

Testimony of
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Before the
Committee on Armed Services
U.S. House of Representatives
30 January 2007

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House Armed Services Committee
Security and Stability in Afghanistan: Opportunities and Challenges
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Testimony by Ali A. Jalali

Chairman Skelton,

Members of the Armed Services Committee:

Thank you for the invitation to offer my evaluation of the security situation in Afghanistan. The assessment I offer today is based entirely on my own views and personal judgment.

Mr. Chairman:

Recently, press headlines on Afghanistan have been negative. Reports of terrorists' raids, suicide attacks, roadside bombings, burning schools and attacks on civilian targets abound. The country is faced with a revitalized Taliban-led insurgency, a record rise in drug production, a deterioration of the rule of law and a weakening grip of the national government over many districts in the south and south-east. But, despite these troubling developments there is also good news that unfortunately becomes "no news."

Following the ouster of the Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan scored numerous achievements in its transition to democracy; notably, rebuilding its state institutions - including adopting a modern constitution, holding peaceful presidential and parliamentary elections, creating national security institutions, improving women's rights, and expanding education institutions. Afghans are freer today than they were under the Taliban.

While this progress is notable, the current troubles are immense and they are a result of what was not done rather than what was done. The Taliban were removed from power, but neither their potential to come back nor their external support was addressed. Alliances of convenience with warlords perpetuated the influence of the most notorious human rights violators. Competing demands for a response to immediate security needs and the requirements of long-term priorities were not balanced effectively even though they are mutually reinforcing. Failure to adopt a comprehensive and integrated approach to combating narcotics led to record increases in illicit drug production, which fuels corruption and funds terrorism and criminality. And inefficient use of insufficient funds, mostly outside of Afghan government control, failed to create economic opportunities, good governance and the rule of law.

The key to resolving current problems in Afghanistan is "doing" what was not "done." This includes ending the insurgency, creating effective governance capable of establishing the rule of law, providing human security and public services, and fostering economic development that can replace the illicit drug trade with legal economic activities.

The most critical challenges facing the country today are building indigenous security capacity, fighting insurgency and establishing the rule of law.

Building Indigenous Security Capacity

While the central Afghan government has extensive constitutional authority over the provinces, Kabul's limited ability to intervene, and its accommodation of local power brokers have left factional chiefs and militia commanders in control of local governments. Over the past three years, Kabul has successfully reduced the power of regional strongmen by reassigning them away from their geographic power base; however, their networks continue to influence provincial administration. Meanwhile, former factional commanders who are appointed to positions in the police and civil administration have loaded their offices with their unqualified supporters and corrupt cronies.

Security Sector Reform (SSR) has been the flagship of the international engagement in rebuilding Afghanistan's security forces and law enforcement. The five pillars of SSR (army, police, counter-narcotics, DDR, justice) are supported by different donor nations. While the pillars are inter-connected, the approach has been marked by a lack of close coordination, an imbalance in the level of committed resources and the absence of a unified developmental concept. Therefore SSR has developed unevenly.

The progress in building the U.S.-supported Afghan National Army (ANA) has been remarkable. The ANA's strength has reached 35,000 (December 2006) and it is expected to attain its goal of 70,000 by 2009. Despite the U.S. donated vehicles, small arms and other equipment in 2005-2006, the ANA suffers from insufficient fire power, the lack of indigenous combat air support and the absence of a self-sustaining operational budget. Therefore it continues to depend on military support from ISAF and Coalition forces.

The essential mission of building indigenous civilian police capacity in Afghanistan has been difficult. The national police had virtually ceased to exist after years of grinding civil war. With a main focus on fighting insurgency and militia-led violence, police capacity-building was not the pacing element in reform of the security sector, nor were broader Rule of Law considerations. Little international attention has been paid to the development of the Afghan National Police (ANP). Political decisions to reintegrate demobilized former factional combatants into the police force have further undermined ANP development. Moreover, the nature of police functions makes it difficult to train policemen as units like army battalions and then deploy them where they are needed. The police need to be trained, deployed and coached at the same time. The dominance of local loyalty and links with corrupt networks along with poor training, low pay and a residual culture of corruption contribute to endemic corruption in the police force.

A recent U.S. interagency assessment of Afghanistan's police program indicates that the ANP readiness level to perform conventional police functions and carry out its internal security mission is "far from adequate." The report suggests 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.

Reform of the justice sector reform suffers from a very low level of human resources and infrastructure capacity. The court structure is outdated, many judicial personnel are unqualified and corruption is deep-rooted. The period of violence in the country has destroyed the institutional integrity of the justice system and left a patchwork of contradictory and overlapping laws. Although some progress has been made, particularly in law reform, no major investment has been made in rebuilding the system.

Ending the Insurgency

Afghanistan has faced a continuous rising of insurgency since the ouster of the Taliban in 2001. In 2006, attacks by a resurgent Taliban and acts of suicide terrorism took the lives of more than 4,000 people which signify a three-fold increase in just one year.

The Taliban-led insurgency is not rooted in a popular ideology. The people of Afghanistan rejected the leadership, the ideology and the political vision of the Taliban and other militant groups long ago. The new Taliban-led insurgents are an assortment of ideologically motivated Afghan and foreign militants, disillusioned tribal communities, foreign intelligence operatives, drug traffickers, opportunist militia commanders, disenchanting and unemployed youth, and self-interested spoilers. It is more of a political alliance of convenience than an ideological front.

The insurgents have safe havens in Pakistan and enjoy technical and operational assistance from transnational extremist groups. They exploit the lack of development, misrule, insecurity, and the absence of the rule of law in the southern and eastern provinces. Ending the insurgency requires removal of both domestic and external sources of violence. However, dismantling Taliban sanctuaries in Pakistan is a prerequisite.

Although a U.S. ally in fighting terrorism and extremism, Pakistan views the challenge in the context of its regional interests. Afghanistan and the international community see Pakistan's cooperation as inadequate. Pakistan has significantly contributed to fighting al-Qaeda militants on its territory. However, despite the deployment of thousands of Pakistani military force in the border region, primarily in Waziristan tribal area, Pakistan has done little to contain the Taliban. The peace deal between the Pakistani government and the pro-Taliban militants in the South and North Waziristan (2005-2006) border area has led to a major increase in militants' cross-border attacks. Pakistan's idea of fencing and mining the border to stem militants cross border movements has been opposed by Afghanistan on the grounds that it can not stop the militants, but separates people on either side of the Durand line. Even under the most favorable conditions fighting infiltration leads merely to tactical shifts which might not change the strategic situation unless the militants infrastructure in Pakistan, including their command and control system, financial sources, logistics and training/educational facilities are disrupted.

In a testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee on 11 January, 2007, U.S. National Intelligence Director John Negroponte named Pakistan as the center of the al-Qaeda web that radiated out to the Middle East, North Africa and Europe. He stated that eliminating the safe haven that the Taliban and other extremists have found in Pakistan's tribal area is necessary to end the insurgency in Afghanistan.

Removal of the sources of insurgency in the area requires a regional approach involving not only Afghanistan and Pakistan but all actors engaged in the region including the United States, the European Union, NATO and other countries in the neighborhood. The new approach should address several issues to include the legitimate concerns of both Afghanistan and Pakistan, the development of the least educated and not urbanized tribal areas on both sides of the Durand line, the promotion of democratic changes in Pakistan, enhancing governance capacity in Afghanistan, and finally integration of Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) into the state administration. In the larger picture reducing the sources of transnational militancy and religious extremism in South Asia and economic integration in the region needs to be part of the new approach.

Although the insurgents are not yet capable to overthrow the Afghan government, they feel they are winning by not losing. On the other hand the counter insurgency operations can lose by not winning. Increased violence creates a sense of insecurity, hinders economic reconstruction, and weakens government influence in remote areas. This may eventually lead to a much stronger insurgency capable of challenging the government. In many districts, the resurgence of Taliban violence is caused more by the lack of government presence than the ability of the insurgents.

Certainly there is no military solution to the insurgency. But, military action is needed to provide a secure environment for development, good governance and the rule of law. The long absence of sufficient international military troops in Southern Afghanistan inspired the Taliban to fill the vacuum. NATO's assumption of security responsibility for all of Afghanistan last year was a major shift. However restrictions placed on the militaries of certain NATO nations reduce NATO's actual capacity. Expecting heavier fighting this spring (2007), U.S. military commanders as well as the NATO Command ask for more troops to boost the current 24,000 U.S. and about 20,000 allied forces in the country. The need is not only for more troops but also for the removal of operational restrictions imposed on German, French and Italian forces deployed in Afghanistan.

The Rule of Law and Human Security

Afghanistan can not achieve peace merely by fighting and killing the insurgents. Neither are development projects alone likely to win the hearts and minds of the people as long as the threats emanating from militia commanders, drug traffickers, corrupt provincial and district administrators, as well as government incompetence remain. This also applies to the operations of Coalition forces and ISAF in fighting terrorism and insurgency. Over-focus on force protection at the expense of creating durable security, picking and choosing discredited allies in fighting terrorism, and indiscriminate and unwarranted searches of peaceful villages without consideration for local culture, or detaining inhabitants who have no known connection with hostile armed groups provokes resentment and indignant protests that hinders the stabilization effort.

So efforts to defeat the insurgents, build peace and development should be sought through the establishment of the rule of law that guarantees human security. This means that security operations by international forces, and the Afghan army and police should be seen as a subset of the rule of law and not the other way around. Security and peace are achieved through winning the hearts of the people and not only through military operations.

Insecurity in Afghanistan is not only a question of physical safety but also of deprivation and restricted access to health and education facilities, legal and political rights, and social opportunities. The real security challenge is to provide services and jobs and protect human rights – especially in rural areas. Freedom from “fear” and freedom from “want” lead to human security and they require more than building the state security forces.

The rule of law is the heart of government legitimacy and a prerequisite for human security that involves protection and empowerment of the citizenry. The dominance of security demands in an unstable environment has led to an over-securitization of the rule of law. This subordinates justice to security considerations and turns police into a tool primarily used in combating insurgency instead of protecting law and justice. Obviously in

conflict-ridden conditions there is a need to deal with security threats in a forceful way; however, the approach should not result in compromising the administration of justice since the rule of law contributes to security in a major way.

Consequently today, there is a feeling of disenchantment at two levels that dangerously affects the stability in Afghanistan. At one level the Afghan government has doubts about the sustainability of foreign assistance and the capacity of the international community's commitment to face the rising threats and invest in long-term development of the country. This inhibits the government from acting decisively as it becomes dependent on non-statutory power holders, self-serving opportunists and militia commanders. At the second level, the public is disillusioned with the lack of government will and capacity to protect the people and deliver needed services. Such public opinion in the unstable South nourishes support for the Taliban.

Addressing the two levels of disenchantment is the key to improving the situation. The international community must provide the Afghan government the means to foster security and development. The Afghan government needs to create an environment of human security in rural areas for regaining the hearts and minds of the public.

Conclusion

The challenges facing Afghanistan are enormous. They are all interlinked and need to be dealt with through a comprehensive and integrated strategy. More troops are needed to defeat the insurgency in the country but military action without development does not lead to peace. Likewise, economic development without the establishment of the rule of law will not ensure human security and political stability in Afghanistan. And, finally the rule of law can not be achieved without an effective counter-narcotic program.

Afghanistan has experienced a long period of instability and violence. In such an environment the line between conflict and post-conflict phases is indistinct. A post-conflict situation can develop into a conflict situation if not managed well. World Bank research shows that failure in post-conflict societies begins when international attention that culminates at the time of political settlement starts an early decline accompanied by reduction of aid. Then the expectation of people from a peace dividend turns into disappointment, frustration and antagonism if it is not met within a reasonable timeframe. These two contradictory trends would cross a point where a fragile peace collapses, some time before five years. I hope this will not happen to Afghanistan.

So responding to the security challenges in Afghanistan requires a long-term commitment by the international community to invest in addressing both short- and long-term needs of the country. As an Afghan proverb says "construction takes much longer time than does the destruction." Afghanistan suffered destruction for more than two decades. Its recovery takes time, patience and perseverance.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.
