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Gen. David Petraeus

On the Future of the Alliance and the Mission in Afghanistan



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Well, thank you very much chairman, and it's great to be with you all. And actually, if I could start off by just applauding, as a soldier, what I just heard the Minister of Defence¹ of the UK tell us. I thought that was a terrific message.

It's great to be on the stage with my new diplomatic partner, Ambassador Richard Holbrooke. You know, it's every Commander's dream to have as his ambassadorial wingman someone journalists describe with nicknames like "The Bulldozer." In all seriousness, I want to publicly salute this gifted diplomat for taking on his new position, an appointment that conveys how significant the focus is in the United States on Afghanistan and Pakistan and the South and Central Asian regions more broadly.

Secretary Gates, the Defense Gates recently described Afghanistan to the U.S. Congress as posing "our greatest military challenge right now." As he noted, our fundamental objective in Afghanistan is to ensure that transnational terrorists are not able to reestablish the sanctuaries they enjoyed prior to 9/11. It was to eliminate such sanctuaries that we took action in Afghanistan in 2001. And preventing their reestablishment remains an imperative today -- noting, to be sure, that achievement of that objective inevitably requires accomplishment of other interrelated tasks as well. As has been explained, President Obama has directed a strategy review that will sharpen the clarity of these tasks.

Afghanistan has been a very tough endeavor. Certainly, there have been important achievements there over the past seven years as Minister Jung and President Karzai noted in the earlier session, many important ones.



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But in recent years the resurgence of the Taliban and Al Qaeda has led to an increase in violence, especially in the southern and eastern parts of the country. Numerous other challenges have emerged as well: difficulties in the development of governmental institutions that achieve legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghan people; corruption, expansion of poppy production and the illegal narcotics industry -- although that was reversed last year -- and difficulties in the establishment of the Afghan police.

In fact, there has been nothing easy about Afghanistan. And as Senator Lieberman observed recently in a speech to the Brookings institution, "Reversing Afghanistan's slide into insecurity will not come quickly, easily, or cheaply." Similarly, Secretary Gates told Congress, "this will undoubtedly be a long and difficult fight." I agree. In fact, I think it's important to be clear eyed about the challenges that lie ahead, while also remembering the importance of our objectives in Afghanistan and the importance of the opportunity that exists as we all intensify our efforts and work together to achieve those objectives.

Many observers have noted that there are no purely military solutions in Afghanistan. And that is correct. Nonetheless, military action, while not sufficient by itself, is absolutely necessary, for security provides the essential foundation for the achievement of progress in all the other so-called lines of operation -- recognizing, of course, that progress in other areas made possible by security improvements typically contributes to further progress in the security arena -- creating an upward spiral in which improvements in one area reinforce progress in another.

Arresting and then reversing the downward spiral in security in Afghanistan thus will require not just additional military forces, as we have been reminded again today, but also large civilian contributions, greater unity of effort between civilian and military elements and with our Afghan partners, and a comprehensive approach, as well as sustained commitment and a strategy that addresses the situations in neighboring countries.

This morning, I'd like to describe briefly and in general terms the resource requirements under discussion in Washington and various other national capitals. Then I'll describe a few of the ideas that helped us in Iraq and that properly adapted for Afghanistan, can help General McKiernan and ISAF.

In recent months, our President and many others have highlighted the need for additional forces in Afghanistan to reverse the downward spiral in security, help Afghan forces provide security for the elections on August 20th, and enable progress in the tasks essential to achievement of our objectives. As has been announced in recent months, more US forces are entering operations as part of ISAF in Afghanistan now, more have been ordered to deploy, and the deployment of others is under consideration. Beyond that, the number of Afghan soldiers to be trained and equipped has been increased, and many of the other troop contributing nations will deploy additional forces as well, with a number of commitments under discussion. And I would be remiss, if I did not ask individual countries to examine very closely what forces and other contributions they can provide as ISAF intensifies its efforts in preparation for the elections in August.

It is, of course, not just additional combat forces that are required. ISAF also needs more so-called enablers to support the effort in Afghanistan -- more intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance platforms; more military police, engineers, and logistic elements, additional special operations forces and civil affairs units; more lift and attack helicopters and fixed wing aircraft, additional air Medevac assets; increases in information operations capabilities and so on.



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Also required are more Embedded Training Teams, Operational Mentoring and Liaison Teams, and Police Mentoring Teams, all elements that are essential to building the all important capability of the Afghan National Security Forces. And I applaud the German Defense Minister's announcement of additional police and army trainers this morning. As with combat forces, some additional enabler elements are already flowing to Afghanistan, commitments have been made to provide others, and others are under discussion.

As Senator Lieberman also highlighted in his Brookings speech, a surge in civilian capacity is needed to match the increase in military forces in order to field adequate numbers of provincial reconstructions teams and other civilian elements -- these teams and other personnel are essential to help our Afghan partners expand their capabilities in key governmental areas, to support basic economic development, and to assist in development of various important aspects of the rule of law.

It is also essential, of course, that sufficient financial resources be provided for the effort in Afghanistan, it's hugely important that nations deliver on their pledges of economic development assistance that the Afghan National Army and Law and Order Trust Funds be fully financed, that support be maintained for the Afghan Reconstruction Trust Fund, and that resources continue to be provided for the projects conducted by our military units and PRT's at local levels. And again I applaud the German Defense Minister's announcement of additional development aid this morning as well.

Of course, just more troops, civilians, dollars and even Euros won't be enough. As students of history, we are keenly aware that Afghanistan has, over the years, been known as the graveyard of empires. It is, after all, a country that has never taken kindly to outsiders bent on conquering it. We cannot take that history lightly. And our awareness of it should caution us to recognize that, while additional forces are essential, their effectiveness will depend on how they are employed, as that, in turn, will determine how they are seen by the Afghan population.

And what I'd like to discuss next, then, are some of the concepts that our commanders have in mind as plans are refined to employ additional forces. I base this on discussions with GEN McKiernan and others who have served in Afghanistan, as well as on lessons learned in recent years. I do so with awareness that a number of the elements on the ground are operating along the lines of these ideas -- and that their ability to do so will be enhanced by the increased density on the ground of ISAF and Afghan forces as additional elements deploy to the most challenging areas. Counterinsurgency operations are, after all, troop intensive. Finally, I want to underscore the fact that commanders on the ground will, as always, operationalize the so-called big ideas I talked about in ways that are appropriate for their specific situations on the ground. So here are some of those ideas:

First and foremost, our forces and those of our Afghan partners have to strive to secure and serve the population. We have to recognize that the Afghan people are the decisive "Terrain." And together with our Afghan partners, we have to work to provide the people security, to give them respect, to gain their support, and to facilitate the provision of basic services, the development of the Afghan Security Forces in the area, the promotion of local economic development, and the establishment of governance that includes links to the traditional leaders in society and is viewed as legitimate in the eyes of the people.

Securing and serving the people requires that our forces be good neighbors. While it may be less culturally acceptable to live among the people in certain parts of Afghanistan than it was in Iraq, it is necessary to locate Afghan and ISAF forces where they can establish a persistent security presence.



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You can't commute to work in the conduct of counterinsurgency operations. Positioning outposts and patrol bases, then, requires careful thought, consultation with local leaders, and the establishment of good local relationships to be effective.

Positioning near those we and our Afghan partners are helping to secure also enables us to understand the neighborhood. A nuanced appreciation of local situations is essential. Leaders and troopers have to understand the tribal structures, the power brokers, the good guys and the bad guys, local cultures and history, and how systems are supposed to work and how they do work. This requires listening and being respectful of local elders and mullahs, of farmers and shopkeepers -- and it also requires, of course, many cups of tea.

It is also essential that we achieve unity of effort, that we coordinate and synchronize the actions of all ISAF and Afghan forces -- and those of our Pakistani partners across the border -- and that we do the same with the actions of our embassy and international partners, our Afghan counterparts, local governmental leaders, and international and non-governmental organizations. Working to a common purpose is essential in the conduct of counterinsurgency operations.

We also, in support of and in coordination with our Afghan partners, need to help promote local reconciliation, although this has to be done very carefully and in accordance with the established principles in the Afghan constitution. In concert with and in support of our Afghan partners, we need to identify and separate the "irreconcilables" from the "reconcilables" striving to create the conditions that can make the reconcilables part of the solution instead of a continuing part of the problem, even as we kill, capture, or run off the irreconcilables. In fact, programs already exist in this area and careful application of them will be essential in the effort to fracture and break off elements of the insurgency in order to get various groups to put down their weapons and support the legitimate government and constitution of Afghanistan.

Having said that, we must pursue the enemy tenaciously. True irreconcilables, again, must be killed, captured, or driven out of the area. And we cannot shrink from that any more than we can shrink from being willing to support Afghan reconciliation with those elements that show a willingness to reject the insurgents and help Afghan and ISAF forces.

To ensure that the gains achieved endure, ISAF and Afghan forces have to hold areas that have been cleaned. Once we fight to clear and secure an area, we must ensure that it is retained. The people -- and local security forces -- need to know that we will not abandon them. Additionally, we should look for ways to give local citizens a stake in the success of the local security effort and in the success of the new Afghanistan more broadly as well. To this end, a reformed, capable Afghan National Police force -- with the necessary support from the international community and the alliance -- is imperative to ensuring the ability to protect the population. And the new Afghan Population Protection Program announced by MOI Atmar holds considerable promise and deserves our support as well.

On a related note, to help increase the legitimacy of the Afghan government, we need to help our Afghan partners give the people a reason to support the government and their local authorities. This includes helping enable Afghan solutions to Afghan problems. And on a related note, given the importance of Afghan solutions and governance being viewed as legitimate by the people and in view of allegations of corruption, such efforts likely should feature support for what might be called an "Afghan accountability offensive" as well. That will be an important effort.



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In all that we do as we perform various missions, we need to live our values. While our forces should not hesitate to engage and destroy an enemy, our troopers must also stay true to the values we hold dear. This is, after all, an important element that distinguishes us from the enemy, and it manifests itself in many ways, including making determined efforts to reduce to the absolute minimum civilian casualties – an effort furthered significantly by the recent tactical direction and partnering initiatives developed by General McKiernan with our Afghan counterparts.

We must also strive to be first with the truth. We need to beat the insurgents and extremists to the headlines and to pre-empt rumors. We can only do that by getting accurate information to the chain of command to our Afghan partners, and to the press as soon as is possible. Integrity is critical to this fight. Thus, when situations are bad, we should freely acknowledge that fact and avoid temptations to spin. Rather we should describe the set-backs and failures we suffer and then state what we have learned from them and how we'll adjust to reduce the chances of similar events in the future.

Finally, we must always strive to learn and adapt. The situation in Afghanistan has changed significantly in the past several years and it continues to evolve. This makes it incumbent on us to assess the situation continually and to adjust our plans, operations, and tactics as required. We should share good ideas and best practices, but we should also never forget that what works in one area today may not work there tomorrow, and that what works in an area may not work in another area either.

In conclusion, allow me to reiterate the key points I've sought to make. We have a hugely important interest in ensuring that Afghanistan does not once again become a sanctuary for trans-national extremists. Achieving that core objective, in turn, requires the accomplishment of several other significant tasks. Although there have been impressive achievements in Afghanistan since 2001, the security situation has deteriorated markedly in certain areas in the past two years. Reversing that trend is necessary to improve security for the population, to permit the conduct of free and fair elections in August, and to enable progress in other important areas.

Achieving security improvements will require more ISAF and Afghan security forces of all types -- combat, combat support, logistics, trainers and advisors, special operations, and so on. Some additional forces are already deploying, further increases have been ordered or pledged, and more are under discussion. To be effective, the additional military forces will need to be employed in accordance with counterinsurgency concepts applied by leaders who have a nuanced understanding of their areas of operation. And to complement and capitalize on the increased military resources, more civilian assets, adequate financial resources, close civil-military cooperation, and a comprehensive approach that encompasses regional states will be necessary.

None of this will be easy. Indeed, as Vice President Biden observed recently after a trip to Afghanistan, Afghanistan will likely get harder before it gets easier. And sustained progress will require sustained commitment. But our objectives are of enormous importance. A significant opportunity is at hand, and we all need to summon the will and the resources necessary to make the most of it.

Thank you very much.