

Afghanistan: A Campaign Assessment

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It's important that you have an understanding of the very serious challenges that the climatology, the topography, and the dilapidated infrastructure of Afghanistan pose to our forces and the Afghan, and indeed the Afghans, in trying to achieve success. Then I'd like to give you a snapshot of where we are in terms of progress in the campaign and challenges, and then go briefly into the stress that we're facing—about the Taliban spring offensive—and then let's talk about longer-term stress. Lastly, we'll talk about four major transitions that are underway in the campaign in Afghanistan. I think our ability—NATO, the international community, the United States, the Afghans within the region—to seriously address some of the challenges in these transitions will really define success or failure in the longer term.

Let me start now with a little bit of Geography 101 with Afghanistan. We start up in the northeast corner of Afghanistan and then go down to the southwest corner. This would be roughly the distance from New York to New Orleans—about 1,500 miles. Now across the distance, about two-thirds of the way down, stretches the Hindu-Kush Mountains. The Hindu-Kush is one of the most formidable mountain terrains and mountain obstacles in the world. At most points along the Hindu Kush you're at elevations of about one and one-half times the height of Mt. Whitney. When you then get down to Kandahar you begin the Great Red Desert of Southern Afghanistan and the Ghazai Desert. To give you an idea of the diversity of the terrain and the challenges that we're facing, a recent decision was made to keep the 10th Mountain Division – one of our great infantry divisions—in Afghanistan for 120 days beyond the one year tour of duty that we anticipated for them when they first went to Afghanistan. The 10th Mountain Division currently occupies mountain outposts in Konar province in eastern Afghanistan. Some of those mountain outposts are about 9,000 feet of elevation, severe winter conditions, waist-deep in snow, and frost bites are a problem up in Konar. Some of those infantry forces now will be relocated into southern Afghanistan and they'll be fighting down in Kandahar in the desert area. They'll be facing temperatures of 120 degrees at midday in one of the most treacherous deserts of the world. That's the breadth of the scope of operations that we're fighting in Afghanistan under these conditions in the terrain and climate.

What else can I point out about the geography? Afghanistan has never been a wealthy country. As a result of Soviet occupation in the 1980s, the civil war in the '90s, and then the occupation by international terrorism and the extremist Taliban allies through the latter '90s and first years of 2000-2001, the little infrastructure that did exist was systematically destroyed. I have never, in 34 years of service, been in a country that has the severe combinations of formidable terrain and dilapidated infrastructure that we face in Afghanistan. It does condition the scope of the campaign; it does condition very much the progress and the pace of progress.

Now, about the borders of Afghanistan. Pakistan to the east and the southeast, Iran to the west,

Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and China, a set of very difficult borders to control, a set of historical relations that exist along some of those borders that cause security problems in and of themselves. So, this is where those soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines are now fighting and serving.

I'd like to talk about the campaign progress that we've achieved to date. This photo is of Taliban guards who are executing a woman who's wearing a burka whose alleged crime was infidelity. She's being executed at the Kabul soccer stadium about a mile from where my headquarters was in Kabul and from where President Karzai's office is. That execution occurred at the Kabul soccer stadium at half time at a soccer game in front of about 30,000 fans. This was Taliban justice being meted out. At that point in time about 90 percent of the country was physically occupied by the Taliban extremists and their Al Qaeda allies. What else was part of the picture of 2001 before we went into Afghanistan? Other parts of the snapshot at that time include just a rule of gun, there was no rule of law. There were no Afghan national security forces, there were no police, there was no credible army. There was no constitution with credit. There were few children in school at that period of time and there was very little provision of social services.

Where are we today in the year 2007? First of all we have in Afghanistan one of the most moderate progressive constitutions that can be found anywhere in South Asia and Central Asia. We have a president who has popularity ratings of 65 percent. President Karzai worries about his popularity ratings at 65 percent because they have dropped. In my own conversations with President Karzai I told him I know of many leaders who would aspire to popularity ratings of 65 percent. We have a congress which is in place—a parliament that is in place, a nascent parliament of about a year and a half, but it's done an extraordinarily good job of trying to connect the people of the state of Afghanistan to a central government. What else would be part of the picture of 2007? We now have in the total population of Afghanistan some 30 million. We have eight million children in school—two million of those are girls. We've gone from zero universities in 2001 to about 19 universities today and in those 19 universities there are 40,000 students—20 percent of those are females. We have 700 health clinics that have been established which provide health care, albeit very rudimentary in some cases, but provide health care now to about eight million Afghan citizens. And I could go on.

What else makes up the picture of 2007? We have extraordinary problems with narco-trafficking, we have very difficult problems with the corruption in the state of Afghanistan; we do have a problem in southern Afghanistan with the resurgence of the Taliban. But it's important to remember the baseline that we're beginning with. What I tell my soldiers in Afghanistan is it's critical to look at snapshots in time, and the snapshot in time of 2007 does show that we have some formidable challenges. But against this snapshot, it's also important to go back to the baseline occasionally and watch the "movie" called Afghanistan which begins in 2001 and when we look at where we are today against that picture, it's pretty inspirational. There is no problem on the ground right now in Afghanistan that I would categorize as so daunting that, with the firm support of the international community, NATO, the United States, and the Afghan people, we can't succeed in overcoming.

Now, I would like to talk about a short term threat to success and a longer-term threat to success. First of all, the short-term threat to success. Since 2003 the Taliban has, every spring, mobilized their forces. Their command and control which sits inside part of Afghanistan and Pakistan, has organized offensive operations. As the weather conditions improve, they go on the offensive and that's been a phenomena beginning in 2003.

What do I expect, then, to occur in this coming year and over the next several months? The Taliban will go on the offensive again and it will be concentrated in southern Afghanistan. They will also have what we call a supporting effort in eastern Afghanistan. Now, how do I think NATO forces and how do I think that the Afghans will do against the threat in 2007? Actually, I believe in 2007 that the international community forces and Afghans are about as well-postured as they've ever been for success. Now, why do I say that after we saw such high levels of fighting in 2006? Several factors: First of all, international military presence. I'll talk in a moment about NATO transitions that have occurred in the expansion of the NATO mission throughout Afghanistan, but NATO today has a force of 37,000 throughout Afghanistan, including a great presence in southern and eastern Afghanistan.

Let me give you one example of the levels of effort that we have now from the international community that we did not have a year ago. In Helmand province in southern Afghanistan was the scene of a lot of fighting a year ago at this time. We had about 150 American Special Forces and other soldiers. That was it for Helmand province for international military forces. Today we have over 3,000 British soldiers there—150 U.S. soldiers a year ago—over 3,000 British today. Now, U.S. army soldiers would say 150 U.S. may equal 3,000 British, but although I have great pride in my army, that's not the case. Numbers matter in Afghanistan.

Secretary Gates made a visit to Afghanistan in mid-January and did a quick assessment. Our firm recommendation to Secretary Gates was that we increase our force level presence for the next year, and he went back and recommended to the president that we keep an infantry brigade of about 3,000 additional U.S. soldiers on the ground for a one-year period. So we have not only NATO presence but this additional combat infantry brigade of the U.S., which gives us a tremendous offensive capability. Now, that infantry brigade is under NATO, by the way.

What else is different? We have a big increase in the Afghan national army in southern Afghanistan and we have an increase in the police force. We also have very good decisions that have been made by President Karzai over the last year and a half improving the quality of government in eastern Afghanistan and southern Afghanistan. Lastly, and very importantly, we have a lot more money available for reconstruction and development in southern Afghanistan, and eastern Afghanistan, as well. The administration made an announcement about a month ago based on recommendations from our embassy and from our forces on the ground to have a significant increase in levels of investments for roads, power, water, and money to farmers to give them alternatives to poppy farming. The administration announced another \$1 billion of assistance over the course of the next year for reconstruction and development. All of those factors together, we think, will make a significant difference in terms of outcome in 2007.

It's in the longer term that we have to be very concerned, though, about campaign success. In the longer term the problem is the establishment of this moderate, stable, state of Afghanistan that's been traumatized by 30 years of war. It is a country and a culture that is new to this democratic experiment. There's an array of problems that we face. These are challenges that are not military in nature; they're more non-military in nature.

I would like to talk about four campaign transitions that are underway in Afghanistan today. International and Afghan abilities to address these properly will really define, I think, long-term success or failure. These are the transition from the international military lead from the U.S. to NATO; secondly, trying to shift from international to Afghan lead in every domain; thirdly, that focus shifting from military emphasis to non-military emphasis and lastly, seeing the challenges of Afghanistan not in Afghanistan alone but in a regional context. I'll go through each one of these

now.

First of all, with NATO. NATO completed its expansion of its mission in Afghanistan in October 2006. NATO came into Afghanistan in the fall of 2003 when it had a very limited mandate, but a United Nations mandate, to take over the responsibility for the greater Kabul area and then a series of political decisions were made to expand this mission and NATO now has the overall responsibility of international military forces throughout Afghanistan.

What are the U.S. missions? First of all, we now have 27,000 U.S. forces in Afghanistan, that's the highest level of force we've had in Afghanistan since October 2001 when Operation Enduring Freedom began. The first mission is serving as part of NATO. About 16,000 of our forces are under the NATO flag. Most of our forces are concentrated in eastern Afghanistan, but we also make a very important contribution in southern Afghanistan as well. The other three missions that the United States leads outside of NATO: first of all, we have a very capable national strike force, counter-terrorist strike forces, that are stationed inside of Afghanistan. They have the ability to move anywhere in Afghanistan or the region as required to attack the senior Al Qaeda leadership and the senior leadership of their Taliban allies. There's a distinction between the NATO mission which is counter-insurgency and an enduring U.S. mission outside of NATO which is counter-terrorism. The second U.S. mission: building Afghan national security forces. We're the lead nation for the building of the army; we are also in support of building the police forces. We're hoping NATO gets more engaged in both of those missions and we're hopeful they will.

The fourth overall mission and the third U.S. mission, is contributing to reconstruction. We have about 300 military and civilian officials representing us in Afghanistan. They are organized under the umbrella of a civil military organization called the Army Corps of Engineers and they do extraordinarily good work and important work in developing Afghan national security force facilities. They do a lot of work now with the United States Embassy, like contracting for the building of roads. We're extraordinarily proud of that organization. Three years ago if we had led a bid for the building, say, of an Afghan national army barracks, we would have been hard-pressed to find an Afghan construction company that could bid on that. Today, as a result of extraordinarily capable contracting in which we've rewarded international contractors for increasing Afghan capacity and skills, and good entrepreneurs subcontractors coming together to establish their own companies when we put out a contract we can get about 12 different Afghan companies to bid. So, some important gains have been made there.

With regard to NATO. What does NATO bring to Afghanistan? Several points. First of all, they bring their presence: more international military forces. Second, they bring more money—there are twenty-six wealthy countries in NATO. What our commanders will tell one when they get out on the ground in Afghanistan, they'll use phrases like, "If I were to tell you, General Eikenberry, what one of my best weapons systems is, its reconstruction projects." Now, NATO commanders on the ground—non-U.S. commanders—as they get more seasoned they're reporting back to their ministries of defense that they need more money for reconstruction and development.

The third benefit of NATO, and an unanticipated one. In Afghanistan and globally in the war on international terrorism, we're fighting an image war. Before the NATO expansion, part of the Taliban extremists' propaganda campaign was that the United States, superpower, Christian crusading, infidels, with their Karzai puppet were despoiling Islamic lands—and I think I have that line down pretty well after hearing it enough. Now, with NATO on the ground—26 countries, they have 11 other partner nations with them by the way—37 nations, the most powerful military alliance in history under a U.N. mandate with the international community

firmly in support of Afghanistan, the wind has gone out of the propaganda sails in that regard. So we have strong international support that has been terribly important in the effectiveness of President Karazi, terribly important in diminishing extremist Islamic militant propaganda aimed at us.

Fourth and final point about NATO is that as a military alliance it is transforming itself in terms of its effectiveness as a result of its experiences in Afghanistan. It's improving its business practices as a political-military alliance and, indeed, in terms of its combat effectiveness, it's improving greatly as a result of its time in Afghanistan. I'll tell you as an American soldier that as we look at the world today, I think the world is a very dangerous place and as we look over the next several decades, we need the NATO alliance with us. There is too much for the United States of America to do alone. We share common values with our NATO partners and NATO is helping transform alliances.

NATO does need improvement in certain areas inside of Afghanistan. First of all, it's not providing all the military forces that its political leaders agreed to. Indeed, our decision, the U.S. decision, to leave about 3,000 infantry soldiers in Afghanistan for another year was partly due to the fact that NATO has not fulfilled all its commitments that politically it agreed to. Secondly, certain member nations of NATO place operational restrictions on their forces inside of Afghanistan. Simply put, the highest land of fighting in Afghanistan is the south and the east. Certain nations right now in the NATO alliance are unwilling to have their forces inside of Afghanistan going to the south and going to the east to fight. In the short term, this is causing difficulties for us because the only way a commander, the overall commander on the ground in Afghanistan, can compensate for that inefficiency is to ask for more forces, but we're having problems getting more forces. I think it will be difficult for the alliance to sustain a campaign in Afghanistan should the level of fighting that we have right now be maintained over the next several years, and my concern would be that for those nations that are fighting in the south and the east there could be political trouble as they begin to ask why there isn't equal burden-sharing within the alliance. The third point with regard to the alliance is that each one of the nations will have to improve their military competencies, but I see steady progress being made in those areas.

Let me turn now to the shift from international to Afghan leadership. Now that we're six years into this campaign in every domain—security forces, governing, and justice—it's critical that the Afghans increasingly move into the lead. I'll only talk briefly about the security forces. That was our charter: building the army and helping with the support of the police. We're doing decently well with the building of the army. Now we have about 35,000 soldiers in the Afghan army. We're hopeful that by the end of 2008 that we will achieve a total of 70,000, which is the combined Afghan international target.

I tell you its hard work. In 2001 Afghanistan had extreme mutual suspicion among the ethnic groups after three decades of what could be called a civil war, and so to build a leader values-based organization simply takes time. Major Jim Tenpenny here—he's a Black Hawk pilot for Army helicopters—one day, as a Lt. Col. will be a battalion commander. To make him a battalion commander Jim Tenpenny will have a couple of years pre-commissioning training and then he'll have about 18 years of officer training and experiences before he's entrusted to become a battalion commander. Now, in Afghanistan we just started this in 2002. How long does it take to develop a battalion commander? Well, we don't have 21 years to develop Afghan national army battalion commanders. But neither can it be expected that we can develop credible battalion commanders in a couple of years. It takes time, it takes patience and it takes commitment.

Now, the police program is further behind that of the army. The police program began about the time of the army in 2002 and it was under the lead nation role of the Germans. The Germans defined their lead a little bit narrowly—they defined it as more training-based and it wasn't until late 2005 that our Departments of State and Defense came together and decided to have a more comprehensive approach. We're making progress with the police, but the police program is slow going. Unlike the army, we're developing it from scratch. The police force had been in existence for about four years when the comprehensive reform program was established. So, over those four years the police force was able to develop its own peculiar set of business practices which were not necessarily good business practices. President Karzai and his administration are firmly behind police reform, but once again it's going to be slow going. We'll see some results in 2007 which will be important, but the program is several years behind that of the army.

The next topic I'd like to talk about is the transition from military to non-military. We attacked Al Qaeda and their extremist Taliban allies and we toppled them in 2001. In 2002, we stayed on the attack against them. But what we do now, in terms of helping to change the conditions so that the extremists do not come back, is that we can provide a shield. The importance of Afghan national security forces is that they come forward and they hold the shield and they provide the shield. But that shield can only provide us with space and time behind which the conditions within the country have to be changed so that the terrorists do not come back.

I use the expression about the middle ground of civil society. Each one of us here has been blessed to be born or live or spend time in this country, and we take for granted the ground that we walk on—the middle ground of civil society. What do I mean by that term? Well, our children have a place to go to school which is taken for granted, if a member of our family gets ill we have medical care available at some level. If we have a threat, we have a police force; if we have an injustice, we have a justice system suitable for our society. The Afghan people over 30 years of Soviet occupation, civil war and occupation by militant extremism had their civil society stripped away from them. So we're providing a shield behind which the middle ground of civil society gets built. When that civil society is built, then the Afghans will be able to defend themselves.

I'll give a quick illustration. There is a province in southeastern Afghanistan, Paktika. Two towns in this province Sharama and Wor Mamay are about 80 kilometers or 60 miles apart. The road that connected them for years could only loosely be described as a road. Those 60 miles would take our forces 12 hours to negotiate with Humvees, and not because of L.A.-like traffic either. It took 12 hours because of the terrible conditions along that road. We had a group of combat engineers. Our engineers partnered with Afghan construction companies to redo the road—not paved, just hardtop, a hard packed road. We took the driving time down to two hours. I traveled that road with the governor. The six months before we completed the road we had about 20 attacks and ambushes along the road., after we completed the road—the next six months—zero attacks, zero ambushes. I stopped at a gas station about halfway along the route and talked with the gas station owner, who had the gas station when the road was non-existent, and asked him how was business. He said “Business is great.” I asked him why business was great and he looked at me with disbelief and said, “turn around and look at the road which you guys built.” Then I asked the question, “how's security?” and his answer was, “security is wonderful.” I asked, “Why is security good?” and once again he turned around and looked at the road. Since the road was built a health clinic went in and because of the road now all the villages can get to the health clinic. A school was built and now all the children in the villages along that road can get to the school. Commerce is booming, bazaars are blossoming, and the Afghans now will hold that road, they'll hold that ground, they'll hold those villages themselves because they have something better now. So, the non-military aspects to this campaign are decisive, our military can hold the ground, we

can get time and space, but decisive aspects will be non-military.

Last, I would like to talk about the regional aspects of the war in Afghanistan. If we're going to have total success in Afghanistan it is not going to come through results achieved in Afghanistan alone. International terrorism is a regional problem and the problem extends from Afghanistan and inside of Pakistan as well. We have a problem with the command and control of international terrorism and the Taliban which does use parts of Pakistan as sanctuary. Attacks are occurring on our forces and the Afghan forces. I'll emphasize the attacks on Pakistani forces. The Pakistani army over the last three years has lost over 400 soldiers in combat against the same enemy that's attacking us and attacking the Afghans. Four hundred soldiers represents more than the United States and NATO forces combined have suffered in Afghanistan. So, it's a fight against the same enemy, but nevertheless the enemy is inside of Pakistan as well and it's a very serious problem.

I'll close by saying that after two tours of duty in Afghanistan, two and a half years over the last four, I am confident that we are making steady progress and with time, patience and commitment, we will prevail. I am also equally sure that if we leave Afghanistan and the problem in Pakistan is not adequately addressed, if we leave before we have eliminated the enemy, and before we've created conditions so that the enemy cannot come back, if we leave before that time that enemy will follow us to our homeland, it will follow us to Los Angeles. They visited us in September 2001. If we do not prevail in Afghanistan, if we do not prevail in Pakistan, the enemy will be back here on our heels.

Thank you

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**Speeches are edited for readability and grammar, not content.
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