

STATEMENT BY

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AFGHAN NATIONAL SECURITY FORCES AND SECURITY LEAD TRANSITION:

THE ASSESSMENT PROCESS, METRICS, AND EFFORTS TO BUILD

CAPABILITY

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Thank you Chairman Wittman, Ranking Member Cooper, and members of the subcommittee. It's an honor and privilege to join this distinguished panel and to discuss the challenges of building and assessing Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) capability to transition to security lead.

My testimony draws on experience and perspective gained during my career as a US Army Special Forces officer with deployments to Afghanistan most recently in 2010-2011 as commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Counterinsurgency Advisory and Assistance Team (CAAT) deploying experienced counterinsurgency advisors across all five ISAF regional commands and reporting directly to COMISAF. It is also informed by participation in efforts to build host nation security force capabilities in the Philippines and elsewhere as well as by scholarly research on the effective employment of state security forces to combat insurgency.

I will recommend several areas the US and Coalition Forces might focus on to help ensure the ANSF is effective at and capable of securing the country with minimal outside assistance. I will discuss some challenges in assessing ANSF effectiveness and conclude with reasons for both optimism and concern regarding the current status and anticipated future capabilities and effectiveness of the ANSF and how these concerns challenge the assessment process today.

State security forces, to include the ANSF, cannot and should not be expected to "win hearts and minds" in a counterinsurgency campaign. While often loosely defined, "winning hearts and minds" refers to efforts aimed at addressing popular grievances and concerns and at executing an array of activities intended to gain and maintain popular support and to improve the perception of government legitimacy over the long term. Such ambitious objectives, however, exceed the scope and capacity of state security forces such as the ANSF. For example, even the most proficient and capable ANSF cannot remedy the adverse effects of a corrupt or ineffective District Governor; neither can ISAF. Security forces play a crucial but nonetheless a supporting role in a state's efforts to achieve these ends.

A more appropriately bounded mission for security forces in counterinsurgency is better described as "leasing hearts and minds"- gaining control and sufficient popular support in the near to medium term to create time and space for the requisite follow-on whole of government efforts needed to consolidate this control and to achieve broader government campaign objectives in the longer term.

Establishing security and protecting the population are key prerequisites to accomplishing the mission of "leasing hearts and minds" (as defined here) and setting the conditions for successful follow on governance, development activities and other efforts that are key to making progress in a comprehensive counterinsurgency campaign. This is particularly challenging in Afghanistan where the majority of the population lives in rural areas that the Afghan National Army (ANA) and Afghan National Police (ANP) are currently unable to secure.

A well trained, equipped professional ANSF that cannot project its influence to protect Afghanistan's subpopulation most at risk of falling under Taliban influence and control cannot ultimately be considered effective at performing its most basic mission-protecting and providing for the security of its citizens. Given this, and based on guidance provided to me by the sub-committee staff, I'll describe my experience with and assessment of one such effort to bring security to rural areas in Afghanistan-the Afghan Local Police (ALP) program- and why the type of capacity this initiative is intended to provide is important to overall success in the campaign.

The Afghan Local Police program, a component of US SOF led Village Stability Operations (VSO), is a community driven effort to provide all-important security and protection to the population in Afghanistan's rural areas. Beyond the appreciable benefits this program provides in extending security, it also serves as a mechanism that can harness the potential of local forces to build community rapport with and provide important local information to regular ANA and ANP units operating in the same vicinity. Additionally, it can serve as a potential resource to facilitate reintegration efforts key to making progress in the campaign.

There has been steady and deliberate progress in establishing the ALP since it was codified by Presidential decree and placed under the Ministry of the Interior on August 16, 2010. As of mid-July 2012, US SOF personnel responsible for executing this program report 68 districts are currently validated for VSO/ALP and 15,400 ALP members have been raised and employed to assist in security provision in the vicinity of their home villages. The ALP are established in key rural areas deemed important to GIRoA in terms of security, governance, and development and potential to deny insurgent safe havens and freedom of maneuver.

During my previous tour of duty in Afghanistan, our advisory teams visited multiple US Special Forces units conducting Village Stability Operations and standing up Afghan Local Police where conditions were suitable and strict requirements for the program were met. Based on this experience and updated feedback from SOF personnel currently involved in this mission, I can attest that US SOF members implementing VSO/ALP have done and continue to do a remarkable job under very challenging conditions.

Recent assessments of the performance of the ALP in combating the Taliban have generally been positive. A report provided to me by NATO Training Mission-Afghanistan reported that in April-May of this year, ALP "successfully held their positions in 85% of insurgent engagements." Performance can vary across sites due to stark differences in local conditions but, encouragingly, the majority of the assessment feedback from recent surveys conducted in the field indicates that Afghans support the ALP in the areas where they are deployed.

But there are serious potential risks associated with deploying ALP or any armed group within their communities and largely outside the de facto control of GIRoA. A number of ANA officers I spoke with when the ALP was first fielded admitted that they fully expected to have to fight these forces some day after ISAF forces depart.

Afghanistan's past history of warlords employing armed groups against the interests of the state provides an ominous backdrop that understandably heightens these concerns.

Major factors that mitigate the anticipated risks of the ALP and undergird the current success of this program include careful and deliberate selection of districts where strict screening criteria and conditions are met for the program and, perhaps most importantly, by providing extremely high quality oversight of the program with exceptionally professional and well trained US Special Forces. The significance of this capable US SOF oversight cannot be overstated and ideally is a role that ANA SOF can assume to a greater degree should the program endure post transition.

The vision of ALP is ambitious. It is intended to bring security to rural areas absent ANSF presence and deny Taliban access and freedom of movement all the while buying time for nascent institutions to develop. Whether the program continues post transition to realize this vision will hinge on GIRoA's commitment to provide resources, enforce strict site selection criteria, and field high quality personnel to provide oversight of the program.

GIRoA leaders may determine that Afghan Local Police program should not be continued and this is certainly their sovereign prerogative. If security conditions improve in these rural areas or the ANA and ANP can establish a presence to secure those select districts deemed of strategic importance then the absence of ALP or similar locally recruited and employed security units will not be problematic. Sun Tzu warns, "If he prepares to defend everywhere, everywhere he will be weak." It is not feasible to expect the ALP program or other community defense initiatives to be deployed ubiquitously. Nevertheless, I believe GIRoA would be abandoning ALP at its own peril if it cannot develop an alternative way to protect Afghanistan's rural population in strategically important areas and create space for state institutions to mature.

Given the emphasis of this hearing on metrics and assessments I will make a few general points on this topic. First, as will be emphasized in detail in other testimony we will hear today, we must be careful how we interpret many of the key outcome measures we use to help assess effectiveness and progress. Take for example the use of significant activities (SIGACTS) data or other reported indicators of violence. Low reported violence might be associated with success or it may be a symptom of uncontested Taliban control of an area or lack of Coalition Force units present to report activities. Violence may indicate a deteriorating security situation or may just as well predict improvement as ISAF and ANSF units are contesting an area and conducting operations aimed at wresting control back from the Taliban while insurgents are fighting to prevent them from doing so. Better indicators are needed, such as the willingness of noncombatants to share information and cooperate with coalition forces.

Second, for some time, gauging ANSF capacity has relied on assessments presented in quantitative terms such as how many ANSF in various categories were trained and deployed. Less deliberate effort has been invested in accounting for variation in the *quality* of these forces. Existing metrics of quality assessment are frequently based on US

trainers' or mentors' reports. Such assessments can be quite accurate when these trainers and mentors spend a considerable amount of time with a unit. In cases where assessments of ANSF capabilities and progress are made by personnel with limited real exposure to the units in question, however, we may see much less accurate assessments being made.

Given this, at least in the case of the ANP and other units with frequent exposure to locals, I would advocate including some feasible form of a community-based performance assessment, in which both public and anonymous feedback on the police is regularly solicited through surveys, complaint hotlines and other mechanisms as an independent measure of police and potentially other units' performance. Tying rewards such as commanders' promotions, resource allocation from higher headquarters and other incentives to community or "customer" assessments may help bring much needed increased public accountability and enforce standards of performance among certain types of ANSF units most especially the ANP.

Finally, there is an opportunity to enlist greater expertise and bring it to bear on the assessment process. More and higher quality data on conflict in Afghanistan could be made available for independent analysis by some of our best minds residing in academia and the policy community.

Reasons for optimism

Assessing ANSF capabilities relative to the standards of developed western militaries can be disheartening and cause pessimism about their anticipated capabilities post-US troop withdrawal. Rampant corruption, readiness issues, high desertion rates, limited organic enabling assets, poor accountability mechanisms, illiteracy and other problematic factors can make it challenging to maintain a positive outlook for the ANSF post-transition.

However, ISAF and GIRoA's challenge is building and sustaining an ANSF that is more capable and proficient than the Taliban and other likely security threats Afghanistan might face. This standard is arguably achievable even with the well-documented ANSF weaknesses and shortcomings. Encouragingly, the ANSF is increasingly reported as holding their ground in head to head confrontations with the Taliban and overall is prevailing against a variety of insurgent threats around the country albeit often with the benefit of a variety of Coalition Force enablers.

Historical precedents provide some basis for optimism that the ANSF, with continued aid and support from the international community, may carry out its mission to secure the country and prevent a return of Taliban rule after US forces leave. Following the redeployment of Soviet combat troops from Afghanistan in early 1989, for example, the security situation did not collapse despite the many dire predictions at the time. In fact, with continued military assistance and enablers such as combat aviation assets, the Afghan security forces were able to prevent the collapse of Najibullah's government for nearly three years – up until the critical aid and assistance was cutoff with the fall of the Soviet Union.

Reasons for concern

Ultimately, counterinsurgency campaigns can only be as good as the government they support and even the best, most effective militaries conducting operations in support of such a campaign cannot compensate long for failures in governance. As an example, take US SOF led efforts to conduct Village Stability Operations which include raising and employing Afghan Local Police. The primary goals of this program are to connect villages to their district government using a bottom up approach. The quality of the governance capacity from the district level on up must ultimately provide the popular incentives needed for such a program to succeed. Even the best SOF team (whether ISAF or ANSF) cannot “sell” a product that Afghans do not want to “buy”.

It is likely that the huge investments made in the ANSF have led to the “purchasing” of a certain amount of cooperation among various leaders and stake holders. As our investments are inevitably reduced and these incentives diminish, this cooperation will be harder to sustain. Given this, perhaps the biggest threat to the ANSF’s ability to secure the country after the departure of US forces hinges less on its capabilities and more on its internal cohesion and the potential for ethnic divisions to fracture it.

A capable ANSF can be part of the solution in securing Afghanistan post -US withdrawal, or potentially part of the problem- should it disintegrate and its members support anti-government elements. This will be determined by political conditions and by the subsequent ability of the state to maintain civilian control of the ANSF as much as by the capabilities of Afghan security forces that we are building and improving.

A capable ANSF is a necessary but not sufficient condition for success in the Afghanistan campaign; improving the capabilities of this institution must not be addressed or assessed in a vacuum.

Thank you for the honor of testifying here today and I look forward to your questions.