

“The Meaning of Marjah: Developments in Security and Stability in Afghanistan”

Prepared Statement of

**David Samuel Sedney
Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Afghanistan,
Pakistan and Central Asia**

and

**Brigadier General John W. Nicholson, Jr.
Director, Pakistan Afghanistan Coordination Cell
The Joint Staff**

Testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee

May 6, 2010

Chairman Kerry, Ranking Member Lugar, and members of the committee; we're pleased to have this opportunity to give you an update on our ongoing efforts in Afghanistan. You understand the importance of this mission, the magnitude of the challenges we face there and the depth of our commitment to meeting those challenges.

When President Obama took office, we confronted a bleak situation. Early gains had eroded, the Taliban was reascendant in many parts of the country, and Afghan confidence in the Coalition was in decline. President Obama ordered an immediate strategy review, and in the course of that preliminary review we made a number of key changes. The U.S. Government added 38,000 troops last spring, and NATO appointed General McChrystal as commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). General McChrystal has emphasized the importance of a counter-insurgency strategy that prioritizes protecting the Afghan people over killing the enemy.

In his December speech at West Point, the President announced a number of key refinements to our Afghanistan strategy including the deployment of additional U.S. Forces. As of April 23, over 15,000 of the additional 30,000 U.S. troops have deployed to the country. The remainder will be in place where they are needed by the end of summer 2010, supplemented by over 9000 additional NATO and non-NATO troops, over 2000 more than had been pledged in January, 2010. Over 3000 of these international troops are in place.

Partnering and improvements in Afghanistan National Security Forces (ANSF) training are accelerating ANSF growth and improving the quality of the force, with an emphasis on creating a force that is both effective and sustainable. Equally important has been the drastically expanded and overhauled civilian effort. Today there are more than three times the number of U.S. direct hire civilians in Afghanistan than there were a year ago, and over four times more civilian personnel deployed alongside our military personnel on Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) and District Support Teams (DSTs) outside of Kabul. As Secretary Gates notes recently, our State, USAID, and other civilian partners are critical to our overall military success in Afghanistan. Our military and civilian missions are integrated, and our military personnel depend upon their civilian counterparts to help stabilize and rebuild after the fight.

As we stated in our April, 2010 report on “Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan,” submitted in accordance with section 1230 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 (Public Law 110-181), the evidence suggests that our shift in approach has begun to bear fruit, even as significant challenges remain. We assess that the insurgency’s momentum has been blunted. Closer coordination with President Karzai, the Afghan Government, coalition allies and those in the region, particularly Pakistan, is paying off as we see more and more of a common effort.

Due to our change in approach, the percentage of Afghan civilian casualties caused by Coalition actions has dropped substantially. This improvement has produced significant shifts in Afghan attitudes towards ISAF and Afghan forces. Compared to a year ago, Afghans today report that they are far more optimistic about the future and have far more confidence in our ability to prevail over the Taliban and other violent extremist forces.

We’ve seen other positive indicators in the last year, as well. Of the 121 key terrain districts identified by ISAF in December 2009, 60 were assessed as sympathetic or neutral to the Afghan Government. By March, 2010, that number had climbed to 73 districts. Although Afghanistan’s August elections were marred by allegations of electoral fraud, these allegations were addressed through constitutional means. Ultimately, a new government was formed. Despite the serious issues that remain to be addressed, a national survey completed in March 2010 indicates that 59% of Afghans believe their government is headed in the right direction, an increase of 0.5% over December 2009 and 8% over September 2009.

At the January 28 London Conference, following up on pledges he made in his November inaugural speech, President Karzai reaffirmed his government’s commitment to peace, reconciliation and reintegration, developing security force

capability, good governance, fighting corruption, economic development and regional cooperation. These commitments have received strong international support as the international community partners with the Afghan Government in a long term strategy to stabilize Afghanistan.

The London conference also produced a renewed international commitment to strengthen civilian-military coordination in Afghanistan. This commitment was reflected in part by the announcement of a new NATO Senior Civilian Representative who is now serving as GEN McChrystal's civilian counterpart, as well as the appointment of Staffan de Mistura, an experienced United Nations (UN) diplomat, as the new Special Representative of the UN Secretary General for the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA). An international conference will be conducted in Kabul in July, allowing for the Afghan government to present its plans for accelerating efforts to improve economic opportunity, security, and governance.

The Afghan government is in the lead for reconciliation and reintegration efforts. President Karzai has issued interim guidance for the execution of reintegration programs, with final guidance expected after completion of the Consultative Peace Jirga later this month. Karzai's guidance assigns responsibility to the Provincial governors to implement programs that will allow reintegration into civil society of those mid- to low-level insurgents who break ties with al-Qaeda, cease violence, and accept the Afghan constitution, including the rights and protections for women and ethnic groups. We expect to release funding from the Afghan Reintegration Program Authority, authorized in the FY10 National Defense Authorization Act. The ARPA will fund DoD reintegration activities in support of the Afghan program.

President Karzai will visit Washington next week. A number of key ministers will join him and participate in meetings on themes critical to achieving our joint objectives implementing the Afghan government's London Conference commitments. Meetings with President Obama and U.S cabinet officials will reinforce the long-term and vital partnership between our two countries in areas ranging from security to governance and economic development. The visit will also highlight the continuing support among Afghans for U.S. support to Afghanistan, particularly appreciation for the sacrifice being made by U.S. soldiers and civilians working along side their Afghan counterparts. During the visit, we expect to discuss a strengthened U.S.-Afghan Strategic Partnership Declaration, to be finalized later this year. This is a shared priority for the Afghans and for us, and we believe it will add confidence and clarity to our long-term partnership with Afghanistan. The Declaration will outline a shared vision for how the United States plans to support Afghanistan, as well as how we plan to work with Afghanistan's neighbors to integrate it into a more supportive and

prosperous regional environment. None of these steps will guarantee success. But we are seeing conditions that we believe are necessary for success to begin to emerge. We have the right mission, the right strategy, and the right leadership team in place. U.S., international and Afghan civilian and military resources have been marshaled to effectively support the mission. The majority of international forces in Afghanistan are now under Commander, ISAF's (COMISAF's) command, ensuring greater unity of command.

Our efforts to build the capacity of the Afghanistan National Security Forces are showing progress, though significant challenges remain. Currently, the Afghan National Army (ANA) strength is at 119,338, well above the April target of 116,500, compared to an authorized strength of 134,000 for FY2010. The Afghan National Police (ANP) has reached 102,138, with an authorized strength of 109,000 for FY2010. In FY11, our goal is to build the ANA to 171,600, and the ANP to 134,000. We think these goals are achievable. Indeed the international community must publicly commit to supporting the training and equipping of Afghanistan's security forces even after our combat forces begin a responsible drawdown.

Nevertheless, risks to the growth and quality of both Ministry of Defense (MoD) and Ministry of Interior (MoI) forces remain. The newly formed NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan (NTM-A), led by LTG William Caldwell, is working closely with the MoD and MoI to improve recruiting, training, retention and attrition. For example, salary and benefit initiatives have raised pay for the ANSF and addressed pay disparities between ANA and ANP forces. The MoI has created institutions like the MoI Recruiting and Training Commands to institutionalize best practices. The MoI is also implementing a revised ANP development model that will ensure all recruits receive adequate training before they are deployed in field. The Focused District Development program has provided follow-on training for Afghan Uniformed Police in 83 districts. The Focused Border Development program is accomplishing the same for the Afghan Border Police. The MoI has, in coordination with NTM-A, initiated planning to address leadership and professional development and to identify ways to counter corruption. NTM-A/Combined Security Transition Command-Afghanistan (CSTC-A) is working with the MoI to institute a competitive selection and promotion process that is transparent and merit based. COMISAF has directed that the Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP) partnering program be expanded to provide direct mentoring. A rotation program has been implemented for ANCOP to ensure the units have an opportunity to refit and refresh after extended counter-insurgency (COIN) operations. All of these initiatives demonstrate the considerable attention being given to improve the quality of the ANSF force.

We are also beginning to see signs of progress resulting from using development to support sustainable governance. Less than a year ago, Arghandab was an insurgent safe haven. After some tough fighting last summer and fall, the conditions for establishing security and implementing governance and development programs began to emerge. International actors are partnering with the Afghan district governor, local tribal leadership, an ANA Kandak and local Afghan Police to develop the programs that are building a foundation for governance and economic development.

This is not to suggest that achieving success in Afghanistan will be easy, far from it; we face many challenges as we move forward. As already mentioned, we continue to struggle to improve retention and decrease attrition in the ANSF, and we also need to continue to improve the quality of the force. In the face of continued shortfalls, we are engaging in aggressive diplomatic efforts to encourage our international partners to provide institutional trainers and mentoring teams for the ANSF. A series of NATO meetings over the last five months, including the April Foreign Ministerial, focused heavily on addressing these shortfalls.

Inevitably, we will face setbacks even as we achieve successes. We also need to prepare for the possibility that things will get worse before they get better. As additional U.S. and other international forces flow into theater and move into other geographic areas where ISAF forces have not previously gone, we have seen increases in violence and increases in attacks on our troops. Our adversaries are intelligent and adaptable, and we will need to continuously refine our own tactics in response.

As you all know, operations in Helmand are ongoing, along with planning and shaping efforts for future operations in Kandahar. I want to emphasize that for ISAF and our Afghan partners, Helmand operations have been the first large-scale effort to fundamentally change how we do business. In Helmand, protecting the population is our top priority, along with ensuring that our military operations to “clear” Marjah pave the way for truly Afghan-led governance and economic development activities in the “hold” and “build” phases. Preparation for the operation included extraordinary levels of civil-military planning and engagement with the Afghans—from ANSF partners, to Afghan ministries, to local tribes and populations with the operation ultimately approved and ordered by President Karzai. Kandahar involves some fundamentally different challenges that will require different approaches. In the end, however, the success of both of these efforts will be largely dependent on tackling the whole-of-government challenge of building and sustaining governance and security institutions.

Let me conclude by underscoring our assessment that the insurgency is losing momentum and we are heading in the right direction. That said, the outcome is far from determined. While over 50% of additional forces are in place, those still to come are critical to achieving success. None of what we are doing in Afghanistan involves quick fixes. These are long-term problems, and their solutions will require both patience and flexibility. At this point, though, we are cautiously optimistic. As said earlier, we believe we finally have the right mission, the right strategy, the right leadership, and the right resources. As we move forward, we will continue to adjust—and we believe that we will continue to make progress.

As you know, the Congress is considering DoD's FY11 budget request, including \$110.3 billion for Operation ENDURING FREEDOM (OEF) within Overseas Contingency Operations, as well as an FY10 Supplemental request for \$28.8 billion for OEF. These funds are critical to supporting the solution set for our mission in Afghanistan, and I ask for your support. Thank you. We look forward to your questions and comments.