

**Congressional Testimony
Transition in Afghanistan**

**House Armed Services Committee
2118 Rayburn House Office Building**

By

**John M. Keane
General
US Army, Retired**

27 February 2013

1000 hours

**Congressional Hearing
Testimony
27 February
1000 hrs**

Mr. Chairman, ranking minority and members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to testify today on such a critical subject as we transition US operations in Afghanistan. Am honored to be with such a distinguished panel who I have known for many years.

Many of the committee members are aware that I have conducted several assessments for our military commanders in Afghanistan having completed my last assessment for Generals Mattis and Allen last year. Those visits have been invaluable to understanding so called “ground truth” by assessing the progress or lack thereof of our campaign plan’s goals and objectives. Given four panel members today, I will keep my remarks brief.

Afghanistan is rapidly moving toward its most critical milestone since 2001, when the Taliban were deposed, as 2014 approaches and Afghanistan participates in a political, economic and security transition. Much of

Afghanistan's future is dependent on the success of 2014. While the economic and security transitions are driven largely by NATO force level reductions, the political transition with a national election is exclusively Afghan as it will impact the confidence of the Afghan people and the international community at large in the political process. A relatively fair and open election that reflects the peoples' choices and results in an improved national government will be a significant step forward in the political development of Afghanistan. I am disappointed that US force levels in 2014 will be so low that they will have negligible impact on the security of the elections.

After almost twelve years of war in Afghanistan the central issue for me is how do we best manage the risk? How do we avoid squandering the gains that we have made in Afghanistan?

Yes, we have been in Afghanistan a long time, driven mainly by US decision to go to war in Iraq. As such, Afghanistan in 2002 quickly became a secondary effort, indeed, an economy of force operation, from 2002 to 2009, when in 2009 the POTUS made a decision to conduct counterinsurgency

operations and to escalate the war by adding thirty thousand surge forces. Even this decision did not reflect what Generals McChrystal and Petraeus believed was the minimum force to succeed, forty thousand surge forces. Instead, they received a force which was 25% smaller, which dictated that the campaign in the SOUTH and EAST be conducted sequentially versus simultaneously. The campaign in the SOUTH was largely successful, while the campaign in the EAST was never completed, because the surge forces were withdrawn prematurely in 2012, over General Petraeus' objection. Recently the POTUS made the decision to remove thirty four thousand of the sixty six thousand forces by February 2014 versus keeping the sixty six thousand till the end of 2014. These decisions must be understood because they all have impacted mission success by increasing the risk.

The most serious security situation lies in the EAST, where we were never able to conduct extensive clear and hold operations which led to our success in the SOUTH. As such there are Taliban and Haggani sanctuaries in the EAST not too far from Kabul. It is unrealistic to believe that the ANSF will succeed in the EAST, where NATO / ISAF has not. In the SOUTH,

what remains is to consolidate the gains that were made in achieving relative stability which has led to improved security and improved local governance.

Can we mitigate the risk? While I am not certain, I know to not try will doom us to likely fail. Three key decisions can begin to mitigate the risk and provide a hedge:

POST 2014 RESIDUAL FORCE

---First, is the size and missions of the residual, post 2014 force. There are 3 missions for the force: counter-terrorism (CT), training and assistance, and enablers to ANSF. The CT mission to have the necessary reach to be effective must operate from 3 locations, Khost, Jalalabad and Kandahar. These units require drone crews, analysts, helicopters with maintenance, medical trauma units and security forces. If we consolidate the CT force within a single base then we are not mitigating the risk, we are increasing it by not having an effective CT force.

The training and assistance mission spreads across three Army Corps and across police zones is primarily advisors to assist with the continued growth

and development of the ANSF. An advisory brigade should be assigned to each corps with responsibility for the police zones in the corps as well.

Finally, are the enablers for the ANSF. This is often misunderstood as to its importance. Just about every NATO country in Afghanistan requires enablers from the US in varying degrees, such as helicopters, intelligence, medical, logistics and road and mine clearance. When the ANA was organized, recruited and trained the decision was to build an infantry force, or a “boots on the ground” force. The enablers would be provided by the US and are similar to what the US provides NATO forces. Eventually, the ANA will have its own enablers but not till beyond 2014. If the ANA is to be offensive minded they must have confidence in their support, otherwise they will be paralyzed and reduced to defending their bases.

A summary of the forces required for a post 2014 residual force are:

CT – 12,000

Training and assistance – 5,000

Enablers – 8,000

Total – 25,000

ANSF FORCE LEVEL

---The second mitigation to reduce the risk is the force level for the ANSF. Currently, at 352 thousand one of the options is to drawdown the ANSF post 2015 to a level of 228 thousand. This makes no sense given the NATO / US drawdown which culminates in 2014 and, we obviously do not know what that impact is. We can mitigate the risk by planning to fund the ANSF at the current 352 thousand to 2020. At some point the Afghans will be in a position to contribute to the funding level.

PAKISTAN SANCTUARIES

---A third mitigation to reduce the risk is to authorize the targeting of the Taliban and Haggani leaders in the sanctuaries in Pakistan. Priority is to the Haggani sanctuary because of the unstable situation in the EAST. This would be an extension of the mission the OGA is conducting against the Al Qaeda in the FATA. Once systematic targeting commences, the sanctuary will cease to exist as we currently know it; a place where strategy, training, operational oversight, intelligence and logistics is executed, routinely, in safe haven. These functions will suffer significantly which will positively impact

operations in the EAST. Additionally, it will be a huge morale boost for the ANSF.

Let me conclude by saying I believe there is far too much risk to a stable security situation in Afghanistan as we meet today. This is driven mostly by US policy decisions. I recognize that many observers are looking to a political settlement as the most desirable outcome, and certainly it is that, but the harsh reality is the more risk there is to mission success the less likelihood of a settlement. If the Taliban and Haggani believe they will gain in influence in 2014 and beyond, why settle? If future policy decisions on US post 2014 force size and ANSF force levels do in fact increase the risk versus mitigate the risk a favorable outcome is unlikely. In that case, it would be hard to justify a US presence beyond 2014. Ambassador Ryan Crocker as many of you know is an extraordinary diplomat, the very best we had in the region, who said: “how we end a conflict and what we leave behind is more important than how we began it”.

Thank you, and I look forward to your questions.