

**Statement by Amb. Karl F. Inderfurth
House Armed Services Committee
January 30, 2007**

**“Security and Stability in Afghanistan:
Challenges and Opportunities”**

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

Thank you very much for your invitation to address the challenges and opportunities facing Afghanistan. In my testimony I will identify five of these challenges and make several recommendations, introduce three cautionary notes for your consideration, and then cite what I consider to be the most important opportunity this Committee and the Congress have to ensure Afghanistan’s long-term security and stability.

OPENING

May I begin by calling attention to the very first piece of legislation passed by the new House of Representatives on January 9. H.R. 1, the “Implementing the 9/11 Commission Recommendations Act of 2007,” contained many important anti-terrorism measures, including those found in Section 1441 on Afghanistan and Section 1442 on Pakistan.

The passage of H.R. 1 and its focus on the unfinished business of the 9/11 Commission recommendations provides an excellent point of departure for my testimony because there is much unfinished business that we and the international community must tend to in Afghanistan.

Let me remind you that in its final report, the 9/11 Commission identified Afghanistan as “the incubator for al Qaeda and for the 9/11 attacks” and made this recommendation to safeguard America against future acts of terrorism:

“The United States and the international community should make a long-term commitment to a secure and stable Afghanistan... Afghanistan must not again become a sanctuary for international crime and terrorism.”

The Commission went on to say that this “ambitious recommendation” would require a “redoubled effort to secure the country” and warned that “failed half-measures could be worse than useless.”

More than two years after that 9/11 Commission recommendation was made, “half-measures” in Afghanistan by the United States and the international community are failing to provide security, rebuild the country or combat the

exploding drug trade. They are also threatening to undo what progress has been made since U.S.-led military forces toppled the Taliban from power in late 2001.

Indeed much has been accomplished since the Taliban were overthrown. President Hamid Karzai is justifiably proud in saying that Afghanistan "now has a constitution, a president, a Parliament and a nation fully participating in its destiny."

But is also true that Afghanistan is still very much at risk. The Taliban and their extremist allies have made a powerful comeback, especially in the eastern and southern parts of the country. Afghanistan remains the world's leading drug supplier of opium. Corruption is on the rise. And many Afghans are asking, five years after the international community arrived, where are the promised roads, the schools, the health clinics, the electricity, the water?

From the outset, the United States went about establishing a "light footprint" in Afghanistan. The recent report of the Iraq Study Group identified one of the principal reasons: "The huge focus of U.S. political, military and economic support on Iraq has necessarily diverted attention from Afghanistan." But the international community also joined in that "light footprint," failing to fully provide either the manpower or the funding needed to deal with what was then and, in my opinion, remains the central front in the "war on terrorism."

Today we see the price being paid for "half-measures" in Afghanistan. Afghanistan must receive the priority, attention and resources it deserves. A successful plan will include moving on many fronts simultaneously, and in close cooperation with our partners in the international community and, a point I will underscore at the end of my statement, the Afghan government itself.

AFGHANISTAN CHALLENGES

Challenge Number 1: Security, Security, and Security

US and NATO officials are predicting "heavy fighting" in the spring and say that Afghanistan is facing "a bloody year" in 2007. Violence is four times more intense than it was a year ago, killing an estimated 4000 people, the deadliest year since 2001. Deteriorating security has also set back Afghanistan's development efforts. Aid and reconstruction workers are targeted; immunization programs have been halted; scores of Afghan schools have been threatened or burned.

More troops are needed. The current level of 34,000 NATO soldiers in Afghanistan represents about 85 percent of what military commanders say they need. British General David Richards, the NATO commander, estimates that he is 4,000 to 5,000 troops short. Outgoing U.S. coalition commander General Karl Eikenberry has also called for reinforcements.

The U.S. contributes 12,000 troops to the NATO mission and has another 12,000 personnel operating in the country under independent command. Last week the Pentagon announced that it will keep 3,200 of its troops -- from the Army's 10th Mountain Division -- in Afghanistan for an extra four months to bolster NATO forces through the spring.

This is a positive response to the NATO troop shortfall, but it will not be sufficient to address Afghanistan's security needs over the next year.

At the upcoming February 8-9 NATO defense minister's meeting in Seville, Spain, Secretary Gates should announce that the U.S. is prepared to further expand the number of American troops in Afghanistan with extra forces. This would coincide with the United States assuming command from the British of the NATO mission in Afghanistan. It would also reinforce the message Gates took earlier this month on his first visit to NATO headquarters: "Success in Afghanistan is our top priority."

But it must also be the top priority of NATO's other 25 members. The day after the Defense Department announced plans to extend the tour of US soldiers in Afghanistan, the top NATO commander in Afghanistan, British General David Richards, said that he anticipates "at least another brigade of combat troops from ISAF nations would be coming here shortly and more after that."

Seville should be the occasion for contributions for that new combat brigade to be finalized and announced. The U.S. should not bear the burden alone of increasing military forces in Afghanistan. In the words of Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns: "NATO needs to do more in the way of troops, in the way of money, in the way of ridding itself of the restrictions on the use of military forces" in Afghanistan. NATO should also encourage its partners in the NATO Mediterranean dialogue, especially Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco, to offer troops to help stabilize Afghanistan.

Challenge Number 2: The Afghan-Pakistan Border

Providing security to Afghanistan cannot be accomplished without doing more to secure the Afghanistan-Pakistan border. The Taliban 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. As long as the Taliban have a "safe haven" in Pakistan -- to use the recent words of Director of National Intelligence John Negroponte -- they can continue their insurgency indefinitely, making it virtually impossible for Afghanistan to become a country at peace with itself and its neighbors.

Washington and NATO must continue to work with Pakistan for a more concerted effort to disrupt the Taliban leadership and its revived command and control structure operating on Pakistani territory. This should be a top priority for Secretary Rice on her planned visit to Pakistan next month. While it is true that Islamabad cannot prevent individual Talibs and small groups from crossing the porous, 1,600-mile frontier, it can do a much better job of making its territory less hospitable for them.

The key to securing the Afghan-Pakistan border is to improve the troubled relations between the two neighboring and improve their level of cooperation. The recent establishment of the first Afghan, Pakistan and NATO intelligence and operation center in Kabul is a hopeful step in this direction. But more fundamental steps are required.

Washington and other capitals should urge Afghanistan to officially accept the so-called Durand Line of 1893 as the border with Pakistan. Although President 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.

Washington should urge Pakistan to integrate the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into the country's political, economic and legal mainstream. These areas along the Afghan-Pakistan border remain economically, socially and politically backward. A traditional bastion of conservative Islam, the FATA have in recent years become a breeding ground for the Taliban and a sanctuary for al-Qaeda remnants. 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 additional economic assistance.

Cautionary Note No. 1: Don't Open an Afghan Front Against Iran

Pakistan is not the only neighbor that has a strong interest and stake -- including religious, cultural and economic ties -- with Afghanistan. So does Iran, particularly in the western part of the country and among the Shiite (Hazara) population.

According to recent news reports, as part of the Bush administration's decision to authorize a "kill or capture" policy for Iranian operatives inside Iraq, US officials are also preparing "more aggressive moves...to undermine Iranian interests among Shiites in western Afghanistan."

This would be ill-advised. Such a move by the US would certainly complicate and likely prove counter-productive to President Karzai's efforts to normalize and stabilize relations with his western neighbor.

Moreover, opening an Afghan front against Iran does not appear appropriate or necessary. As the Iraq Study Group pointed out, during the Taliban era “The United States and Iran cooperated in Afghanistan.” This cooperation included opposition to the Taliban in the UN “6 plus 2” forum, quiet support to Iran for its supply of military assistance to Northern Alliance leader Ahmed Shah Masood, and a joint recognition of the need to combat the rising threat of the Afghan drug trade. The two countries collaborated during the post-Taliban Bonn Conference. More recently, Iran’s involvement in Afghanistan has been described by one US official as somewhere between “helpful and benign.”

Challenge Number 3: Afghan Security Forces

A greater priority must be given to standing up the Afghanistan’s security forces - - the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP). Today there are 36,000 soldiers in the army, with a projected end strength of 70,000 by 2009. There are about 50,000 police with a goal of a 82,000 man force, again by 2009. Both security forces are badly under-resourced.

A report by retired General Barry R. McCaffrey (who traveled to Afghanistan last summer) stated: “There seems to be neither U.S. resources nor political will” to equip the Afghan army to allow it to become a first line counter-insurgency force. McCaffrey recommended that the U.S. government provide \$1.2 billion annually to training and equipping the Afghan army and sustain it for ten years.

Greater assistance is urgently needed for the Afghan police. They are vital in establishing order in urban and rural areas, but are often more the source of insecurity than security for local residents. According to McCaffrey, they are in a “disastrous condition: badly equipped, corrupt, incompetent, poorly led and trained, riddled by drug use and lacking any semblance of a national police infrastructure.” A December report by the Departments of State and Defense states that “long-term U.S. assistance and funding, at least beyond 2010, is required to institutionalize the police force and establish a self-sustaining program.”

Given this background, the recent announcement by the Bush administration that it is going to request from Congress, over a two year period, \$8.6 billion in additional assistance for the Afghan national security forces is an important step forward and should be supported. Accelerating the training and equipping of the ANA and ANP will enable them to play a greater role sooner in defeating the Taliban and become a longer-term provider of security and stability in Afghanistan.

Challenge Number 4: The Drug Trade

Afghanistan is in danger of becoming a full fledged narco-state. The UN reports that the country’s opium harvest has reached the highest levels ever recorded,

accounting for about 92 percent of the world's supply. Today nearly half of Afghanistan's economy is dependent on the illegal drug trade.

Combating that drug trade will require a multi-pronged approach, including cross-border interdiction; aggressive law enforcement that goes after drug lords (and their heroin laboratories) and corrupt officials; more intensive manual eradication which the Afghan government intends to accelerate this year; and greater economic incentives to small farmers to destroy their poppy fields and pursue alternative livelihoods.

To date U.S. and NATO-led forces have been reluctant to take part in combating the Afghan drug trafficking network. That issue should be examined again. The Afghan army, police and counter-narcotics forces are not yet adequate to the job. Drug proceeds are supporting the Taliban and helping fuel the growing insurgency, placing U.S. and NATO forces at greater risk. NATO should assume a counter-drug mission.

Cautionary Note No. 2: Afghanistan is Not Columbia

It was reported last week that on a trip to Bogotá, General Peter Pace, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that U.S.-backed anti-drug and counterinsurgent operations in Colombia could serve as a template for Afghan efforts to fight drug production.

Colombian police and anti-drug experts have already helped train Afghan police and advise Kabul. But caution would be advised in trying to duplicate the U.S. approach toward Colombia's "war against drugs" in Afghanistan. That approach has invested heavily in the chemical eradication of coca fields. Assistance to programs to encourage poor farmers to switch to growing legal crops has received far less financial aid.

This is the exact opposite approach favored by the government of President Karzai, which has strongly opposed ground spraying with herbicides or aerial eradication of Afghanistan's poppy fields. Karzai believes that would cause further hardship for Afghanistan's farmers and cause a backlash that would rebound to the benefit of the insurgents trying to undermine his authority.

It is for that reason that a statement recently made by Undersecretary Burns should be adhered to: "The Afghan government is sovereign and so Pres. Karzai and his ministers will make the decisions as to how these counter narcotics programs are carried out."

Challenge Number 5: Reconstruction

One year ago this month in London, more than 60 countries and international organizations gathered to adopt a new, post-Bonn framework for cooperation and

partnership with Afghanistan. A document known as the Afghanistan Compact set out benchmarks and timetables to achieve specific goals in security, governance and development over the next five years.

The conference also provided the international community another opportunity to match its stated commitment to see Afghanistan rebuild with the resources necessary to accomplish that task. Two previous donor conferences - in Tokyo in 2002 and Berlin in 2004 - fell short. So has London.

The Afghanistan Compact promised a five-year, \$10.5 billion development program for Afghanistan, but the slow delivery of Western aid continues. Underfunded to begin with, there have been huge delays in starting reconstruction and development programs. Corruption is on the rise. Many Afghans say their lives are no better today than they were five years ago. President Karzai's popularity and support have suffered as a consequence.

As part of its latest package of U.S. assistance to Afghanistan, the Bush administration announced that it would ask Congress for \$2 billion in reconstruction and economic aid. But that would be over a two year period, meaning that it appears the level of US development aid would remain at about the same level it has for several years and fall short of Secretary Rice's statement that "We want to and we should redouble our efforts."

A U.S. official was quoted as saying last week that "We've got to kick up our investment. The U.S. is going to do that and we'd like to see our allies do that. 2007 is a year in which we can make a profound difference." Secretary Rice will have the opportunity to make that case to our allies at the next international donors' conference for Afghanistan, now scheduled for April in Rome.

Cautionary Note No. 3: It's Their Country

As we and the international community continue to examine how we can assist Afghanistan address the many challenges it faces in the days ahead, it is important to remind ourselves that, first and foremost, we must listen to and respect what the Afghans themselves see as their needs and priorities. It is, after all, their country and they, not we, know it best. The United States has strong national security interests in Afghanistan, but we will be most successful in addressing these by working with the Afghans themselves.

In this regard I would like to submit for the hearing record a copy of the report prepared by the Government of Afghanistan for the meeting beginning today in Berlin with officials of the European Union troika. The talks will focus on assessing the developments in Afghanistan over the past year. The paper prepared by the Afghan Government is entitled "Afghanistan: Challenges & The Way Ahead." It is remarkably similar to -- and highly relevant to -- the subject of today's hearing, from the perspective of those who know their challenges best.

CLOSING

I mentioned at the beginning of my testimony that I would conclude with citing what I consider to be the most important opportunity this Committee and the Congress have to ensure Afghanistan's long-term security and stability.

It is this. You have the opportunity to make an important mid-course adjustment in U.S. policy toward Afghanistan -- to move away from the "half measures" the 9/11 Commission warned against -- and to make Afghanistan a model of bipartisan cooperation.

In the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, there was broad, bipartisan agreement that our first response must be in Afghanistan -- against al Qaeda and those providing it safe haven, the Taliban. Since that time there has been no disagreement that we must "stay the course" in Afghanistan, with our troops and our aid. Strong support for this approach has been offered by two bipartisan panels -- the 9/11 Commission and more recently the Iraq Study Group. And just two days ago Speaker Pelosi delivered this message to President Karzai in Kabul -- Afghanistan has strong bipartisan support in Congress.

As for the Executive branch, I would hope that President Bush would institute regular meetings with Congressional leaders during his remaining two years in office to brief and consult on the U.S. mission in Afghanistan and what needs to be done. I would also encourage Secretaries Rice and Gates to include bipartisan Congressional observers as part of their delegations to key international conferences dealing with Afghanistan.

And on these occasions I would urge the Executive branch and the Congress to continue to make the case that the United States is committed to Afghanistan over the long-run. This investment in the security and development of Afghanistan is not only important for Afghanistan, but for the long-term national security interests of the United States.

Thank you very much.