

**Statement by Amb. Karl F. Inderfurth  
House Armed Services Committee  
January 23, 2008**

***“Assessment of U.S. Strategy and Operations in  
Afghanistan and the Way Ahead”***

**Chairman Skelton, Ranking Member Hunter, Members of the Committee:**

Thank you very much for your invitation to take part in this assessment by the Committee of U.S. strategy and operations in Afghanistan and, especially, the opportunity to express my views on the subject of the way ahead.

I would like to begin by commending the Committee for taking up Afghanistan as one of its first items of business in the new session of the 110th Congress. Not only does this reinforce the Committee’s determination that Afghanistan not become “the forgotten war,” but I believe it sends a signal to the Bush administration to put Afghanistan -- and I would add Pakistan -- at the top of this country’s security agenda where they should have been for the past six years.

I will remind the Committee that in its 2004 final report the 9/11 Commission identified three countries that would be critical to the successful prosecution of the “war on terrorism.” Afghanistan and Pakistan were the first two; Saudi Arabia the third.

Unfortunately, since even before the 2003 invasion of Iraq, Afghanistan has taken a back seat to U.S. military involvement in that country. It still does. As the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen, told this Committee on December 11: “Our main focus, militarily, in the region and in the world right now is rightly and firmly in Iraq. It is simply a matter of resources, of capacity. In Afghanistan, we do what we can. In Iraq, we do what we must.”

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, some way must be found to deal with this perpetual problem of Afghanistan being overshadowed by the Iraq war. I hope the Committee will do what it can -- and must -- to rectify this situation.

**Afghanistan Study Group (ASG)**

I would also like to mention here that others agree with the higher security priority this Committee is according Afghanistan.

The Center for the Study of the Presidency, led by former U.S. ambassador to NATO David Abshire, was closely engaged in the work of the Iraq Study Group.

During the discussions of the group it became more and more evident that Afghanistan was at great risk of becoming “the forgotten war.” Participants and witnesses pointed to the danger of losing the war in Afghanistan unless a reassessment took place of the effort being undertaken in that country by the United States, NATO and the international community. In its final report, the study group made this recommendation: “It is critical for the United States to provide additional political, economic and military support for Afghanistan, including resources that might become available as combat forces are moved from Iraq.”

In the spring of 2007, recognizing the importance of making policy makers in Washington aware of the deepening crisis in Afghanistan, Amb. Abshire decided to establish a smaller scale study group. This bipartisan group, co-chaired by Ambassador Thomas R. Pickering and General (ret.) James L. Jones, includes 15 former government officials and experts on Afghanistan and the region. The goal of the Afghanistan Study Group is to provide policy makers with key recommendations that will lead to a re-vitalization and re-doubling of the United States and international community commitment and effort in Afghanistan.

As a member of this group, along with Dr. Barnett Rubin on this panel, we look forward to providing the Committee our report with its findings and recommendations in the near future, both for your consideration and, hopefully, for your action. I should add that some of my comments this morning will draw from the work we have done over the past six months, including our preliminary report.

### **A Brief Assessment**

I do not believe it will be necessary for me to go into detail about the current situation in Afghanistan or how we arrived at this point. You heard from Defense Secretary Gates and Chairman Mullen in December and you will hear from my expert colleagues on the panel this morning. But, in very brief form, let me offer this assessment of U.S. strategy and operations in Afghanistan:

*The United States has tried to win the struggle in Afghanistan with too few military forces, insufficient economic aid, and without a clear and consistent comprehensive strategy to fill the power vacuum outside Kabul and counter the combined challenges of reconstituted Taliban and al-Qaeda forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan, a runaway opium economy, and the stark poverty faced by most Afghans.*

*It is time to re-think our military and economic strategies to ensure the level of our commitment is commensurate with the threat posed by failure in Afghanistan.*

This requirement to re-think U.S. strategy is further supported by polls that show a weakening of resolve in the international community to see the effort in Afghanistan through to a successful conclusion. The Pew Global Attitudes Survey of June 2007 (relevant portion attached to this testimony) reported that the publics of NATO countries with significant numbers of troops in Afghanistan are divided over whether U.S. and NATO forces should be brought home immediately, or should remain until the country is stabilized. In all but two countries, the U.S. and the United Kingdom, majorities said troops should be withdrawn as soon as possible. Many don't really see this as their fight. They see Afghanistan as a sinkhole.

Moreover, recent polls in Afghanistan reflect a downward turn in attitudes toward the ability of the Afghan government and the international community to improve those conditions the Afghan people identify as the most critical problems facing the country: insecurity, weak governance, widespread corruption, a poor economy and unemployment.

This is discouraging news. But, fortunately, there are some recent, encouraging signs that the U.S. and its partners in Afghanistan have recognized the hard truth that defeat in Afghanistan is a possibility -- and are beginning to adjust strategy and resources accordingly.

### **Steps in the Right Direction**

In recent weeks, announcements have been made – and signals have been sent -- that would constitute steps in the right direction for the overall U.S and International effort in Afghanistan:

To enhance security, it was announced last week that the U.S. will send an additional 3,200 Marines to southern Afghanistan this spring, where NATO forces face the brunt of the Taliban insurgency. Also, Secretary Gates, on his trip to Kabul in December, said the U.S. will support the expansion of the Afghan National Army (ANA) by up to 12,000 over its target strength of 70,000; accelerate shipments of M16s rifles and armored Humvees; and triple the number of helicopters scheduled for delivery. This is made possible by the significant increase in funding provided by the Congress in FY 2007 for Afghanistan's security forces, including the Afghan National Police (ANP) that is in dire need of greater assistance (see attached *New York Times* article "Lacking Sufficient Support, Afghan Police Struggle to Work a Beat in a War").

To accelerate reconstruction, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers says it is planning a "construction surge" in Afghanistan this year worth nearly \$2 billion. A sizable portion of that money will go towards building facilities for the Afghan security forces, but badly needed road, power and water projects are also

included. Last year the Corps built a \$37 million bridge between Afghanistan and Tajikistan, a symbol of a more promising commercial future for both countries.

To strengthen international coordination, the U.N. is appointing a new high level civilian envoy for Afghanistan. Paddy Ashdown is the highly respected and experienced former international coordinator for Bosnia. Working closely with the Afghan government, it will be his task to formulate a more comprehensive strategy for achieving success in Afghanistan. This would include a more coordinated application of military and civilian instruments, including the UN, the World Bank, non-governmental organizations and international organizations.

To raise Afghanistan's international profile – and underscore the stakes involved for the international community – several world leaders recently traveled to Kabul to meet with President Karzai and their national contingents in the country. These included British Prime Minister Gordon Brown (who said U.K. troops will have to remain in Afghanistan for more than a decade), French President Nicolas Sarkozy (the first French head to travel to Afghanistan), newly elected Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd (who announced his country will stay for the “long haul”), and Italy's Prime Minister Romano Prodi (his first visit to Afghanistan). These visits are pointing toward the critical NATO summit that will be held in early April in Bucharest, where the alliance will have the opportunity to demonstrate the strength of its resolve and its long term commitment to a stable and secure Afghanistan.

## **The Way Ahead**

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee, you asked the panel to provide our assessment and recommendations on the full range of issues facing Afghanistan today, including U.S. and NATO-ISAF military operations, the insurgency, counter-narcotics efforts and development, governance and anti-corruption issues, and regional matters affecting Afghanistan (particularly Pakistan).

I have already touched on several of these. In the remainder of my testimony I would like to focus on just one -- the challenge Afghanistan faces from the use of Pakistan as a “safe haven” for the Taliban and al-Qaeda and the rising level of violence and political instability in that country, as tragically seen by the December 27 assassination of former Pakistan prime minister Benazir Bhutto (whose last meeting before she died was with Afghan president Hamid Karzai).

Afghanistan and Pakistan are inextricably linked. There can be no successful outcome for Afghanistan if Pakistan is not a part of the solution. As General Bantz Craddock, the head of NATO operations in Afghanistan has said, engaging Pakistan is one of the crucial elements of success in Afghanistan.

Over time, with sufficient and sustained international support, and Afghanistan's own efforts, I believe the many difficulties facing Afghanistan today can be

addressed. But the Taliban poses a special type of threat. They can lose every firefight with superior NATO, U.S. and Afghan National Army forces and still turn southern and eastern Afghanistan into a "no development" zone and stir insecurity in Kabul and elsewhere. And as long as the Taliban has a haven in Pakistan, they can continue their insurgency indefinitely, making it virtually impossible for Afghanistan to become a country at peace with itself and its neighbors.

What can the United States and the international community do about this fundamental problem?

**First, the future stability of both Afghanistan and Pakistan depends on the development of an effective strategy to counter and uproot the Taliban/ al Qaeda sanctuary in Pakistan's tribal border areas**, particularly in North and South Waziristan. The Taliban and associated militants are operating out of safe havens in Pakistan, raising money, recruiting and training fighters. These extremists have begun to make inroads into the settled areas of the Northwest Frontier Province in Pakistan, most recently in the Swat valley.

Despite Pakistan's counterinsurgency efforts over the last four years (or lack thereof according to the critics), the Taliban and al Qaeda have developed a strong-hold in this region that bolsters the Taliban's capabilities against coalition forces in Afghanistan, facilitates al Qaeda planning and execution of global terrorist plots (as noted in the July 2007 National Intelligence Estimate), and increasingly threaten to destabilize the Pakistani state. The U.S. and its international partners will need to work closely with Pakistan to make every effort to root out Taliban ideology from its own society and shut down the extremist madrassahs (religious schools) and training camps that perpetuate the Taliban insurgency and cross border activities.

Countering cross border infiltration is critical, but it will require closer coordination and cooperation than we have seen to date. The Trilateral Afghanistan-Pakistan-NATO Military Commission is an important mechanism in this regard. So is the strengthening of the U.S. military presence along the Afghan side of the border. The appointment of a U.S. special envoy to work with Afghanistan and Pakistan could also contribute to tackling these issues.

Washington also needs to convince Islamabad to work more closely in joint counter-terrorism operations that can bring U.S. resources (including intelligence) and military assets to bear in the borders areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan. That possibility exists. As Admiral William Fallon, head of US Central Command, said recently: "They see they've got real problems internally. My sense is there is an increased willingness (in Pakistan) to address these problems and we're going to try to help them."

But a large-scale U.S. troop intervention in Pakistan's tribal areas would be disastrous for the Pakistani state and for U.S. interests and would not provide a lasting solution to the problem. A more effective strategy involves working cooperatively with Pakistan's military to integrate these areas into the Pakistani political system and, once they are secure, provide substantial assistance to build up the economy and social infrastructure. To make it easier for Islamabad to undertake costly reforms needed to integrate the tribal areas, the United States, the World Bank and other donors should provide Pakistan with substantial additional economic assistance.

**Second, a key to achieving the goal of a stable and peaceful Afghanistan is to improve the long-standing, troubled relationship between Kabul and Islamabad.** The meeting last month between Presidents Musharraf and Karzai focused on the need for more cooperation on intelligence to meet -- in Musharraf's words -- "the menace of extremism and terrorism, which is destroying both our countries." Although their meeting was described as "unusually cordial," Afghan and Pakistan leaders are a long way from dropping their mutual suspicions. Afghans resent past and, many believe, present Pakistani interference, including ties with the Taliban. Pakistan fears Kabul's close ties with New Delhi.

To allay some of their mutual suspicions, Washington and other key capitals should urge Afghanistan to officially accept the so-called Durand Line of 1893 as the border with Pakistan. The border has been in contention since Pakistan became an independent state in 1947. Although Karzai does not publicly dispute this border, his government has been reluctant to accept it officially lest this cause internal political trouble. A comprehensive settlement to secure Afghanistan's border with Pakistan is long overdue and urgently required.

Washington should also urge the Karzai government to take greater account of Islamabad's sensitivities in dealing with India. Islamabad fears that the main function of Indian consulates in Kandahar and Jalalabad is to stir trouble across the nearby border, especially to fan the flames of the anti-Islamabad insurgency in Baluchistan. Even though India continues to provide generous economic assistance to Afghanistan, Kabul would be wise to try to assuage Pakistani concerns.

**Third, and over the longer term, as Afghanistan makes progress toward standing on its own feet, the United Nations should convene a high-level international conference attended by all Afghanistan's neighbors and other concerned major powers. The goal would be a multilateral accord that recognizes Afghanistan's borders; pledges non-interference in Afghanistan's internal affairs; explicitly bans the supply of arms to non governmental actors; affirms that, like the Congress of Vienna accord for Switzerland, Afghanistan should be internationally accepted as a permanently neutral state; and**

establishes a comprehensive international regime to remove obstacles to the flow of trade across Afghanistan, the key to that country's economic future.

Such an agreement would not end all external meddling in Afghanistan, but would help. It would also provide an international framework for Kabul's acceptance of its frontier with Pakistan and a basis for the eventual withdrawal of U.S. and NATO military forces from a stable and secure Afghanistan.

### **A Word on Iran**

In addition to promoting and assisting these steps with Pakistan, the U.S. should develop a strategy toward Iran -- Afghanistan's other key neighbor -- that includes the possibility of resuming discussions with Iran to engender greater cooperation to help stabilize Afghanistan, beginning with the issue of counter-narcotics where common ground already exists.

There were productive contacts and exchanges between the U.S. and Iran during the Taliban years (in the so-called "6 Plus 2" UN process) and at the Bonn conference after the Taliban were removed from power. In the last year, however, serious concerns have been raised about Iran's role in Afghanistan, with reports of Teheran supplying arms and other support to the Taliban despite its history of hostility toward that movement. Washington, with its allies, should develop a comprehensive picture of what Iran is up to in Afghanistan (both negative and positive) and map out a sound approach that seeks to convince Tehran to develop a more constructive role there, including the possibility to reestablish direct talks on Afghanistan. The present U.S. stance of not speaking with Teheran about Afghanistan risks increasing the likelihood that Iran will step up its covert interference as a way of undermining U.S. interests and the international effort in Afghanistan.

### **'Charlie Wilson's War' Continues**

If I may, Mr. Chairman, I would like to offer one final recommendation for those of you who have not already done so -- take an hour and a half to see the recently released film "Charlie Wilson's War."

I am sure many members of this Committee already know this story -- and probably the protagonist, your former House colleague Charlie Wilson with his Texas - sized personality. The film is certainly entertaining, but it also contains a very serious 'take away message' for the audience at the close of the movie, which is why I am calling it to your attention.

Simply stated, after spending hundreds of millions of dollars to help the Afghan mujahideen 'freedom fighters' defeat the Soviets and the Red Army, we walked away from Afghanistan after the Russians withdrew their forces in 1989. We left it to Afghanistan -- and I might add, Pakistan -- to pick up the pieces after ten

years of brutal warfare. Funding and high level U.S. attention to help the Afghans face their new challenges of security and re-building evaporated.

We all know what happened after that, up to and including 9/11. So this is my point -- and this is the 'take away message' from the movie: we still have time to get 'Charlie Wilson's War' right, for it to have, as they say, a 'happy ending.' We have been given a second chance to do the right thing for Afghanistan -- and for the United States. I sincerely hope we don't miss this opportunity. This Committee has a major role in assuring that we do not.

Of one thing I am certain -- without a genuine and long-term commitment on the part of the United States and the international community, Afghanistan will fail again.

THANK YOU.