our goal remains to deny safe havens to Al Qaeda and its affiliates and to deny the Taliban the ability to overthrow the Afghan government. Over the past four years, due to the dedication and sacrifice of our forces, our Coalition partners, and the Afghan security forces and people, we have made significant progress in advancing those objectives.

Today, the Afghan people have greater economic opportunity, greater access to health care, better and more education and more freedoms and individual rights, especially for women, than ever before. As committed to in Chicago last year and re-affirmed at the Presidential Summit this January, the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) last month took the lead country-wide for providing security for the people of Afghanistan.

This important milestone also signaled a shift in the International Security Assistance Force's primary mission from combat to assisting the ANSF. The combat leadership shift from ISAF to the ANSF demonstrates the capability and resolve of the Afghan army and police to secure their people and their nation. It also enables the United States and other ISAF nations to continue reducing the presence of their combat forces. The 2013 security milestone and final tranche of the transition process will mark the fulfillment of the pledges our leaders made in Lisbon and Chicago.

The ANSF are being tested this fighting season, but are performing admirably. Afghan forces now plan and conduct the overwhelming majority of combat operations and are also taking the vast majority of casualties. However, despite heavy fighting, the Afghans are holding the gains of recent years and the Taliban must come to grips with the fact that they cannot defeat the ANSF militarily.

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The United States is transitioning in Afghanistan, not leaving. We are on track to bring the ISAF mission to a close by the end of 2014, and transition to Operation RESOLUTE SUPPORT, a new train, advise, and assist mission under a NATO umbrella. Beyond this NATO mission, the United States also plans to conduct a narrowly focused counterterrorism mission.

The U.S. and Afghanistan are already negotiating on a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA) to provide the necessary framework to support the presence of U.S. forces to accomplish these missions. NATO is also preparing to negotiate such a framework with Afghanistan.

While the United States has not made a decision on the size of the post-2014 military presence, our planning and our ultimate U.S. presence will be guided by a number of factors, to include:

- Progress toward our core goal of defeating al-Qaeda in the region;
- The potential for peace talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban;
- Continued progress with the ANSF;
- Afghan political transition, centered on the elections in April 2014;
- The regional setting; and
- Concluding the U.S.-Afghanistan Bilateral Security Agreement and the NATO-Afghanistan Status of Forces Agreement.

We will keep Congress informed of any post-2014 U.S. presence decisions and developments in other areas such as the Bilateral Security Agreement.

This is a critical time for our shared effort in Afghanistan. After more than a decade of war, and tremendous sacrifices by the people of the United States, our coalition Partners, and Afghanistan, we can see the prospect for peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Thank you for your continuing support to the mission in Afghanistan and our men and women in uniform, without which none of this would be possible. I look forward to answering your questions.