

**U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee
"Civilian Strategy for Afghanistan:
A Status Report in Advance of the London Conference"
January 21, 2010
Ambassador Richard C. Holbrooke
Statement for the Record**

Chairman Kerry, Senator Lugar, thank you for your invitation to appear before this committee to discuss our civilian strategy and efforts in Afghanistan. I would like to begin by thanking our friend from the United Kingdom, David Miliband, for the UK's indispensable leadership and commitment to our mission in Afghanistan.

American and British soldiers are fighting side-by-side to achieve peace and security in Afghanistan. And American and British civilians are working side-by-side to help Afghans develop and govern their country so it will never become an al-Qaeda sanctuary again. The U.S. and UK will continue to stand together with the Afghan people to accomplish our shared mission.

We are looking ahead with great enthusiasm to the London Conference on Afghanistan next week. It will be co-hosted by UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon and co-chaired by the UK and Afghan Foreign Ministers, along with the UN. Secretary of State Clinton will represent the United States. We will join Afghanistan, the UN, and over 75 nations and international organizations to renew the international community's partnership with

Afghanistan. Our objective for the London Conference is clear: to demonstrate the international community's support for Afghanistan's future, and the agenda outlined by President Karzai in his November 19 inauguration speech. The London Conference will focus on Afghanistan's security, governance and development, and international coordination. We need to maintain momentum so that we continue to deliver progress in Afghanistan and set out the conditions for Afghanistan to take full control of its own security. If conditions are right, we expect that the London Conference will be followed by an international conference in Kabul later this year to present the Afghan government's commitments to the people of Afghanistan.

President Obama outlined a strategy in March 2009 that includes supporting the Afghan government's efforts to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat Al Qaeda and its extremist allies. As he made clear at West Point on December 1, our civilian engagement in Afghanistan will continue long after our combat troops come home. While our military mission in Afghanistan is not open-ended, we are committed to building lasting partnership with Afghanistan. In line with the President goals, the London conference aims to enhance the international community's partnership with Afghanistan.

Now is a good time for us to take stock of the past year. On January 20, 2009, the situation in Afghanistan was more precarious than many realized. Our basic strategy needed an overhaul. Our Embassy in Kabul lacked personnel, programs, and resources. The international community perceived that Afghanistan was not a top U.S. priority. Key regional actors, such as China and Russia, as well as Muslim partners, were not engaged in Afghanistan's future. In Washington there was no serious effort at coordination for our civilian effort and no agreed civilian strategy.

Our relationship with Afghanistan looks much better than it did at this time last year. We have reclaimed the initiative. We have brought strategic coherence to our non-military efforts; made major changes in our civilian priorities; overcome political crises; greatly increased American civilian resources; and mobilized significant international support for stabilizing Afghanistan.

Before I go into greater detail on the progress we've seen this year and the strategy for the way forward, I want to elaborate on our engagement with international partners to stabilize Afghanistan and Pakistan. This has been a major focus of Secretary Clinton and my efforts, and just yesterday I returned from a trip that took me to Europe, the Middle East, and South Asia aimed at bolstering the

international effort to help Afghanistan. As President Obama said, the future stability of Afghanistan and Pakistan affects “the security of our allies, and the common security of the world.” Based on that insight, we have engaged in intensive diplomatic outreach to build a broad international coalition in support of our common objectives in the region.

Of course this includes working with our closest partners, and I am pleased that Foreign Secretary Miliband was able to brief you on the London Conference next week. The European Union has announced an Action Plan for Afghanistan and Pakistan that focuses on civilian assistance in vital sectors. Turkey continues to be a vital partner, increasing their military commitment and managing innovative projects in agricultural exports and other fields. Russia is providing overflight rights, and China has engaged in productive consultations over our common objectives. Countries throughout the wider Muslim region are also playing a leading role. The United Arab Emirates announced the appointment of a resident Ambassador in Kabul last week, one day before hosting a meeting of my counterparts from almost thirty countries and international organizations, including some of the most active countries in the region.

Through the international group of my counterparts – the “SRAP” collective -- and by strengthening international civilian institutions in Kabul, we are also working to ensure that increased international resources are well-coordinated and well-used. The London Conference should be able to announce important progress in strengthening civilian coordination in Kabul under the leadership of the United Nations but with strong support from ISAF, the EU, and others.

Mr. Chairman, I would now like to summarize a few of the key civilian-led initiatives underway in Afghanistan – which is summarized in the comprehensive civilian strategy that we are releasing today. We are implementing a new civilian-military agriculture redevelopment strategy that will sap the insurgency not only of foot soldiers, but also of income from the narcotics trade. We are expanding sub-national capacity building efforts, focused mainly in key population centers in the East and South, through new civ-mil initiatives, such as the District Development Working Groups and District Support Teams, and supporting programs that give Afghans a greater stake in their own government, such as the National Solidarity Program. And we are improving coordination of international assistance by consulting with our allies and partners to strengthen the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and enhancing civilian coordination among ISAF partners.

Last week, Secretary of Agriculture Vilsack visited Kabul to highlight the fact that agriculture is our most important non-security program. We are very pleased with the efforts and progress to date we have made with our Afghan partners. 2009 was the best agricultural year Afghanistan has had in the last 30 years – a reflection of good weather, increased security in agriculture areas in the South, and our robust civilian assistance efforts. We have dozens of USDA advisors in the field working closely with Agribusiness Development Teams from National Guard units from such states as Nebraska, Missouri, and Texas. These agriculture experts work closely with their local and provincial Afghan counterparts to revitalize this historically successful economic sector, boost job creation, and encourage the population to stop opium production and wean Afghan youths from joining the Taliban and supporting terrorists. Our military and civilian success in former Taliban-controlled areas will generate word of mouth in Afghanistan and create additional momentum to enable the Afghan government to more effectively deliver services in these areas and successfully fight the Taliban and al-Qaeda.

To help implement this strategy, we have bolstered our diplomatic and development presence in the field, and work very closely with Ambassador Eikenberry and his team in Kabul. In Washington, we are also pursuing a whole-of-government approach. I lead a team of experts and senior advisers from ten

U.S. government departments and agencies, headquartered at the State Department. They represent USAID, Treasury, the Department of Justice, Homeland Security, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, FBI, CIA, OSD, and USDA. We work seamlessly with the NSC and CENTCOM, as well as in close coordination with Ambassador Eikenberry and his strong team in Kabul. Together, we are implementing our political, economic, and diplomatic efforts.

We have nearly tripled the number of civilians on the ground since January 2009 – but the numbers are not the only measure. We need to do more than just fill personnel slots – we need to be sure that we are putting the right people in the right places. We also have true civ-mil integration and cooperation nationwide – not just in Kabul, but also at RC-East and RC-South. This is possible because of the efforts we have made to recruit and send more qualified civilians into the field. Today key civilian experts are able to deploy with military units in places like Helmand province where insurgents operated uncontested just a few months ago.

A final note on civilian staffing in Afghanistan: unlike their military counterparts, civilians are selected and deploy as individuals, not units. That is what makes this huge increase in civilians to Afghanistan so impressive. The civilian impact is far greater than numbers: the average civilian leverages 10 partners – locally

employed staff, Afghan and international experts from US-funded NGOs. There is a different purpose and way of working on the civilian side: we want the civilians supporting and building the capacity of their Afghan counterparts who must be the forward face of these shared programs.

Mr. Chairman, we have no illusions about what faces us in Afghanistan. The challenges there are immense. The Afghan government is under assault from the Taliban and struggling to provide security, jobs, and basic justice to a society devastated by more than 30 years of war.

One weapon that the Taliban and Al Qaeda use very successfully is information, seeking to dominate the information space through direct communications or intimidation, and by working through religious or nationalist media outlets. They have a well-oiled rapid-reaction propaganda machine that constantly uses graphic images, intimidating telephone calls, and CDs and DVDs distributed in local bazaars, while disavowing responsibility for bombings they conduct which kill large numbers of civilians. Therefore, while our previous strategy focused largely on traditional public diplomacy and communications tools, we are now elevating our communications efforts in importance and innovation. We are helping to build communications infrastructure and capacity; conducting sustained media and

outreach strategies in both countries; and fostering a localized grassroots movement on the ground through mobile and radio initiatives -- including leveraging new technology to foster socio-economic benefits through e-banking, learning and health.

Secretary Clinton has said that while only the Afghan people “can defeat the insurgency once and for all” and “build a successful democracy that lasts,” it remains the responsibility of the United States to partner with the Afghan government over the long term to achieve these goals. We cannot do so unless we implement an integrated civil-military strategy in Afghanistan.

Achieving progress will require continued sacrifice not only by our military personnel, but also by the more than 1,500 U.S. government civilians serving in Afghanistan and Pakistan. But for the first time since the conflict in Afghanistan began eight years ago, we have an innovative, whole-of-government strategy to protect our vital national security interests in this region – the strategy as articulated by President Obama last year and spelled out in more detail in this document before you today. When combined with U.S. military efforts to build Afghan and Pakistani security capacity, our political, economic, and diplomatic efforts constitute an unprecedented interagency undertaking. And as I saw again

during my recent visit to the region, our civilian personnel are working together with our Afghan and international partners as never before. Their efforts are vital to our success in protecting and advancing American interests.

Mr. Chairman, let me close on the most important point: we could not do this without the support of this Committee or the Congress. You have been indispensable partners. Over the past several months, many of you have come to the State Department to meet members of my interagency team; you have led numerous delegations to both Afghanistan and Pakistan to better assess the needs on the ground; and worked closely with us on important legislation, like the Kerry-Lugar-Berman bill. I hope we can continue the open, frank, and regular dialogue we have had over the past year. Secretary Clinton and I are deeply committed to doing more in order to protect and advance American interests side by side with Congress.

I believe the President's strategy – as spelled out in detail in this document – offers our best prospect for stabilizing Afghanistan and the region, and to disrupt, dismantle and defeat Al Qaeda and its extremist allies so they are no longer a threat to the United States and our interests. I look forward to continuing to work with

you and the Congress to secure the resources we need to achieve our mission and to signal our continued commitment to Afghanistan and our international partners.