



Statement before the
House Foreign Affairs Committee
Subcommittee on the Middle East and North Africa

***“ASSESSING THE PRESIDENT’S STRATEGY
IN AFGHANISTAN”***

A Testimony by:

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Chairman Ros-Lehtinen, Ranking Member Deutch, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing today on Afghanistan, a place where success hangs in the balance. The people of Afghanistan, neighboring countries, dangerous actors such as the Taliban, al Qaeda and Da'esh (the so-called Islamic State), and the United States and our partners and allies are making key choices now – sometimes by acting, sometimes by inaction. Those choices will frame an outcome that will directly affect our national security for decades to come.

The key for us is: will we get things right, or, to borrow (partly) a phrase from the movie “Charlie Wilson’s War” – will we mess up the end game and make things worse in the future? While our views and actions are only part of the equation and the Afghan people and the government of Pakistan are the most important actors, our actions matter and matter a lot. Sadly, based on my recent time in Afghanistan and conversations inside and outside Afghanistan, I believe our current policies are failing and making success less likely. While the Afghan people may be able to succeed despite the obstacles they face, we can and should do better. We need an immediate, intensive re-look at our policies.

Terrorism Now: Interconnected Challenges

However, before turning to Afghanistan, I want to express my sympathy and solidarity with the people and nation of France and to the victims of last month’s attacks, their families and their loved ones. France is our oldest ally and the French people share, and, in many ways, exemplify our fundamental values. When terrorists struck New York in September 2001, the outpouring of support to the United States from France was remarkable. In the days afterward, France stepped forward to work with us in many fields as we went into Afghanistan and began the difficult task that continues today, of ensuring Afghanistan is not used as a base from which to launch further attacks on the United States, on our allies, or on any country.

These attacks in Paris, where the victims (as in the 9/11 attacks here in New York) were from many countries, demonstrate how interconnected the world is and how interconnected are the security challenges that we all face. While centered in Syria and Iraq, Da’esh, the organization responsible for the attacks in Paris, is also an increasing presence in Afghanistan where its brand of violence and cruelty has attracted former Taliban and others. Many Afghans now see Da’esh in Afghanistan as a serious security threat.¹

Success in Afghanistan – Why it Matters

Success in Afghanistan is not only still possible, in my view, it is a requirement for the future security of the United States. The attacks on the United States mounted by al Qaeda from its safe haven in Afghanistan in September 2001 were made possible by a series of mistakes and misjudgments. Far from the least of these was the decision by the United States to abandon Afghanistan after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989.

¹ The Asia Foundation, *Afghanistan in 2015: A Survey of the Afghan People*, San Francisco, 2015; p. 37, Figure 2.3. (Cited hereafter as TAF Survey)

If we repeat that mistake today, we risk paying an even greater price in the future. Today, terrorism is an increasingly dangerous global threat - with new organizations and networks emerging, more recruits joining terrorist organizations, safe havens multiplying, and terrorist attacks up sharply. The latest United States official report² shows terrorist attacks up in 2014 by over 30 percent, with deaths from terrorism up over 80 percent. The record so far in 2015, tragically, augers for another bloody year. Developments in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Mali, Somalia and elsewhere are beyond the subject of this hearing, but suffice it to say the trends are not positive, the challenges are growing, and the way ahead is far from clear.

Therefore, if, after all the blood and treasure, after all the efforts and sacrifices of the past decade and a half, Afghanistan were to return to the control of extremists, the danger from terrorism to the United States would be deadly. Those who want to attack and destroy us would gain adherents and credibility and would feel validated in their crusade against us and our values. The consequences would not just stay in Afghanistan; they would reverberate through the region and across the globe. At some point we would face the possibility of another war in Afghanistan, and that would be a much larger, bloodier conflict.

Success in Afghanistan – Why it is Still Possible

But, success in Afghanistan, despite the huge challenges and many mistakes by all involved, is still possible. In fact, in my judgment, with the right set of policies and the right kind of assistance, I believe Afghanistan and its people will succeed. I believe that Afghanistan can become the emerging positive state that the vast majority of its citizens want. I will address the challenges, mistakes and failures later in my testimony, but first the positives.

Now for many Americans, subjected to a relentless media barrage of negative reports on Afghanistan, it may come as a surprise that there is a lot of very positive news about Afghanistan. Few Americans know that our assistance has played a major role in the startling progress that Afghanistan has made and is making in areas as disparate as health and education, agriculture and media freedom. Few Americans know just how hard Afghans are now fighting and how many Afghans are now dying for their country. It is this positive record, and the commitment of the Afghan people, whom I have come to admire and respect over the past 14 years, that lead to me to my positive assessment.

Since 2001 Afghanistan and the Afghan people have made across the board progress in almost all areas of human development such as in health, education, and agriculture. The United Nations Development Program ranks countries on a Human Development Index. Afghanistan went from being unranked in 2001 due to lack of data and a ranking of 181 (at the bottom) for 2007,³ to a ranking of 169 (out of 187 countries) for 2013.⁴ The World Bank reports sharp improvements from 2007-2012 in a range of areas, including adult and youth literacy, electricity, sanitation, and safe drinking water.⁵ Reporters Without Borders ranks Afghanistan 122 out of

² United States Department of State, *Country Reports on Terrorism 2014*, Washington D.C, June, 2015.

³ United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report*, New York October, 2009

⁴ United Nations Development Program, *Human Development Report*, New York, July, 2014

⁵ The World Bank, *Afghanistan Development Update*, Washington D.C., October 2015; chart, p. 18.

180 countries in press freedom,⁶ up from 134 out of 166 countries in 2003.⁷ And in 2014 Afghans turned out in numbers that surprised analysts everywhere for elections that allowed for a peaceful transition of civilian rule, a landmark for any country. This kind of progress in a country wracked by a violent insurgency, beset by narcotics networks, and in a region where authoritarianism, extremism, and oppression are rife is truly remarkable.

Even more remarkable is that over the past two years Afghanistan has survived two years of wrenching transitions - a security transition from over 100,000 international forces fighting the Taliban insurgency down to 13,600 international troops in support roles in 2015; a political transition from President Karzi to a National Unity Government headed by President Asrhan Ghani; and an economic transition from an economy spurred by spending by international forces and massive international assistance to an economy that, while still depending on outside assistance, is increasingly internally focused. These transitions have been difficult. Afghan security forces have fought hard and well against an increasing Taliban threat, but have struggled to maintain the gains achieved by international forces when the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) was in the lead for much of the fighting. Afghan elections were marred by controversy and fraud and a new government was only cobbled together after strong pressure from the United States. That new government has struggled at times, but has made a promising start in a range of areas (below). And the Afghan economy, which many feared might plunge into a recession as international forces withdrew, is growing, albeit at too-sluggish rate of 1.3%.⁸

In President Ghani the Afghan people have a new leader, committed to reform, and the United States and our international partners in the new NATO “Resolute Support” (RS) mission have a new and positive partner. As he proved during his visit to Washington this past spring, President Ghani appreciates the contributions and sacrifices the American people, particularly our troops, have made over the past 14 years and he looks forward to a day when Afghanistan is at peace and is able to support and defend itself.

I will mention just a few of the most important areas where the new government has made progress:

- Resetting Afghanistan-U.S. relations, including signing of the Bilateral Security Agreement with the U.S.
- Institution of systemic financial management reforms, focused on rooting out corruption and increasing domestic revenues.
 - Domestic revenues are up by 8% over 2105, despite the slowdown in economic growth. The World Bank attributes this to better administration by the new government⁹.
 - Banking reforms including accelerated efforts to recover Kabul Bank funds and stabilize the banking sector. (Note: this includes the cancelling by President Ghani of a controversial deal, brokered by members of his administration, with one of

⁶ Reporters Without Borders, *2015 World Press Freedom Index*, <https://index.rsf.org/>

⁷ Reporters Without Borders, *2003 World Press Freedom Index*, <https://index.rsf.org/>

⁸ World Bank, op. cit.

⁹ World Bank, op. cit.

the convicted Kabul Bank fraudsters. This is an example of how difficult fighting corruption is in Afghanistan.)

- Establishment of a Procurement Commission to review all public contracts, in the past a major source of corruption. Accomplishments include uncovering military fuel corruption and savings estimated by the Afghan government to be in the hundreds of millions of dollars.
- Agreement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a Staff Monitored Program, a first step towards an IMF Extended Credit Facility for Afghanistan.¹⁰
- Major jobs/employment program announced, targeted at youth unemployment.
- Urban land registration program launched to combat land corruption and restore land rights to disenfranchised.
- Other economic development programs launched, such as \$300 million New Roads program.
- A number of new, young, reform-oriented ministers appointed to key ministries, such as agriculture.

Security – the Greatest Challenge

However, despite all the progress made over the past 14 years and the positive signs on reform from the new government, Afghanistan is still a fragile state facing huge challenges. Security is by far the biggest challenge, and one that has morphed well beyond what United States and other analysts predicted just a few years ago. A recent survey by The Asia Foundation (TAF) found that only 36% of Afghans, down from 55% a year ago, believed their country was headed in the right direction¹¹. The major reason for this change was a decline in the security situation. The TAF survey found concerns about security at their highest levels since 2007¹².

This survey of Afghans tracks with reports from a variety of sources, including the United Nations^{13,14} and the United States Department of Defense¹⁵ that security in Afghanistan is under threat, with Afghan forces, at best, holding their own. During a recent visit to Afghanistan in September and October, I met with a range of Afghans, from students and business people to military and political leaders. More of them reported concerns about their own and their families' safety than at any time since I was first posted to Afghanistan in 2002 or in any of my multiple times in the country since.

¹⁰ International Monetary Fund, *IMF Managing Director Approves a Staff-Monitored Program for the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan*, Press Release No. 15/247 June 2, 2015

¹¹ TAF Survey, op. cit. pp. 5, 15-21

¹² TAF Survey, op. cit. pp. 6, 7, 33-52

¹³ Rod Norland and Joseph Goldstein, *Afghan Taliban's Reach Is Widest Since 2001*, *U.N. Says*, New York Times, October 11, 2015.

¹⁴ United Nations, *The situation in Afghanistan and its implications for international peace and security, Report of the Secretary-General*, New York, September 1, 2015

¹⁵ United States Department of Defense, *Report on Enhancing Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, Washington, DC, June 2015 (hereafter cited as "1225 Report")

This decline in security is having a number of unforeseen consequences. A major one is a surge of Afghans fleeing the renewed violence and joining Syrians and others seeking refuge in Europe. The International Organization for Migration estimates that about 20% of the refugees striving to reach Europe now are from Afghanistan. If security trends continue as they have, this year's numbers will move from the tens of thousands to the hundreds of thousands. Such a surge would put huge pressures on our European allies as well as on neighboring countries, which are now trying to repatriate to Afghanistan refugees from earlier conflicts.

A New, Improved Taliban

On the ground, the Taliban offensive in 2015, code-named “Azm” (perseverance) was the broadest ranging and most successful military campaign that the Taliban have waged since they took over the country in the late 1990s. The offensive covered more of Afghanistan than ever before, reaching areas in the north previously thought to be out of the Taliban’s reach. During the offensive the Taliban took control of 7 district centers and, in October, one provincial capital, Kunduz. Also in October they nearly took two other provincial capitals, Faisabad in Badakshan and Maimana in Faryab province. The Taliban also mounted serious challenges to Afghan government control of Ghazni and Helmand provinces. While Afghan forces defended or retook most of these places, the UN reports that the Taliban remains in control of two district centers as of the end of September¹⁶.

The Taliban conducted multiple, major show of force attacks on Kabul. Significant attacks included on “...the National Assembly on 22 June, attacks on international military convoys in Kabul on 30 June, 7 July and 22 August, and following the announcement of the death of Mullah Omar, a string of attacks between 7 and 10 August, including suicide attacks in the vicinity of an Afghan National Army base, the police academy, an international military base and Kabul International Airport, resulting in over 55 individuals killed and over 330 injured”¹⁷. The Taliban carried out “attacks on Afghan military and Government targets in the provincial capitals of Kandahar (25 May), Jalalabad (31 May), Lashkar Gah (30 June) and Khost (12 July)”¹⁸. (Note: The attacks in Kabul and Khost, to me, bore all the signatures of the Haqqani Network, a Taliban group resident in Pakistan and with long-standing ties to Pakistan’s intelligence services.)

These attacks will likely have succeeded in killing and wounding more Afghan civilians and Afghan security forces than in any year in the past fourteen. It is an obvious irony that an insurgent movement that spent years messaging that its objective was to kill foreign forces, that the vast majority of the Taliban’s victims have always been Afghans and the majority of those victims are civilians. Despite Taliban claims of a code of conduct that strives to minimize violence against civilians, Taliban actions have regularly been to the contrary. And in a war where the Taliban have blamed international interventions for the death and destruction in their country, in fact, as international forces have withdrawn and pulled out of combat, violence by the Taliban has gone up. What does this achieve? Here is where the Taliban’s strategy tracks that of many insurgents elsewhere – undermining confidence in the target government. This year they

¹⁶ United Nations, op. cit. para. 16.

¹⁷ *ibid.* para. 18

¹⁸ *ibid.* para. 18

have succeeded, as the TAF Survey shows. They are getting the message to the Afghan people that their government and security forces do not yet have the capability to protect the Afghan people. In this situation, Afghanistan needs more, not less, help.

But, beyond the increased breadth and intensity of the Taliban attacks, perhaps most worrying for the 2016 fighting season is an evolution in the tactics, techniques, and procedures used by the Taliban forces. As described to me by multiple sources, the Taliban for the first time in over a decade began using massed forces – beginning with scores of fighters, then hundreds in some of their operations. The Taliban offensives included use of Uzbek and other foreign fighters as “shock troops,” the Taliban version of Special Forces, a technique they used in their offensives of the late 1990s, but had rarely employed in recent years. These foreign forces were key to the October battle for Kunduz.

The Taliban also seemed better armed and better financed than in the past, according to many of those I spoke with. The large amounts of weapons and explosives used by the Taliban throughout Afghanistan showed they had the financing and logistics infrastructure to move this military equipment from their depots and supply chains in Pakistan to wherever such supplies were needed in Afghanistan. Beyond equipment from Pakistani sources, fighters from Pakistan – in most cases ethnic Pashtuns educated in jihad in extremist mosques in areas of Pakistan bordering Afghanistan – were widely used in some of the Taliban offensives. While some of these fighters are from Afghan families that fled Afghanistan in past decades, they generally were born and raised in Pakistan and often made their first trip to Afghanistan in order to fight or to carry out suicide attacks.

The Taliban Prepare for 2016

Much of the Taliban offensive in 2015 seemed probing in nature. This is consistent with the name the Taliban bestowed on the effort and with the situation on the ground. This was the first fighting season where ISAF forces were not present in combat and was a test of what the U.S. administration meant when it proclaimed the war in Afghanistan was “over,” and had been “brought to a responsible conclusion.” The Taliban appeared to be constantly testing Afghan forces to see under what circumstances they would receive air or other support and to determine how effective the Afghan forces would be without American advisors present on the battlefield. As the summer progressed, the Taliban kept upping the ante, seeing if they could use massed forces and getting closer to the kind of semi-conventional battles that the Taliban fought when they conquered Afghanistan in the 1990s and during the mid-2000s when they began their comeback against an under-resourced Coalition, but later discontinued when their casualties from Coalition air power became too great.

While it is too early to understand all the conclusions the Taliban may have drawn from this year's fighting, it does seem clear from Taliban messages to their fighters, from speaking to those who have spoken with, or have direct knowledge of the Taliban's views, that the Taliban are positive and optimistic. They see the 2015 fighting season as a success and expect much greater success next fighting season.

Based on their experience this year they likely believe that they will only face rare cases of U.S. or coalition air power or other assets being used against them. They will have found the limits on Afghan forces' mobility – how quickly the Afghans can (or cannot) move reinforcements or supplies to threatened areas. They will have discovered that Afghan intelligence is currently only "...manned, organized, trained and equipped to perform all basic intelligence functions at a rudimentary level."¹⁹

And while the Afghan forces prevailed in virtually every battle they fought with the Taliban this past year, the lack of mobility on the part of Afghan forces makes them vulnerable to a maneuverable insurgent force. The lack of Afghan firepower, with little effective artillery and minimal indigenous close air support, makes it more likely that the Taliban will begin using massed forces to overpower outnumbered Afghan soldiers. This is not because the Afghan forces are not good fighters, or that there are too few Afghan forces. It is a simple fact of insurgent/guerilla warfare that the insurgents have the ability to choose the battlefield. Without the key enablers— air support, artillery, and intelligence – that we have discontinued providing. The Afghans, as a defending force, pinned down guarding cities, towns, villages, key infrastructure, and lines of communication, are at a disadvantage.

And the Afghan forces will be at this disadvantage facing a well-armed, well-financed Taliban that will, as it has for the past 14 years, have spent the winter refitting in Pakistan, holding senior level planning meetings there, and coming up with their strategy and campaign plan for 2016. When that new campaign plan is announced, typically in the spring, my fear is that rather than a status quo title and goal, like this year's "Perseverance," the Taliban's next offensive will reflect their success of the past year and aim to take over parts of Afghanistan. That will be hard to do, as the Afghan forces remain capable and motivated. I do not believe the Taliban will succeed in 2016. But, in the absence of needed enablers and with U.S. forces restricted from providing effective enabler assistance the Taliban's ability to, at a minimum, kill more Afghan civilians and security forces will be greater next year than this year.

A New Security Challenge: Da'esh (the Islamic State)

While IS, ISIS, ISIL, Da'esh, call it what you will, operates its terror networks from territory it has conquered in Syria and Iraq, the organization is an offshoot of al Qaeda, the same al Qaeda that carried out the attacks in New York and which we drove out of Afghanistan, into Pakistan, in 2001. Da'esh sprang from that same al Qaeda, an organization whose top leaders we have killed often, but which continues to operate in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen and other places. And Da'esh, like al Qaeda, has an ideology that is antithetical to our values and to our existence.

Now that Da'esh has emerged from al Qaeda it has become a competitor with its parent for fighters, for money, and most of all a competitor for ideological leadership of extremists and radicals who want to force a warped version of Islam on the vast majority of Muslims who reject the extremists' horrific visions. In this competition, terror attacks are used not just to try and strike at western countries that reject the abusive Da'esh ideology and actions, but also as

¹⁹ 1225 Report, op. cit., p. 58.

recruiting tools and as ways to “prove” the validity of these groups’ universalist claims to religious and political authority.

This competition of ideologies is playing out in words and actions. The leaders of each group have stated that the other lacks legitimacy and called on all Muslims to reject the other group. They are competing for the adherence of existing groups, such as the Taliban, and seeking recruits from the same pools of dissatisfied youth in Afghanistan, as elsewhere.

Da’esh has had success in recruiting former Taliban, disappointed in the current Taliban leadership’s failure to re-conquer the country and in the venality of some Taliban leaders. Da’esh adherents have seized Afghan towns and villages; displaying the Da’esh flag and imposing the same extremist strictures on the people as exist in Syria and Iraq. Those who have fallen under Da’esh have in many cases fled, seeking refuge in cities and appealing to their government for assistance. The Taliban have responded by sending in forces to try and retake areas from Da’esh, killing both opponents and civilians in what are on-going, violent clashes. It is impossible to predict whether Da’esh will gain a true foothold in Afghanistan and whether it can out-compete the Taliban and their still active al Qaeda allies. But the presence of Da’esh has resulted in even more bloodshed, particularly against Hazara Shi’as, hated by both the Da’esh and the Taliban. The interplay between these two groups adds a new element to an already dangerous battlefield, complicating the tasks of the Afghan security forces.

Where We Have Failed

As someone who was present in Kabul in May 2002 when the first U.S. Special Forces arrived to begin training a minimal Afghan National Army and who, as Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia from 2009 -2013, had some responsibility for policies regarding the development of the Afghan forces, I have seen both failures and successes. As we worked to fulfill our January 2002 pledge to build an effective Afghan National Army, capable of defending its own country, and ensuring that Afghanistan was never again a base for terrorist attacks against others, I watched as our military in 2002 tried to refinish beat-up Kalashnikovs for the new Afghan soldiers to use because Washington bureaucrats thought all guns were created equal and believed that the Afghans would never need real ones. I urged (unsuccessfully) against setting our target for an Afghan Army of 50,000 with no advanced capabilities, in order to save money for our invasion of Iraq. This was a force that Afghan soldiers knew, and told us, would never be sufficient to hold the country against a resurgent Taliban or any other enemy. They were right.

We started off too small and too light, spent years playing catch up, with the Taliban always a couple of steps ahead until we finally started getting it right in 2009. President Obama’s early decisions on Afghanistan got the part about building Afghan forces right for the first time. We did a serious analysis of how large and how capable a force Afghanistan would need to defend itself from an insurgency abetted by terrorists. We put in place the right kind of training force, quickly moving to a train-the-trainer approach that effectively produced good soldiers. These were Afghan soldiers, capable of fighting on the small-unit level the conflict then demanded. And we provided them with needed enablers – air, intelligence, and logistics. We equipped the forces well and began training on higher-level institutional skills, operations at

the corps and above levels, strategy and analysis, leadership, and national level coordination of operations.

The Enabler Gap

But, because we had a tight timeline from Washington – our surge forces could only stay in place for, in some cases, less than a year, we prioritized what was needed most immediately and put off the tougher, more time-intensive and more expensive building of enablers. As mentioned above the key enablers absolutely essential to a capable military response to an insurgency in today's world are, air power – both transport and close air support; intelligence, especially the force multiplier of modern technical intelligence – drones and aerostats; and logistics. Additionally, building the higher-order military capabilities mentioned above, particularly leadership and corps and above-level operations and coordination, are skill sets that take years to inculcate.

However, our planning assumptions in the 2009-2012 timeframe were that even as U.S. troops drew down, we would be able to provide necessary enablers and continue training, advising, and assisting until the Afghans developed necessary capabilities themselves – a process for which there is no set timetable or yardstick. When in 2012 the White House decided that there would be no U.S. enablers made available to Afghan forces after 2014 and started debating a possible pullout of all our forces from Afghanistan in the same year, our assumptions were reversed. As a participant and observer in the debates inside the administration during 2012-2013, I saw the struggles to come up with ways forward that would either minimize the enabler gaps or to devise quick, cheap ways to provide complicated, expensive systems. I have huge admiration for my colleagues at the Pentagon, CENTCOM, US Forces Afghanistan and elsewhere who tried many different paths as they struggled to square the conflicting orders to leave Afghanistan in a “responsible” manner and not to provide enablers to Afghan forces after 2014. Sadly, I have to report that these efforts have not worked and that the absence of enablers and the dearth of effective, trained advisors in the right places in Afghanistan is putting success in Afghanistan at unnecessary risk.

Specifically, the Afghan Air Force we are now developing relies on a mixture of old and/or less than fully capable aircraft many of which will not come on line for 1-2 years. The Afghan government has been seeking support for its air force from other countries, including Russia and India, but so far with limited success. It does not appear likely that the Afghans will have anything close to the air power they need for 2016.

Afghan intelligence needs the technical capabilities from the advanced drones and aerostats which the U.S. and Coalition allies deployed to Afghanistan through 2014. Many of these capabilities have either been moved back to the U.S. or deployed to Syria and Iraq. However, the U.S. has the capability to reintroduce quickly much of the departed technical assets and the intelligence personnel and analysts that operate them. These key enablers should only be removed when the battlefield situation is such that their departure does not substantially increase risk.

As for logistics assistance, that is an area where I do not possess the expertise and have not had the kind of interaction with Afghans necessary to determine what kinds of assistance is going to be needed beyond our current timelines. This is an area that deserves closer examination by experts.

Another area that deserves serious study is the provision of the higher-level operational advisors at the corps and above level that the Afghan military continues to need. The U.S. Army has disbanded the units that it once had to train such advisors. At the current time, our advisors get minimal training on their tasks and often rotate out too quickly to have the kind of positive impact that they should have. Similarly, our Italian and German colleague who staff the Train, Advise, and Assist Commands (TAACs) in Herat in western Afghanistan and Mazar-e-Sharif in northern Afghanistan, do not have the training they need.

Recommendations

As I explained above, there is much that is going well in Afghanistan. My view is that success, although a hard task is a task that we can and should achieve. But to reduce the risk to that success to a manageable level, we need to review our current strategy, particularly with an eye to changing our rules on enablers and our rules of engagement.

We do not need to send large numbers of new forces to Afghanistan. But, we do need the flexibility to respond when the Taliban, or Da'esh, or Al Qaeda, threatens the Afghans with capabilities for which we did not prepare the Afghan forces.

Rather than a time-driven schedule, blind to events on the ground, and in order to protect our national security and to keep our commitment to support Afghanistan, we need to come up with a set of benchmark achievements by which we will measure the success of our plans. If circumstances change, or we fail, we should be ready to adjust the strategy, and, if necessary, adjust the capabilities and forces we deploy.

Only if we are flexible and adjust our policies to reflect changed realities on the ground can we show the world that we are reliable, trustworthy partners who are willing to take the actions necessary to prevent catastrophes like another 9/11, or worse, from happening.

Quotes

“We know the costs of walking away.”

“So I say to you today: As Afghanistan sees women standing up in Afghanistan to take control of their country’s future – not only for themselves, but for all Afghans – we have to be determined that they will not stand alone. **America will stand up with them** as they shape a strong and united Afghanistan that secures the rightful place in the community of nations.” (Emphasis added)

John Kerry

Secretary of State

Georgetown University

Washington, DC

November 15, 2013

“...we have very real--and very recent--history that shows just what can happen in this part of the world when extremists have breathing space, safe havens, and governments complicit with and supportive of their mission. Less than 5 years after the last Soviet tank crossed the Termez Bridge out of Afghanistan, Islamic militants launched their first attack on the World Trade Center in New York. **We cannot afford to make a similar mistake again.**”

Robert Gates

Secretary of Defense

Testimony to Committee in Armed Services, United States Senate

December 2, 2009

"Consider the long-term price we have paid as a result of disengaging from Afghanistan after 1989. As Secretary of Defense Bob Gates told the Senate Armed Services Committee just yesterday, **we cannot afford to make that mistake again.**"

Hilary Clinton

Secretary of State

Asia Society speech

February 18, 2011

"I told the President that you can count on the United States -- just like you've been able to count on this administration, you'll be able to count on the next administration, as well. It's in our interest that Afghanistan's democracy flourish. **It's in America's interest that we forever deny safe haven to people who still want to kill our citizens.**"

President George W. Bush

Remarks in Kabul, Afghanistan

December 15, 2008

"The question that has been raised in the course of my visit this morning is, **"Will the United States be here for the long term?" The answer is yes. We are committed to this.** The American people are committed, Congress is committed, and above all President Bush is as committed as he has been since the very first day we started and you can be sure of that. The United States will be making another substantial pledge at the Berlin conference and we look forward to seeing you there. You will be leading the conference and we look forward to working with you and your authorities in building up of the Afghan National Army, the building up of your police force, the building up of your political institutions. And doing everything possible so that the Afghan people know the international community stands firmly with them and that the United States of America stands firmly with the Afghan people as they move forward.

Colin Powell

Secretary of State

Remarks in Kabul, Afghanistan

March 17, 2004

The commitment of the United States is a strong commitment but also one that will be an enduring commitment. I have said before that **we made the mistake once before of leaving Afghanistan** and of not sustaining our commitment to our relationship here. We will not make that mistake again. America will be committed and a friend of the Afghan people for a very, very long time to come.”

Condoleezza Rice

Secretary of State

Remarks in Kabul, Afghanistan

June 28, 2006