

**Testimony of James B. Cunningham
Ambassador-Designate to Afghanistan
Before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee
July 31, 2012**

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Lugar, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today as President Obama's nominee to be the United States' next Ambassador to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. I am truly honored that President Obama and Secretary Clinton have placed their trust in me. I look forward, if confirmed by the Senate, to working closely with you to advance America's interests in Afghanistan. I will welcome frequent opportunities to consult with you, as I know many of you have spent a great deal of time working on Afghanistan in recent years and I have had the pleasure of meeting several of you in Afghanistan and during my previous assignment as U.S. Ambassador to Israel. We appreciate that so many of you are willing to travel to Afghanistan to see firsthand the conditions on the ground, and we welcome your future visits.

For the past year I have been serving as Deputy Ambassador at U.S. Embassy Kabul, supporting Ambassador Ryan Crocker in leading a Mission of some 1,100 dedicated staff from 18 U.S. government agencies. I fully intend, if confirmed, to follow his example of maintaining the closest possible cooperation between the civilian and military efforts in Afghanistan and of pursuing a "whole of government" approach to the important challenges before us. Under Ambassador Crocker's outstanding leadership we achieved a great deal over the past year, including completion of our historic Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), which will guide our enduring partnership now, and beyond the end of Transition in 2014. The SPA, and the successful NATO Summit in Chicago and the Tokyo Conference, send a clear message to the Afghan people, and to the region, that Afghanistan will have the support of the international community, and of the United States, in the years ahead. If confirmed, I will build on this successful diplomatic campaign, underscoring our collective commitment to help build an Afghanistan that will contribute to stability in the region, and never again be a source of international terrorist threats to the United States.

On September 11, 2001, I was the Acting Representative to the United Nations in New York. The next day, I told the members of the UN on behalf of the United States that the 9/11 terror was not just an attack on the United States but an attack on all, of whatever religion or nation, who shared the values on which our global community rests. That struggle between terror and those values continues today, and will, unfortunately, continue for some time to come.

In Afghanistan, we are turning a page. Over the past several months, we and our Afghan and international partners have created an unprecedented yet sustainable framework of support for Afghanistan, consisting of a web of bilateral and multilateral commitments. As the President said in his May speech to the nation from Bagram Air Base, our core goal in Afghanistan is to defeat al-Qaeda and prevent Afghanistan from ever again becoming a safe-haven for terrorists. Our strategy for a stable Afghanistan has five elements: transitioning to Afghan responsibility for security in 2014; training Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF); building an enduring partnership with Afghanistan; supporting Afghan reconciliation; and promoting regional stability and economic integration. Our task will be to ensure that the successes and outcomes of the three surges: military, civilian and diplomatic, which have accomplished so much over the last 18 months, are consolidated as Afghanistan assumes full security responsibility and embarks on the “transformation decade” agreed at Bonn.

At the Lisbon NATO Summit in 2010, with our Allies and partners, we established the timeline for security transition. Transition is progressing, with three of the five tranches underway. As foreseen, the Afghans are taking on responsibility for security, with Afghan security forces taking the lead now in providing security for some 75% of the population. Afghan Security Forces will reach their full surge strength soon, and are becoming increasingly capable despite the many obstacles to be overcome.

In Istanbul in November 2011, Afghanistan’s neighbors and near-neighbors – with our support – began a much-needed dialogue on regional issues, including security, counterterrorism, and economic cooperation. At the Bonn conference in December 2011, Afghan leaders presented to the international community the outlines of a strategy to ensure Afghanistan’s stability beyond the troop drawdown. In turn, the international community committed to supporting Afghanistan throughout a “transformation decade” from 2015-2024, with the aim of ensuring continued security, economic, and democratic gains in the post-Transition period.

In May 2012, President Obama and President Karzai signed the Strategic Partnership Agreement (SPA), which provides a long-term framework for relations between the United States and a fully sovereign Afghanistan. Secretary Clinton’s announcement during her July 7 visit to Kabul that the President designated Afghanistan a Major Non-NATO Ally was another signal of our commitment.

At the NATO Summit in Chicago in May, NATO and its ISAF partners welcomed the progress being made on Transition, and noted that, come mid-2013, we will shift into a support role as the Afghans step forward to lead. The United States reaffirmed our commitment to Afghan security beyond 2014, and the international community committed to providing the Afghan security forces the support and funds they need for sustainment after 2014. The Afghan government also recognized that NATO and its partners have a crucial role to play in training, advising and assisting the ANSF, and invited NATO to continue its support after the ISAF mission concludes by the end of 2014.

In order to address support for Afghanistan's development, growth and governance, the international community gathered in Tokyo on July 8 to further define the concept of mutual accountability and assure Afghanistan of continued economic assistance. The Japanese announced that the international community had pledged \$16 billion in aid over the next four years, sufficient to cover Afghanistan's fiscal gap as identified by the World Bank. Of equal importance was the adoption of a "Mutual Accountability Framework," which affirmed that international assistance to Afghanistan is not unconditional: the Afghan government must act decisively to ensure that the returns on the international effort are sustained and irreversible. Afghanistan's partners, who want so much to help, made clear that their ability to sustain support for Afghanistan depends upon the Afghan government delivering on what it must do, particularly in the area of governance, to preserve and build on the gains of the past decade.

I want to quote Secretary Clinton in Tokyo: "The future of Afghanistan belongs to its government and its people. And I welcome the clear vision presented by President Karzai and the Afghan government today for unlocking Afghanistan's economic potential by achieving a stable, democratic future. That must include fighting corruption, improving governance, strengthening the rule of law, and increasing access to economic opportunity for all Afghans, especially for women."

Today, the pieces of a long term, enduring support structure for Afghanistan's continuing progress and development are now in place. We have made clear to Afghans, and to the region, that the security transition does not mean we are abandoning Afghanistan. And the Taliban appear to be taking notice. For the first time in a decade, they are debating and signaling an openness to negotiations. The United States supports Afghan peace efforts, aimed at a responsible settlement of the conflict. The sole purpose of U.S. support for reconciliation is to create the conditions for an inclusive national dialogue among all Afghans about the future of their country. We have been consistent about the necessary outcomes of any

negotiation: insurgents must break ties with al-Qaida, renounce violence, and abide by the Afghan constitution, including the rights afforded to women and minorities. And we have been clear about steps the Taliban should take to build confidence, and signal their interest in a peace process. So, the Taliban face a clear choice: they can dissociate from international terrorism and enter an Afghan peace process, or face increasingly capable Afghan National Security Forces supported by the United States and our Allies.

Looking to the future, there is much more to do to strengthen Afghanistan's institutions, to ensure a smooth political transition in 2014 consistent with Afghanistan's Constitution, and to build regional support for a stable, prosperous, secure Afghanistan in a stable, prosperous, secure region.

Also key to Afghanistan's future stability will be a credible and inclusive presidential election in 2014, followed by a constitutional transfer of power. President Karzai has repeatedly affirmed his commitment to a peaceful, constitutional transition of power at the end of his second term. All Afghans, whatever their gender, ethnicity or religion, have much to gain from a successful political transition, and the United States is committed to working with international partners to support the Afghans as they choose their next leader.

I will not play down the difficulties. But many Afghans are working hard for a better future, and we will continue to support the Afghan government and people, now and after the 2014 elections with a new president, in the hard work needed to bring the security, development and stability which the Afghan people so earnestly desire and deserve after decades of violence. I would be honored, with the consent of the Senate, to lead the U.S. Mission in Afghanistan in the important work of enhancing the security of the United States and of helping Afghanistan make further progress toward that vision of the future.

I want also in this testimony to highlight some of the substantial gains Afghanistan has made over the last decade in partnership with the United States and the international community. Today, over eight million Afghan children are enrolled in school, a third of them girls, compared to just less than a million in school, nearly none of them girls, in 2001. Sixty percent of Afghans now have access to basic healthcare facilities – a six-fold increase as compared to 2002 – and a recent public health survey showed average life expectancy has increased from 42 to 62, and infant mortality was cut in half. Nearly two-thirds of Afghans have phones, and expanded radio and TV access is facilitating information flow and connecting Afghan society. Approximately 100,000 Afghan women have benefited from

micro-finance opportunities and our funding supports 17 protective service facilities for women and children. And since 2006, our rule of law programs have trained over 20,000 professionals working in the Afghan criminal justice system including prosecutors, defense attorneys, judges, investigators, corrections personnel, and social workers.

With your continued support, our bilateral civilian assistance to Afghanistan that has helped to achieve these results will continue to facilitate economic stability, encourage responsive governance, and sustain the social gains made over the last ten years. The critical principles underlying our work are “sustainability” and “mutual accountability.” Our resources will align with Afghan priorities, lay the foundation for a successful security transition, bolster viable sectors of the economy to build economic self-reliance, and promote critical sectors of the Afghan economy, including agriculture and extractives. Our programs will continue to strengthen the legal system and law enforcement, and we will redouble our efforts to increase the participation of women in all aspects of Afghan society. The Tokyo mutual accountability framework also called for a greater portion of our funding to be directly conditioned on specific reforms via an incentive mechanism. We remain committed to the goal of providing at least 50% of our development assistance through the Afghan Government and believe the systems we have put in place will promote transparency and accountability.

We all recognize that corruption challenges loom large in Afghanistan and, if confirmed, I will continue to urge the government, in its own vital interest, to aggressively pursue anti-corruption policies. I will also continue to make every effort to ensure that the assistance which the American people have so generously provided is used wisely and effectively, with the maximum degree of confidence that it is serving the intended purpose. It is also important to note that Afghanistan is making progress on key transparency reforms to facilitate economic growth, including significant progress toward Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI) compliance and World Trade Organization accession. And while there is still much work to be done, the Afghans have taken steps towards holding accountable those responsible for the Kabul Bank crisis, permitting the IMF to restart its relationship with Afghanistan in November of last year, a decision which was reaffirmed in late-June by the IMF Executive Board. The United States is also continuing to assist the Afghans in disrupting the opium trade as a funding source for Taliban and insurgent actors.

Private sector growth in Afghanistan, both through domestic and international investment, will be key to building Afghanistan’s economic self-reliance

throughout the Transformation Decade. We believe that the Secretary's vision for a "New Silk Road" will gradually transform South and Central Asia through a network of transit, trade, investment, energy, and increased people-to-people ties.

A critical next step in our partnership with Afghanistan will be the conclusion of a Bilateral Security Agreement (BSA), which we expect will supersede our current Status of Forces Agreement for the long-term. Like the SPA, the BSA will be a negotiation between equal partners and sovereign countries to create an agreed, updated framework in which to implement the security cooperation and assistance committed in the Strategic Partnership. There will be tough issues, but both sides are committed to work together and we have built strong relationships and partnership through the SPA.

Post transition in 2014, the Department of State envisions maintaining an enduring presence in Afghanistan. We have learned lessons from Iraq and seeking a balance between an appropriately sized mission able to effect U.S. policy and current budget realities. We plan to maintain an Embassy in Kabul and presences in four regional centers that will signal our commitment to the Afghan people, support effective diplomacy and avoid the perception of regional favoritism. We are embracing a whole of government approach in our planning with the goal of leveraging all USG capabilities across agencies and avoiding redundancies. The staffing levels will be scaled appropriately for the civilian mission in Afghanistan and in relation to other global priorities.

Ultimately, the gains of the last decade must be sustained by the Afghan people themselves. The processes of transition and continued economic, political and social development must be Afghan-led, and we are seeing Afghanistan taking increasing responsibility for its future. Afghanistan will continue to face significant challenges, but we have created the regional and international context for a political settlement of the Afghan war and a gradual and responsible handover of authority to Afghan National Security Forces.

Thank you Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee, I look forward to your questions.