

Statement for the Record
The Administration's Strategy for Afghanistan and Pakistan
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Mr. Chairman, Senator McCain, thank you for asking me and General Petraeus to testify today on the Obama Administration's recently completed policy review on Afghanistan and Pakistan.

As the President stated last Friday, our strategic goal is very clear: to disrupt, dismantle, and defeat al Qaeda and its extremist allies. To do so, we must eliminate their safe haven in Pakistan and prevent their re-emergence in Afghanistan. All of the elements of national power we employ – political, diplomatic, military, and economic – must be oriented on achieving this goal.

This review started by going back to first principles: Why are we investing American blood and treasure in this region? What are our key interests and objectives? Why are we not meeting those objectives, and how can we turn the tide on the ground?

Preventing future terrorist attacks on the American people and our allies is vital. We have learned – at too high a price – the danger of allowing al Qaeda and its extremist supporters to have safe havens and the resources to plan their attacks. This is why we have troops in Afghanistan. They are vital to protecting our homeland and our allies from future attack. We must succeed there while also intensifying our efforts to assist Pakistan.

To achieve our goals, we need a smarter and more comprehensive strategy. And we need to devote the resources necessary to implement it.

A critical aspect of this new strategy is the recognition that Afghanistan and Pakistan are two countries that comprise a single theater for our diplomacy. The futures of the two countries are inextricably linked. Al Qaeda and its extremist allies have moved across the border to Pakistan where they plan terrorist attacks and support operations that undermine the stability of both countries.

Special Representative Holbrooke will lead bi-lateral and tri-lateral engagements with the aim of developing greater security and economic cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan and within the region. And from the Defense side, we will work to build the counterterrorism and counterinsurgency capabilities of both countries so they can combat terrorists and insurgents more effectively.

Pakistan's ability to dismantle the safe havens on its territory and defeat the terror and insurgent networks within its borders is critical to its own security and stability. Pakistan faces a severe socio-economic crisis that enables these extremist groups to flourish and pose a great threat to this nuclear armed state.

It is in America's long term interest to support Pakistan's restored democracy by investing in its people and their economic well-being. We seek a more strategic partnership with Pakistan that will encourage and enable it to shift its strategic focus from conventional war to counter-insurgency and counterterrorism so they can better address this burgeoning internal threat. We urge Congress to support the forthcoming Kerry-Lugar legislation, which would authorize civilian and economic assistance and the Pakistan Counterinsurgency Capability Fund to develop a more effective military that can defeat terrorist and insurgent networks.

Let me emphasize that these initiatives should be pursued in the context of a long-term strategic partnership with Pakistan. Only a serious and sustained engagement by the United States and the international community can help Pakistan make the required changes. However, this military and economic support will be limited if we do not see improvements in Pakistani performance.

We must also develop a lasting partnership with Afghanistan.

For years, our commanders, diplomats, and aid workers on the ground in Afghanistan have not been given all the resources they need to defeat the insurgency. They have not been given the tools needed to address the conditions that enable it to fester. We must do better for our men and women in harm's way and for the people of Afghanistan.

Like Pakistan, Afghanistan suffers from a severe socio-economic crisis. These problems are exacerbated by the political disintegration that has occurred after decades of war and the devastation wrought by the Taliban. These are the root causes of the insurgency that al Qaeda and the Taliban seek to exploit for their own purposes. Building Afghan capacity to address these causes, while simultaneously taking the fight to the enemy, are important components of our efforts.

The US, along with our Afghan partners and international allies, is committed to fully resourcing an integrated counterinsurgency strategy. This strategy aims to reverse Taliban gains and secure the population in the troubled South and East of the country. Improved security should provide the time and space to grow the capabilities of the Afghan National Security Forces and to develop governance and legitimate economic capacity.

Building the capacity of the Afghan National Security Forces, both the Army and the Police, is a critical element of this strategy. We aim to accelerate the growth and capability of the ANSF to targeted levels by 2011, and will assess whether future expansion is necessary and sustainable at that time. Building up the ANSF should enable us, over time, to transition from ISAF-led to ANSF-led counterinsurgency operations.

To do so, we must meet the requirements set by commanders on the ground for trainers. The deployment of an additional 4,000 US troops announced by the President will, for the first time, address this critical need. Furthermore, we will ensure that US units deploying to Afghanistan are given the mission of not only protecting the population but also partnering with local Afghan units to build their capacity whenever and wherever possible. The Afghans want to take charge of security in their own country. It is time we committed the resources to give them that chance.

Beyond a strengthened military mission, we will intensify our civilian assistance and better integrate it with our military efforts. We aim to significantly increase civilian expertise and resources – both US and international – in Afghanistan to promote governance and development programs, and build Afghan capacity.

Working with the UN and our allies, we will seek to improve the coordination and coherence of these efforts in support of Afghan priorities. Ensuring free, fair and secure elections will be the most immediate and consequential task.

We will also complement capacity-building at the national level with more bottom-up initiatives to build capacity at the district and provincial levels. These efforts will be designed to have a direct impact on the daily lives of the Afghan people. They are the best way to address the root causes of insurgency and give people tangible reasons to support their government.

Combating corruption will complement efforts to strengthen Afghan institutions at all levels of government. Greater integration of local leadership, combined with hands-on mentoring and oversight by civilian experts, is the most promising way to build greater accountability and legitimacy in the eyes of the people.

Defeating the Taliban-led insurgency and fighting corruption will also require breaking its links with the narcotics industry. We will work to develop more effective counternarcotics efforts to deny the insurgency and corrupt officials lucrative sources of funding. This critical objective requires building Afghan law enforcement capacity, developing alternative livelihoods for farmers and reforming the agricultural sector on which the vast majority of the population depends.

As we regain the initiative in Afghanistan, we will support an Afghan-led reconciliation process to bring insurgent foot soldiers and mid-level leaders to the side of the government. If this process is successful, senior leaders should become more isolated and easier to target.

Our men and women in uniform and our allies have fought bravely in Afghanistan for more than seven years. Nearly 700 of our Soldiers and Marines have made the ultimate sacrifice. Nearly 3,000 have been wounded. The sacrifices have been tremendous. We can honor them by improving our strategy and by giving their comrades, military and civilian alike, the resources they need to bring this war to a successful conclusion. I urge Congress to provide its full support.

This strategy seeks to help the Afghan people build a bridge to self-reliance. But even when our forces eventually transition responsibility to their Afghan partners and depart, we should continue—through economic and security assistance—to help Afghans secure and build their nation. Our vital interests demand no less.

I want to once again stress the civilian and military resources required for success. I want to urge you and your colleagues to fund civilian capabilities that can deploy to Afghanistan and economic and security assistance to both Afghanistan and Pakistan. Every day, men and women in our armed forces tell me that they need their civilian counterparts with them in the field to succeed. I urge you to work with your colleagues on the relevant appropriations committees to get the funding we need for the civilian resources necessary to protect and advance our vital interests in this critical region.

Finally, this is not just America's war. Defeating al Qaeda and its extremist allies is a goal – and a responsibility – that the international community must share.

This strategy requires mobilizing not only domestic support, but also greater international political support for our efforts. Working in full partnership with the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan, our NATO allies and ISAF, the UN, and regional stakeholders will be critical for success. This will be part of the President's agenda this week in Europe, and it will be Ambassador Holbrooke's and General Petraeus' work for months to come.

Keeping the American homeland and American people safe requires us to step up to this challenge.